

LIVING IN CHRIST



John Edmiston

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Walk Worthy!

I therefore, the prisoner in *the* Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the calling with which you are called, (2) with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, (3) endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)

Our series on Ephesians moves from Life In Christ (chapters 1-3) to Living In Christ (chapters 4-6) - and from an emphasis on “being and being in” to an emphasis on “doing and working out”. Having established our place and privilege in Christ - we now find out what a God-indwelt life looks like in the Church, (chapter 4) in the family and society (chapter 5) and in the Heavenly realms (chapter 6).

The connecting verse is Ephesians 4:1 with its injunction to “walk worthy of the calling with which you are called,” We have a high calling – how then do we live it out? If God calls us saints and places us in the heavenly realms with Christ – how should we then live?

Paul does not answer this question in terms of material lifestyle. We are not told that as “God’s kids” we should live in luxury. Walking worthily of the high calling is not a matter of possessions and gracious living but of obedience and gracious attitudes.

Living worthily of our high calling means we will be humble and peaceful: “with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Let’s play it in reverse: “With haughtiness and arrogance, with impatience, being easily offended, engaging in faction-fighting at every opportunity, and maintaining carnality and immaturity in an atmosphere of conflict.”

Put like this it is obvious what is of the Spirit, and what is of the flesh. (Galatians 5:16-23).

Life in the Spirit is NOT characterized by back-biting, gossip and conflict. Rather the life of the saint is patient and humble, loving and kind, and gives each person space to grow in Christ.

Many of the attitudes inculcated into us when we first learn social skills – are of the flesh. Young adults are often encouraged to be elitist, proud, and haughty. They are taught to jump on minor social infractions, to reject others and to separate from others and form cliques. Unfortunately some of this sub-standard socialization makes its way into the Church.

The Church should not be like the world, and should not be driven by the flesh and by human pride and factionalism. Rather the Church should be a place where saints can be grown.

The Church should be forbearing of new Christians, meek and gentle to the hurting, free of pecking orders and cliques and humble in a real and solid kind of way. Such people are saintly and saintly people are worthy of their calling.

Let’s look at these spiritual virtues in a bit more depth:

Lowliness – the opposite of haughtiness. Without superiority or class distinctions, able to serve, delighting in lifting up another person, never putting someone down. The lowly person surrenders the best seat. Lowly people lift others up by getting underneath. This is why the Son of God called

Himself “lowly”:

(Matthew 11:29) Take My yoke on you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest to your souls.

Lowliness is commended throughout the Scriptures and is something that God regards and gives grace to - (Job 22:29, Ps 138:6, Prov. 3:34, 11:2, 16:19; Luke 1:52) and the true apostles were lowly of heart (2 Corinthians 7:6, 10:1) and it is an essential part of the Philippians 2 section on humility: Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves (Philippians 2:3).

With lowliness there are no pecking orders.

Meekness: The opposite of arrogant abusiveness. Meek people are safe and gentle. They display true spiritual greatness, God defends the meek (Ps 76:9, 147:6) and they will inherit the earth (Psalm 37:11, Matthew 5:5). Moses was exceptionally meek (Numbers 12:3) and it is one of the characteristics of the triumphant Messiah (Psalm 45:4., Isaiah 11:4, Zech 9:9) and of course Jesus was meek (Matthew 11:29,) in fact it was one of His kingly virtues at His triumphal entry (Matthew 21:5).

As the opposite of abusiveness and arrogance - meekness is to characterize NT church-discipline (1 Corinthians 4:21, 2 Corinthians 10:1, Galatians 6:1, 2 Timothy 2:25) and especially the life of the Christian teacher, apologist and defender of the faith (2 Timothy 2:25, 1 Peter 3:15, Titus 3:2, James 3:13). It is also part of being a truly godly Christian woman (1 Peter 3:4) and an attentive disciple (James 1:21).

Long-suffering and forbearance: The opposite of irritability and swift judgementalism. The ability to put up with others and give them room to grow – as we ourselves would like others to give us grace and understanding. These attributes are at the very heart of the glory of God (Exodus 34:6,7). Immature people lack them entirely. People who are forever fuming and fretting and being annoyed, need to grow up in Christ. While we can demand our rights now and then most of the time we should not be so fussy. Maturity involves “put-up-ability”.

Finally, we should have a spirit of cooperation and unity, a good “team spirit”, that is from the Holy Spirit, so that we are “forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Thus walking worthily is thus not about spiritual elitism, fractious legalism, or divisive judging; neither is it about being a superior Christian – it is about being a lowly, meek, patient, loving and cooperative saint. If we are walking worthily we will not over-emphasize denominational differences or divide off from others but endure their faults, pray for them and be meek and lowly towards them.

The Basis of Christian Unity

**There is one body and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling, (5) one Lord, one faith, one baptism, (6) one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all.
(Ephesians 4:4-6)**

All born-again Christians share a basic existential unity in the Spirit. The foundations of our life in Christ are the same for all - and are invariant through time and culture.

Though we may belong to different churches, denominations and organizations we are a part of "one body" the body of Christ.

Even though we may express ourselves in a hundred different ways - we are indwelt by the one Holy Spirit.

Even though we may have different tasks - we all have one common hope in the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and one common calling - to be like Christ.

Even though we may have diverse teachers and leaders we only have one Lord – Jesus Christ.

Even though we may believe differently about certain non-essential matters there is only one faith – in the crucified, risen, ascended and soon returning Lord Jesus Christ.

While our theology may vary, there is only one God that we are trying to describe and know, and He is the God and Father of us all.

And all born-again Christians relate to God in the same three basic ways – He is above us all, through us all and in us all - binding us together as one in Himself.

So outwardly and organizationally we are diverse, but in the Spirit and in Christ, we are one.

The spiritual unity manifests itself in times of persecution, then we do not care so much whether someone is a Baptist or a Pentecostal or an Anglican but only that they are a true believer in the Lord.

Now we tend to sing the same songs and study the same theological text-books and visit the same Internet sites and work for the same inter-denominational missions. In fact I used to lecture at both a Baptist and an Assemblies of God seminary. I took similar teaching in both, taught out of the same texts and the Baptists thought I was a great Baptist and the Pentecostals thought I was one of them! But both thought each other's seminary was plain wrong! While in fact they were getting much the same lessons!

We are much closer than we think! Both Baptists and Pentecostals believe in being Spirit-filled in the sense of Ephesians 5:18, both believe in spiritual warfare, both believe in the Trinity, the necessity of conversion, believer's baptism - and so forth. There is much more that unites us than that which divides us.

Since this is so, then we ought to put differences aside and forebear one another in love.

Let's do some "math": If each of us has 85% of our theology "correct" that still leaves 15% each that is debatable or a maximum of 30% difference where two parties are involved. They can be 85% right and we can be 85% right and still there be substantial differences. Now we have to learn to live with those differences - as long as they do not affect the core doctrines about Christ.

No-one can deny fundamental doctrines such as the incarnation, the divinity of Jesus, the crucifixion, the resurrection and the physical return of Christ without stepping outside of the Christian faith and fellowship.

There can be no spiritual unity with false teachers, cults or other religions.

But there can be great spiritual unity between born-again, bible-believing Christians whether they are Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Anglican, Pentecostal or Charismatic. In fact there is more unity between born-again people of different denominations than between born-again and unsaved people within a single denomination.

We all have unsaved people in our pews, and some of those have been there a long time, while they may be part of our local church, they are not part of the body of Christ.

The body of Christ is made up of those who have Christ in their hearts through faith and it transcends denominational and organizational boundaries.

There are born-again, bible-believing Catholics, Orthodox, Protestant and Charismatic Christians. These are all part of the body of Christ. Thus no single church can claim ownership of the gospel or to be the sole dispenser of the grace of God.

Thus we should seek unity with and develop tolerance and acceptance of other born-again, bible-believing Christians - and enter into a gracious dialogue with them over areas of difference.

On the other hand heretics, liberal theologians, false teachers and other religions are not "brethren" and their rituals and teaching may in fact be demonic (1 Corinthians 10:20,21, 1 Timothy 4:1) in their teaching. They are to be firmly corrected in all meekness, once or twice, then left alone (1 Timothy 6:5, 2 Timothy 2:25).

We should be in the unity that builds up the body of Christ and yet separated from all lies and wickedness so that we may walk in righteousness and truth.

This balance between unity and separation is captured in the epistle to the Hebrews: Hebrews 12:14 (14) Follow after peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no man shall see the Lord:

We are to pursue peace with all men, Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims, yet in this pursuit of peace and unity we are never to compromise our essential holiness, without which we cannot see God.

That He Might Fill All Things

But to every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. (8) Therefore He says, "When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts to men." (9) (Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? (10) He who descended is the same also as He who ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things.) (Ephesians 4:7-10)

Yesterday we learned about Christian unity. Today we move into discussing Christian ministry based on the gifts of the Spirit.

Why discuss unity before we discuss gifts? Because our gifts differ from one another and are sometimes the stuff of comparisons and disputes. The lowliness, meekness, forbearance and unity of verses 1-6 are the necessary prelude to the discussion of gifts in verses 7 –16.

Paul starts his discussion of the gifts with a brief theological prelude in verses 7 to 10 above. It's a bit confusing so please follow closely.

Spiritual gifts are grace, they are a gift from Jesus and are given as a result of His conquest of the spiritual realm. During Jesus' crucifixion, descent into the grave, resurrection and ascension through the heavens to the right hand of the Father evil was conquered and a fundamental change took place in the way the spiritual powers were arranged.

The powers that held people captive, were themselves taken captive. That is why it says that Jesus "took captivity captive".

In Colossians Paul puts it another way:

Colossians 2:13-15

(13) And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses,

(14) blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and has taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross.

(15) Having stripped rulers and authorities, He made a show of them publicly, triumphing over them in it.

The powers and principalities were disarmed at the cross, triumphed over in the resurrection and taken captive during the ascension into heaven. (Ephesians 1:20; 2:6; 4:7-10; 1 Peter 3:22; Colossians 2:10,13-15)

The triumph of Christ has resulted in a time of gift-giving. The battle is won, now the Victor is distributing gifts. Now Jesus "gives gifts to men". These gifts are not silver and gold, but eternal and spiritual, they are as Hebrews says "the powers of the age to come" (Hebrews 6:5).

God has plundered the wicked spiritual beings and distributed spiritual power to His Church. This will be Satan's defeat. The demonic enemy has been routed and the Devil's prisoners are now freed and given weapons to fight back. These are spiritual weapons for a spiritual battle.

In verse 9 above it says that Jesus descended into "the lower parts of the earth" – that is into direct subterranean conflict with Satan and the forces of evil. We are told very little of the details of this

conflict, just that it occurred, that it involved Jesus preaching to imprisoned spirits (1 Peter 3:19) and that He was victorious. Further speculation will probably only lead us astray.

After descending Jesus ascended into Heaven or more correctly He ascended through the heavenly realms to sit at the right hand of God.

Eph 4:10 He who descended is the same also as He who ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things.

As I mentioned in an earlier devotional the word Heaven, is always plural in the original languages (Hebrew and Greek). In fact there are at least three different levels of Heaven. In 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 Paul talks about the Third Heaven, which he also calls Paradise, a holy and wonderful place of inexpressible things. In Revelation 14:6-9 we hear about a mid-heaven where angels fly and proclaim the gospel and announce judgment. And in Psalm 104:12 we hear about the first heaven, which we call the sky or firmament, the place where the "birds of the heaven" fly. (This is covered in detail in the life in Christ series – especially in Eternity DBS numbers 228 and 229).

So Jesus ascended through these three levels of Heaven, through the firmament, the mid-heaven and Paradise, to be right there at the right hand of God. He did this so He could "fill all things". To fill something with water you have to be above it. Jesus pours Himself out, into us and into His Church and into His world, and into the Universe He sustains by His powerful Word (Hebrews 1:1-3) - filling all things from His high position in the heavenly realms.

Earlier on in Ephesians Paul puts it like this:

(Ephesians 1:20-23) Which He worked in Christ in raising Him from the dead, and He seated Him at His right hand in the heavenlies, (21) far above all principality and authority and power and dominion, and every name being named, not only in this world, but also in the coming age. (22) And He has put all things under His feet and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church, (23) which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Jesus uses His high position to fill us with the Holy Spirit, and He pours out his love that we might be filled with the fullness of God.

On the day of Pentecost Peter proclaims:

(Acts 2:33) Therefore being exalted to the right of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this which you now see and hear.

And in Ephesians 3:19 we see Paul praying that the Ephesians:

(Ephesians 3:19) And to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, that you might be filled with all the fullness of God.

Part of the reason that Jesus ascended into heaven was so that he could pour out the Holy Spirit into your life and fill you with Himself and with the loving fullness of God and give you spiritual gifts so that you could build up His Church.

Gifts From Above

And truly He gave some to be apostles, and some to be prophets, and some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, (12) for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-12 MKJV)

It was he who "gave gifts to people"; he appointed some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, others to be pastors and teachers. (12) He did this to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service, in order to build up the body of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-12 GNB)

God's best gifts are people who help us to become like Jesus.

This life is about becoming saved, then becoming holy and being made into the image of Jesus Christ. All our experiences are for our perfection in grace. Therefore the greatest gift we can be given is someone who helps us to become the person that God designed us to be.

The primary function of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers and pastors is to assist us in our journey towards Jesus.

Paul continues:

And so we shall all come together to that oneness in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God; we shall become mature people, reaching to the very height of Christ's full stature.

(14) Then we shall no longer be children, carried by the waves and blown about by every shifting wind of the teaching of deceitful people, who lead others into error by the tricks they invent.

(15) Instead, by speaking the truth in a spirit of love, we must grow up in every way to Christ, who is the head. (Ephesians 4:13-15)

Thus our spiritual gifts do not determine our place in a spiritual hierarchy or organization, rather they determine how we can best help others become like Jesus.

Those who claim ministry gifts should do so not to domineer others, or to attain status, but rather they should speak the truth in love so that believers become saints.

Spiritual gifts must be exercised with great respect for God's design and destiny for individual people. The teacher or prophet or pastor should minister in ways that help each person to fully be the person God has called them to be in Christ.

What Paul meant by these five roles is not at all clear. Little is known about what is meant by "evangelist" or "pastor" in the New Testament. Ephesians 4:11 is the only reference to the word "pastor" and it is not explained or defined, just mentioned. Evangelist is only mentioned three times (Acts 21:8, Ephesians 4:11, 2Timothy 4:5) and may just be a term for a catechist. By contrast "apostle" is mentioned 80 times in the NT, prophet 157 and teacher 42.

If the New Testament is any guide the best defined and most mentioned and expected ministry roles are apostle, prophet and teacher. These seem to move around a network of house churches in a given city, which in turn are led by a team of elders and deacons.

In fact there is almost no justification at all for the current practice of a having a “pastor” as a church officer. There are clear NT criteria for elders and deacons as church officers but none for “pastors” and outside this verse “pastors” are never mentioned again, nor is there any sign of them being appointed to church leadership. Timothy, who is frequently called a pastor in sermons – is in fact only described as an “evangelist”.

Do we need to return to the NT pattern or is the current system “just fine”? I think we are moving towards the NT pattern without knowing it! Cell groups, home groups and house churches are springing up everywhere, itinerant ministries and the Internet are networking people together, people like Ed Silvoso are popularizing “the church in the city” and helping to organize city-wide meetings of Christian leaders, and there is also a slow recognition of the apostolic and prophetic. We are “getting there” and it may be wise to move cautiously because quite a few of those claiming to be apostles and prophets need further evaluation.

We are also slowly but surely moving towards “every-member-ministry” and Christian leaders seeing their job as equipping the saints rather than doing everything for them. I think the trends are in the right direction. With loving debate and wise discernment we may soon rearrange the old less functional ministry patterns and reproduce some of the dynamism of the NT with its networked, plural leadership of equipped saints who do the work of the ministry.

Well then, what about the apostles and prophets? That is a tough question. I believe in Spirit-led, apostolic and prophetic leadership helping a network of churches to remain true to the gospel and extending the geographical boundaries of the Kingdom. However, I have many reservations about some of those who loudly claim to be apostles and prophets. I think we need to accept the existence of these functions and to do our homework and come up with biblical criteria and ways of acting with discernment regarding apostles and prophets.

Finally, let me repeat that gifts are not about position in a hierarchy but service to the saints. Ministry gifts are to help people grow up in all aspects into Christ and apostles are “set forth as last of all”. (1 Corinthians 4:9-13)

The Church: A Living Community of Mature Christlike Believers

And so we shall all come together to that oneness in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God; we shall become mature people, reaching to the very height of Christ's full stature. (14) Then we shall no longer be children, carried by the waves and blown about by every shifting wind of the teaching of deceitful people, who lead others into error by the tricks they invent. (15) Instead, by speaking the truth in a spirit of love, we must grow up in every way to Christ, who is the head. (16) Under his control all the different parts of the body fit together, and the whole body is held together by every joint with which it is provided. So when each separate part works as it should, the whole body grows and builds itself up through love. (Ephesians 4:13-16)

The Church is the body of Christ, a living diverse community, reaching up to Christ's full stature, growing up in every way unto Christ, anchored firmly in the truth and functioning in love.

Community shapes us and matures us. Our first community is our family, then our school and our peers, then our college, our sports team, our friends, our professional colleagues, our culture, our nation. Each of these makes a contribution to our beliefs, our personality and our character and shapes us a person. Our church, our participation in the community centered on Christ, should also shape us.

In the verses above Paul places a great emphasis on the power of a Spirit-filled and functional community to help us to become like Jesus. Paul states that the result of an effectively functioning body of Christ will be profound:

...we shall become mature people, reaching to the very height of Christ's full stature. (V.13)
 ...we must grow up in every way to Christ, who is the head. (verse 15)
 ...So when each separate part works as it should, the whole body grows and builds itself up through love. (v. 16)

A Christ-centered community that functions in love can make a huge difference in our lives, it can build us up until we are just like Jesus. On the other hand a dysfunctional community can destroy us.

On CNN today I saw an account of a couple in New Jersey whose four adopted children were under 50lbs in weight – and no-one noticed despite their regular involvement in a local church. Their utilities had been off for five months, the children were found when a neighbor noticed them searching through garbage for food. This can only happen when community breaks down completely. Christians should “see” each other, notice each other, care for each other. No Christian family should have their electricity cut-off or be without food. My wife and I regularly pay other people's bills despite being on a missionary salary. This is part of loving one another and not closing your heart to human need.

This is how we know what love is: Christ gave his life for us. We too, then, ought to give our lives for others! (17) If we are rich and see others in need, yet close our hearts against them, how can we claim that we love God? (18) My children, our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action. (1 John 3:16-18)
 Of course discernment is needed when giving – and that is another issue. But today's verses tell us that we need to be in community, seeing other people, caring for other people, praying with

other Christians, hearing their stories, mowing their lawns, fixing their cars, baby-sitting their children, being friends and having fun together.

I am convinced that we will mature far more as person by living in love and participating in community than we will in five hundred seminars in a classroom. You learn more about love in baking a casserole for a tired friend than in a book defining all the Greek words – as useful as that is.

We become Christ-like by stretching ourselves, in love, in community.

Now that by your obedience to the truth you have purified yourselves and have come to have a sincere love for other believers, love one another earnestly with all your heart. (1 Peter 1:22)

What would it do for you if you loved other people earnestly with all your heart and kept on doing it?

What would it be like to be part of a bible-believing, Spirit-filled community that loved one another earnestly with all their heart?

It would produce solid, mature people who gave up their negativity and selfishness and who knew Christ and lived in love. This is precisely what Paul is aiming at and precisely what the spiritual gifts are for.

The spiritual gifts are not only for producing a good performance for an hour and a half on Sunday mornings, or for life behind a pulpit or on a stage. They are also for life away from the pulpit, life in the neighborhood and workplace.

For instance, we should pray for the sick at home, in church and in the workplace and in the schoolyard.

We can use gifts of encouragement, exhortation, administration, helps, and generosity – just about any place on Earth, but especially in community, among our brothers and sisters in Christ.

When we learn to function as we should in loving, open-hearted Christian community, then we will set in place spiritual processes that help us to grow up into Christ.

As we speak the truth in love, to one another, as friends and brothers and sisters in Christ, we will grow up in every way into Christ who is the Head. For our community life comes not from a human leader but from Christ in our midst.

Two more things:

1. Valid Christian community must be anchored in the Truth if it is not to be blown hither and yon by every wind of doctrine.
2. A functional Christian community is self-edifying. That is it “builds itself up in love’. Once things are set in place, then, quite naturally, people will be built up and grow (verse 16).

The Church is to be Radically Different from the World

This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should not walk from now on as other nations (rest of the Gentiles) walk, in the vanity of their mind, (18) having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart. (19) For they, being past feeling, have given themselves up to lust, to work all uncleanness with greediness. (Ephesians 4:17-19)

The lifestyle of the Christian is not to be like the lifestyle of the spiritually ignorant. We are not to indulge in greediness, uncleanness and lust. We cannot just “blend in” with college parties, office affairs, wife-swapping in the neighborhood or financial corruption in the business world. The Christian must be morally and spiritually distinct from those around.

Christ changes us, Christ gives us a new way of thinking and a new moral sensibility. This is completely incompatible from the past life of the Ephesians. A clean break is demanded. Paul introduces verse 17 with two serious exhortations “I say and I testify in the Lord”, thus invoking his personal apostolic authority and the authority of God. He then writes “you should not walk from now on”. From the time they receive this epistle on - they are to change, and they are never to go back to their old ways.

Christians must break with the world and its ways and they must never go back. We can still have non-Christian friends but we cannot join them in their excesses. We are to never go back to lust, greed and uncleanness.

Pagans behave like pagans because they are spiritually deficient. Paul uses five terms to describe this spiritual deficiency: (lit. = literal translation from the Greek)

1. The vanity of their mind – lit. inutility, futility, depravity of thinking.
2. Having the understanding darkened – lit. the imagination and deep thinking is obscured.
3. Being alienated from the life of God – lit a “non-participant” in true spiritual life.
4. Through the ignorance that is in them – lit. indwelt by the quality of ignorance.
5. Because of the blindness of their heart – lit. stupidity or callousness of heart.

This may seem an extreme view of the non-Christian, but in areas where there is little or no Christian influence I have found it to be very true. In some developing nations I have worked in corruption and moral incomprehension abound and a kind of callous stupidity settles over all life and activity.

People without light - fall over in the dark. The stumbling, the moral accidents, and the moral chaos is simply the result of an almost complete lack of spiritual light and truth. Consistent morality is not normal in a non-Christian environment; rather moral confusion is the order of the day.

Christians are NOT to live a morally confused lifestyle or to unthinkingly accept the values of those without God. Rather we are to break with such values and to walk “in the light”. As we will see in the next devotional we are to “put on the new man” and this new self is created in righteousness and holiness.

Two errors in teaching are causing Christians to accept unbiblical levels of worldliness.

Firstly, we are being given a false view of grace, which teaches that we can sin all we like and God will forgive us. While I do not wish to minimize God's forgiveness for those who truly need it and want it, grace is not a type of "Get Out Of Jail Free" card. Grace is given to assist us in the task of becoming holy. Grace gives us the chance to start over in the task of being righteous and good and godly. Grace is not a dispensing with morality but an encouragement in being moral.

Secondly, we are taught that we have to reach out to and accept non-Christians wherever they are and that we must not be "too overtly Christian". Thus in a not-so-subtle way non-Christian values are given priority over Christian values. It is strongly implied that we should not offend non-Christians by living holy lives.

But accepting non-Christians does not mean accepting their values as our own or participating in their immorality. We should accept and love non-Christians without adopting their ways or becoming morally confused ourselves. And there is nothing wrong with being "overtly Christian" if that means being righteous, holy and morally courageous.

Paul goes on to characterize the Gentiles as "past feeling" or apathetic, morally insensate. That is they lack the proper moral sentiments and outrage over sin. Stealing is seen as trivial, creative bookkeeping is viewed as a joke, adultery is glamorized and abortion is viewed as just a means of contraception.

The Christian, on the other hand should have strong moral emotions that flow from deep spiritual values. Powerful moral emotions characterize the men and women of God. Jesus was outraged at cruel hard-hearted Pharisees, the prophets thundered forth at injustice; Paul was grieved at the idolatry in Athens. A quick inspection of the biographies of the great Christians will soon find that they felt very deeply and profoundly about moral and spiritual issues. The Spirit-filled, bible-believing, born-again Christian should never be apathetic. Rather we should be alive and passionate and filled with the very emotions of God when we view the world around us.

If we have the light of God in our souls, and the truth of God in our hearts we must live lives that are clearly distinct from that of the society around us. We must make a clean break with lust, greed and uncleanness. We should develop a Spirit-filled Christian lifestyle of righteousness and holiness and have the deep passions of the Spirit that raise us above the apathy and moral disinterest of the world.

Putting on the New Man

But you have not so learned Christ, (21) if indeed you have heard Him and were taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus. (22) For you ought to put off the old man (according to your way of living before) who is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, (23) and be renewed in the spirit of your mind. (24) And you should put on the new man, who according to God was created in righteousness and true holiness. (Ephesians 4:20-24)

Firstly, the convert to Christ is a person who learns from Christ, who is taught by Him, who hears Him, and knows His Master's voice, and learns the truth that is in Jesus, from Jesus.

Secondly, the convert to Christ is a new man, with a new self created in righteousness and holiness and must put off the sinful ways of the person he was prior to conversion.

We are all disciples of Christ. According to Paul we learned Christ, heard Him, were taught by Him and have discovered the truth that is in Him. (V. 20,21 above).

Christ is our Teacher, our master and our disciple: "Nor be called teachers, for One is your Teacher, even Christ" (Matthew 23:10).

God teaches us, through the Bible, through the renewed conscience, and through Christ who dwells in us. The new self, is teachable and hungry for truth and wisdom. And this new self is instructed by God.

But the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as His anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true and no lie, and as He has taught you, abide in Him. (1 John 2:27)

Our inner instructor, this anointing, that teaches us Christ, does not teach us "greed, lust and uncleanness" (Eph 4:19,20) rather it teaches us to be righteous and holy.

Learning Christ is much more than learning a gospel outline. Rather it is learning to "obey all that I commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20) including how to live out the Sermon On The Mount, how to love difficult people, how to pray and how to live a holy life in God.

Thus putting on the new man means adopting a holy and righteous lifestyle that is consistent with the new self, the new creation, made in holiness and truth.

This new self is variously said to be "born of God" and "born from above". It is a new order of being that is Christ in us. The deep inner core of a born-again Christian is a new being of great holiness and purity, that is created by God.

The concept of a truly holy new creation explains the following puzzling verses from 1 John: Everyone who has been born of God does not commit sin, because His seed remains in him, and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. (1 John 3:9)

(see also 1 John 4:7; 5:1,4,18)

This new self, comes from an eternal and incorruptible origin, the seed of the Word of God.

Having been born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the living Word of God, and abiding forever. (1 Peter 1:23)

Thus for a born-again Christian the new man, the inner man is already holy and righteous and all the Christian has to do is to put him on. The old self, the old nature and the flesh are far from holy and war against this new nature. (Galatians 5;16-18).

We have to put off this old nature, which is no longer “truly us” in an eternal sense and put on who we really are in Christ.

The key to this is “to be renewed in the spirit of your mind”. The spiritual alignment of the mind is critical. Where we set our mind makes all the difference.

For they who are according to the flesh mind the things of flesh, but they who are according to the Spirit the things of the Spirit. (6) For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. (Romans 8:5-6)

How does Satan get our mind on his side of the fence? By deceiving us through our lusts and our inappropriate desires. If Satan can get us thinking greedy, lustful, scheming thoughts then he has us.

How do we get over to God’s side of the fence and life and peace? By prayerfully, carefully, deliberately setting our minds on the things of God.

Now this does not mean that you abandon reality and go off to a monastery. That may help some people but it is a drastic solution. Rather you think about ordinary life in holy ways. You think honest, good, pure and diligent thoughts.

Paul gives his instructions for inner peace and life in Philippians 4:6-9

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. (7) And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (8) Finally, my brothers, whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things are right, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report; if there is any virtue and if there is any praise, think on these things. (9) Do those things which you have also learned and received and heard and seen in me. And the God of peace shall be with you.

Put on a new mind, and a new man, and learn Christ in holiness and righteousness that you may dwell in life and peace.

Putting Off the Old Man

Therefore putting away lying, let each man speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. (26) Be angry, and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down upon your wrath, (27) neither give place to the Devil. (28) Let him who stole steal no more, but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, so that he may have something to give to him who needs. (29) Let not any filthy word go out of your mouth, but if any is good to building up in respect of need, that it may give grace to the ones hearing. (30) And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you are sealed until the day of redemption. (31) Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and tumult and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. (32) And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:25-32)

Since we are a new person in Christ, and since this new self is created by God, in righteousness and holiness – then unholy behavior is incompatible with who we really are and must not be engaged in.

Putting away lying (v.25) – Lying is incompatible with the new self that is formed in the truth. We cannot tell lies for God or fib for evangelistic purposes. While a few bible verses seem not to condemn lying in war-time or when life is in danger, on the whole, the Scripture condemns falsehood. I am very concerned about some “undercover” ministries that require Christians to live double lives. This is spiritually damaging. We need to live in the truth, openly, but wisely, and not practice deception – even for a so-called “good cause”.

In my opinion if an environment is so hostile that we cannot go there openly as a Christian then we should not go there. We either “wipe the dust off our feet” (which is the NT response to such hostility, since the workers are few) or go and suffer the consequences, or we find other means of evangelism such as radio, literature or the Internet.

But most lies are just plain selfish – and have little to do with good causes. Whether it is lying on a tax-return, or lying about sexual behavior, or lying about qualifications or padding a resume, or lying in order to impress someone – it is evil.

Putting away wrath, malice and inappropriate anger (v. 26 & 31) - Verse 26 makes it clear that we can be angry for a short-while and in a controlled manner, without abusive language (v.29) or cursing (which may be the meaning of “giving place to the Devil”) (V.27). We are not to let anger put us into a state of turmoil, tumult, wrath or malice. This is evil and only works evil.

James 1:19-20

(19) Therefore, my beloved brothers, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.
(20) For the wrath of man does not work out the righteousness of God.

Putting away stealing (v28.) – There are many ways that Christians can steal. Underpaying Christian employees is stealing from your workers (James 5:4). According to the US Center for World Missions Global Missions Statistics (http://www.uscwm.org/mobilization_division/global_mission_statistics.html) dishonest treasurers pilfer more from church coffers (18 billion) than is spent on world missions (17 billion). Pilfering and financial dishonesty cost Judas, Ananias and Sapphira very dearly and we need to realize that it is a common but very deadly sin. Instead of getting easy money through theft Christians are to be constructive contributors to others (v.28) working with their hands and earning their way.

Putting away filthy speech (v.29) and evil speaking with all malice (v. 31). We are never to speak words that are malicious, evil or filthy. They are not to “come out of our mouth”. It is not “cool” to swear, neither does it “make a point”. Abusiveness, swearing, filthy talk and crude jokes are never from the Holy Spirit. Rather we are to work at speaking graciously, to build others up, not to tear them down or to defile them.

“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God” – base, vile and intemperate behavior grieves the Holy Spirit along with malice, ill-will, hatred and strife. The flesh and the Spirit are at war (Galatians 5:16-18) and God desires us for His own, so much so that the Spirit becomes jealous if we love the world and its ways (James 4:4,5) . This verse also tells us that God is personal and the Holy Spirit is more than a mere “force”, rather He is a divine Person, who is sensitive to our spiritual state and who is pained when we relish sin.

This Holy Spirit seals us until the day of redemption (v. 30). He is the mark upon our spirit that God recognizes, He is the seal upon the servants of God. God has put His mark on us, and that mark is a Spirit of holiness. Our distinctiveness is our purity, our righteousness our true identity. Therefore since we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit and set aside for redemption by a holy God, then we should strive to live holy lives.

Finally the positives – we are “members of each other” (verse 25) – joined in a spiritual unity, so to tear down a Christian is to hurt ourselves. So we should tell the truth to each other as we would tell the truth to our own selves (verse 25) and to be tender-hearted, forgiving, kind, remembering that God for Christ’s sake has forgiven us, so we also ought to forgive others. (see Matthew 18:21-35)

The Holy Spirit is gentle and gracious and the God-indwelt life will be kind and loving, not harsh and demanding.

We must live as forgiven folk, soft in God, and glorying in the gospel and free from all angry tumult of self and the clamor of ego. The new life beckons, let us part with the old.

Walk In Love

**Therefore be followers of God, as dear children. (2) And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us, and has given Himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor.
Ephesians 5:1-2**

Followers of God have a daily lifestyle of sacrificial love.

It is a high calling to be “follower of God”. To follow a philosopher is one thing, to follow a great leader another, but to follow God – that is the highest of all possible callings.

We are to walk in the footsteps of Christ – who is God. We are to live as He lived and do as He would do as the novel “In His Steps” made clear with its ethical question “What would Jesus do?”

We are to follow, not as slaves being dragged along, or as prisoners at gunpoint, or as hypnotized followers of a draconian tyrant, but as children – as those who love their heavenly Father and follow out of freedom, out of likeness of nature, and out of love and relationship.

By saying “be followers of God” Paul indirectly tells the Ephesian Christians that they cannot follow the world, or the pagan rituals, or the Greek philosophers, or even each other - but Christ alone and God alone.

When the Corinthians divided into factions over who they would follow “I follow Paul, I follow Apollos” they were rebuked with “Is Christ divided?” (1 Corinthians 1:12,13) We are to follow leaders “as they follow Christ”, and the role of a Christian leader is to get Christians to follow Christ alone – not the leader.

“And walk in love..” – In bible language “to walk” indicates a habitual lifestyle. It means to “travel through life”. In Exodus God tested Israel to see if they would ‘walk in My Law’ (Exodus 16:4) the Israelites were not to walk in the ways of Egypt (Lev 18:3) or of Canaan (Lev 20:23) but were to walk in God’s ways (Deuteronomy 28:9). The cursed person “walked in the stubbornness of their heart” (Deuteronomy 29:19, Jeremiah 13:10) and Ahab “walked in the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat” that is in traditional idolatry. (1 Kings 16:31). On the other hand the righteous walked in the fear of God (Nehemiah 5:9), truthfulness (Psalm 26:11) in the light of Jehovah (Isaiah 2:5) and in the name of God (Micah 4:5) and thus gained prosperity which is described as “walking in a broad place” (Psalm 119:45)

Life can be tough though and some can “walk in the midst of trouble” (Psalm 138:7) or through the valley of death (Psalm 23:4) and even in darkness and affliction (Isaiah 59:9) but God is with the righteous in such times. Sound wisdom and judgment keep the Christian from stumbling as they walk (Proverbs 3:23) and guide them from walking in the paths of the wicked and in their counsel (Proverbs 1:15, Micah 6:16) and in the ways of darkness. (Proverbs 2:13). The Holy Spirit is the voice that helps us to know which way to go as we walk. (Isaiah 30:21, Ezek 36:27)

And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, This is the way, walk in it, when you turn to the right hand and when you turn to the left. (Isaiah 30:21)

Walking after our own heart and thoughts has a certain integrity (Ecclesiastes 11:9) and is better than living a compromised life, but can lead to moral disaster and judgment (Eccl 11:9, Isaiah

65:2). We need to stick to the “old paths” and the good way not to the “by-paths” (Jeremiah 6:16, 18:15)

False prophets “walk in false-hood” (Jeremiah 23:14) while the Holy Spirit keeps us on the right track (Ezekiel 36:27). Those who “walk in pride” God is able to humble. (Daniel 4:37) and the Pharisees are described as “walking in long robes” indicating their pompousness. (Luke 20:46). Scoffers “walk after their own lusts” (2 Peter 3:3). Apostates turn back and do not walk with God. (Joh 6:66 From this *time* many of His disciples went back into the things behind, and walked no more with Him.) And lazy Christians “walk naked” for lack of spiritual attainment (Revelation 16;15). Jesus was criticized for “not walking in the traditions of the elders” and for abandoning man-made rules and regulations because He walked with God. (Mark 7:5)

In the New Testament the Christian does not “walk in darkness” but has the light of life (John 8:12) and is to walk by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7), in newness of life (Romans 6:4), in the rule of a new creation (Galatians 6:15,16) in the Spirit (Romans 8:1,4; Galatians 5:16, 25), in good works (Ephesians 2:10, Colossians 1:10), worthily of our high calling (Ephesians 4:1, 1 Thessalonians 2:12), in love (Ephesians 5:2), in the steps of the faith of Abraham (Romans 4:12), “becomingly” in attractive holiness (Romans 13:13), in the spiritual unity of a holy pattern (Philippians 3:16,17), in wisdom (Colossians 4:5) and circumspection (Ephesians 5:15), in the day (John 11:9), in the light - not in the darkness (1 John 1:7), and as children of light (Ephesians 5:8), in the truth (3 John 1:3,4) in God’s commandments (2 John 1:6), in the manner that Jesus walked (1 John 2:6) and in Christ by faith (Colossians 2:6).

Romans 13:13 tells us that Christians are not to walk in – carousing and drinking, co-habitation and lustful acts, strife and envy. Romans 14:15 says that if we violate our brothers conscience we are not walking in love. Neither are we to walk in carnality (1 Corinthians 3:3) or craftiness (2 Corinthians 4:2), nor by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7), nor as the pagans walk (Ephesians 4;17) nor as fools (Ephesians 5:15) or in a lazy and disorderly lifestyle (2 Thessalonians 3:6,11) or strange diets (Hebrews 13:9) or in darkness (1 John 1:6) or hatred (1 John 2:11) or after the flesh (Romans 8:1-6, 2Peter 2:10).

Thus to walk in love is to live a life governed by love as its main principle in the way we travel through life. Our example for this is Christ “as Christ also has loved us, and has given Himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor.” (Ephesians 5:2). Thus our lifestyle is to reflect the loving and sacrificial lifestyle of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Love is patient and sacrifices its right to punish. Love is kind and sacrifices legalistic harshness. Love is gentle and sacrifices the wrong use of power. Love is generous and sacrifices what we otherwise would keep. Love is not envious and sacrifices comparing and contrasting and walking in pride and boastfulness. Thus every act of love is also an act of sacrifice. To walk in love is to live as a “offering and sacrifice to God” putting self on the altar at every opportunity.

Sin is Serious Stuff

For let fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness not be once named among you, as becomes saints, (4) neither baseness, foolish talking, jesting, which are not becoming, but rather giving of thanks. (5) For you know this, that no fornicator, or unclean person, or covetous one (who is an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. (6) Let no man deceive you with vain words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the children of disobedience. (7) Therefore do not be partakers with them. (Ephesians 5:3-7)

Sin brings the wrath of God, and deprives us of our inheritance in the Lord. Therefore sin is not proper or fitting for Christians and we should not participate in sinful activities such as fornication, coarse jesting or covetous scheming and corruption. Rather we should live as saints.

In Ephesians 4:19 Paul names three main categories of sin that were common among the unsaved pagan world of his time.

For they, being past feeling, have given themselves up to lust, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

Paul then revisits these same categories twice in these verses above:

(3) For let fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness not be once named among you,
 (5) For you know this, that no fornicator, or unclean person, or covetous one (who is an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

Lust, uncleanness and greediness are the sins of the unspiritual person, the person who is insensitive to spiritual realities and who is given to his or her appetites above all else.

Uncleanness is akarthasia which means unclean, lewd, impure or demonic. The pornographer, the paedophile, the crude, the vulgar, the perverted fall in this category. The man with a stack of hard-core pornography is "akarthasisos" – an unclean person. Akarthasia appears in lists of sexual sins (Galatians 5:19, Colossians 3:5) and involves unnatural or degrading sexual passions. (Romans 1:24, 6:19). The condition is spiritual and may be driven by "unclean spirits" – demons that have this nature and impart it to those possessed by them such as the naked, violent Gadarene demoniac (Mark 5:1-13). They are mentioned about 22 times in the New Testament (see Matthew 10:1, 12:43 etc). The deceptive spirits at the end times are "unclean spirits like frogs" (Rev 16:13) and the fallen Babylon of Revelation becomes a haunt for unclean spirits. (Revelation 18:2)

Internet pornography is a wave of "uncleanness" and is, in all probability, a Satanic deception driven by unclean spirits, which can then set up strongholds in the lives of those who give in to it. This uncleanness is not harmless, says the apostle Paul. Rather uncleanness is unfitting for a Christian, prevents us having any inheritance in Heaven and brings the wrath of God on those who disobey Him in this way.

If you are caught up in this, you need to repent, to remove all bookmarks and links to such sites, erase all images from your hard-drive and cancel any subscriptions you may have. Then it may help to find a mature Christian friend who can help you to be accountable. If you have been involved for a while you may need deliverance. (see <http://www.aibi.ph/warfare/>)

Fornication is a general word for sex outside marriage including pre-marital sex (John 8:41) adultery (Matthew 5:32) visiting a prostitute (1 Corinthians 6:18) and incest (1 Corinthians 5:1)

and is literally “harlotry” and is one of the main characteristics of the Babylonian harlot (Revelation 17:2,4, 18:3, 19:2).

Fornication (porneia) is condemned throughout the New Testament and there is no hint that Jesus or the apostles made Christianity a religion of sexual license. Grace does not allow or permit sexual sin, but instead helps us to overcome it.

Greed or covetousness literally means “much more” (see Hebrews 9:14) but generally is a word for sweaty, avaricious financial scheming. It is a focus on materialism so great that it is idolatrous. Again it will be a characteristic of the end-times when the final choice will be between “buying and selling” and Christ. (Revelation 13) Financial greed results in many people going astray from the faith and brought about the doom of Judas, Demas, and Ananias and Sapphira.

(1Timothy 6:9-10) But they who will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which plunge men into destruction and perdition. (10) For the love of money is a root of all evils, of which some having lusted after, they were seduced from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

Covetousness is closely linked with “extortion” (1 Corinthians 5:10,11; 6:10), flattery especially that of false teachers who “make merchandise” of Christians (1 Thessalonians 2:5, 2 Peter 2:3,14) and idolatry (Ephesians 5:5, Colossians 3:5). It is desire for quick, dishonest gain by dubious means.

The cure for covetousness is honest contentment and Christian simplicity (1Timothy 6:6-8). (6) But godliness with contentment is great gain. (7) For we brought nothing into the world, and it is clear that we can carry nothing out. (8) But having food and clothing, we will be content.

Simplicity of lifestyle is actually commanded by Jesus (Matthew 6:19-21).

(19) Do not lay up treasures on earth for yourselves, where moth and rust corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. (20) But lay up treasures in Heaven for yourselves, where neither moth nor rust corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. (21) For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

As John Stott says “do not lay up treasures on earth” is just as serious a prohibition as any other prohibition that the Lord commands!

I will finish this study with some more word from the Lord in Luke 12:13-21.

And one of the company said to Him, Master, speak to my brother to divide the inheritance with me. (14) And He said to him, Man, who made Me a judge or a divider over you? (15) And He said to them, Watch and keep yourselves from covetousness. For a man's life is not in the abundance of the things which he possesses. (16) And He spoke a parable to them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully. (17) And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room in which to store my fruits? (18) And he said, I will do this. I will pull down my barns and build bigger ones, and I will store all my fruits and my goods there. (19) And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years. Take your ease, eat drink and be merry. (20) But God said to him, Fool! This night your soul shall be required of you, then whose shall be those things which you have prepared? (21) So is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.

Living in the Light

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (9) (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth), (10) proving what is acceptable to the Lord. (11) And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.

**(12) For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. (13) But all things that are reprovved are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. (14) Therefore he says, "Awake, sleeping ones! And arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light."
(Ephesians 5:8-14)**

Christians are en-light-ened ones. We are "light in the Lord" (Ephesians 5:8), we are "children of light" (Eph 5:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:5) our inheritance is "with the saints in light" (Colossians 1:12,13) and we are even the light of the world (Matthew 5:14,15). We are to put on an armor of light". (Romans 13:12) and walk in the light (1 John 1:7).

In spiritual terms "light" is the pure, the positive and the good "for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth".

God is all light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. This does not just mean that there is no evil in God, but also that there is nothing dark or negative, no grumbling, no pettiness, no fits of temper or petulance. God is completely positive and good throughout all His being. And He wants us also to be like that.

Light also exposes and reveals and makes manifest. This is the sense that it is used here in Ephesians. We are to expose dark deeds and rebuke them, uprooting evil from our midst, not brushing it under the carpet.

(11) And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.

(12) For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret.

(13) But all things that are reprovved are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light.

Certain sins are often "covered up" in churches – financial dishonesty, sexual molestation, and clerical adultery. While these things do need to be handled sensitively and not broadcast to the media, they should be exposed, brought into the light, and handled fairly and appropriately through the correct channels.

Light also denotes moral vigor. The light shines, the light bursts forth, the light is pure and strong and good. When we live in the light we do not live in the weak grey world of deceptions, moral compromises, fibs, and excuses, rather we live boldly in a straightforward and holy lifestyle.

Living in such a bold and straightforward and truthful way is not always appreciated by those around us. Jesus lived in the light and was rejected for it!

And this is the condemnation, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the Light, because their deeds were evil. (20) For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light, lest his deeds should be exposed. (21) But he who practices truth comes to the Light so that his works may be revealed, that they exist, having been worked in God. (John 3:19-21)

Paul picks up on this when he says that those who live in the light go around “proving (dokimazo – testing, discerning) what is acceptable to the Lord”. That is they live their lives out in the open before men and God that it may be obvious that their works have been “wrought in God”. They are holy and transparent people.

Living in the light does not mean being indiscreet. We are still to be wise about what we say and to whom we say it. But it does indicate a bias towards openness and away from secrecy. We especially to avoid those who do sinful things in secret, who hide under a cloak of respectability, and who live double lives and revel in shameful deeds. (verses 11,12 above)

Some Christians are asleep in the twilight zone of sin and compromise, lacking moral vigor, stumbling, unconscious of both themselves and God. To these Paul speaks a strong word: 14) Therefore he says, "Awake, sleeping ones! And arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light."

Many Christians need to wake up – to themselves, to a holy God, to the glory of the spiritual life, and to their moral responsibilities. This verse strongly implies that we have a clear choice, we can wake up, we can decide to stop dozing away our lives and we can choose to open our eyes and take a good hard look at ourselves “in the light of day”.

If we decide to take God, our spiritual lives and our moral responsibilities seriously “Christ will give you light”. God will give us more guidance, more love, more grace as we proceed down the path of living “awakened” lives.

To live a straightforward and holy life is both costly and unusual. But it is glorious and good and joyful. Those who live in the light can sleep well at night and look themselves in the mirror, and have no fear of the policeman or the taxman. Their life can stand inspection and their good works are obvious and bring glory to God. Such a person puts away dark passions, mutterings, murmurings, jealousies and hatred and lives in peace. In the end they are at rest, and know the light of eternity.

Redeeming the Time

See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, (16) redeeming the time, because the days are evil. (17) Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. (Ephesians 5:15-17)

Christians are to live wise and circumspect lives, using their time well, and doing good deeds, that flow from a deep knowledge of God's will. This needs to be a conscious spiritual effort because the natural man naturally puts "idle time" to evil uses - "because the days are evil".

Christians were to be circumspect and wise. In other words we are to think over our actions, to consider our ways and take careful thought about our choices, to live deliberately and intelligently in all things. We are not to live thoughtless, foolish and undisciplined lives; for there is nothing spiritual about folly. So let's look at how we are spending our time because, after-all our time is our life-time – and we will give account to the Lord. (Matthew 12:36, Romans 14:12, 1 Peter 4:1-6)

Holiness involves time management – but not the time management of the "efficiency experts" but rather the time management of Christ where every moment is filled with the presence of God and with good deeds.

It is the quality of our time, not the quantity of our time that is important. In a fallen world "the days are evil" and in need of redemption, so we must sanctify our time and lift each moment up out of sin and lust and vanity and into the stream of redemption, faith and love.

In order no longer to live in the lusts of men, but in the will of God the remaining time in the flesh. (3) For the time of life which is past is enough for us to have worked out the will of the nations, having gone on in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, parties, carousings, and abominable idolatries. (1 Peter 4:2-3)

Instead of spending a day brooding about revenge, spend the time in prayer and forgiveness. Instead of spending an hour day-dreaming about an illicit romance – spend it in bible study or doing good. Program your life according to the will of God. Fill your diary with good things, loving things, and with worthwhile and beautiful things.

Plan your life with God's Kingdom interests in mind. Take a month on a short-term mission trip or a year to do some Bible College, or spend two years on the mission field, or a lifetime serving the poor.

Does your life have to be spent in the same selfish materialistic lifestyle as your peers? Can you redeem the future years and use them for the glory of God? I am not saying that you have to be a pastor or a missionary, but I am saying that your life should be lived positively and constructively for the will and purposes of God.

If you own a company –how is that corporation focused? Is the profit motive "the bottom line" or does it also exist for a higher purpose? Is it assisting with the betterment of mankind and the redemption of the community? It does not need to be a charity but it should be a kind, functional, happy and community-conscious workplace.

Do you consciously plan in family-time and time one-on-one with each child? Do you have a genuine day of rest?

Redeeming the time is different from efficiency in another important aspect – meetings and “busyness”. If you are so busy that you are no longer sanctified, and the fruit of the Spirit have begun to “fall off the tree” – then you are too busy. If you are grumpy, impatient, short-tempered and unkind because you are so busy – then you are not redeeming the time; rather you are using time efficiently to make people miserable.

Rest is not idleness - actually rest is obedience. Time of quiet, times of reflection, times in prayer and meditation, time to be part of God’s creation and see His hand in things, and time for just enjoying people and loving our neighbor. Even time for the refreshment of sleep – for God gives sleep to those He loves (Psalm 127:2)

If you are in leadership consider disciplined scheduling of your time. That may sound onerous but there are some good reasons for it.

1. Scheduling in one's quiet time and guarding that time can assist spiritual growth.
2. Scheduling in easily neglected ministry tasks such as visiting means you complete all that you are called to do.
3. Scheduling helps you to guard family time and preserve top priorities from demanding people.
4. Scheduling stops "drifting" into just doing what you like doing and maintains integrity and discipline.
5. Scheduling is a guard against church politics because it gives everyone the clear impression that you are working, that you are fair, that you have no favorites and that you are not blown hither and yon by personal whims.
6. Scheduling presents a disciplined life to God - who can then make changes in that schedule whenever He wants.

How should we allocate our time according to the will of God? Firstly, give no time for sin or for the flesh. Do not schedule a trip to a wild hotel-casino in Los Vegas. Also do not schedule in R-rated movies or dubious activities. Rather schedule in church, bible study, a visit to the lonely old lady in the neighborhood and a phone call to your parents.

Secondly, have a clear set of godly priorities that help you to allocate “which wins” in a clash in your schedule. May I suggest a set of priorities I have used for some years:

1. Relationship with God
2. Health
3. Family
4. Close friends
5. Ministry

Thus while the bulk of my time is spent on my ministry if I get so busy that my quiet time suffers or my health is wrecked, or my family and friends are alienated from me – then I am doing too much and need to cut back.

Thirdly, develop a spiritual sense of God's timing for events. "A time to live and a time to die, a time to weep and a time to dance etc" (Ecclesiastes 3:1-11) God has His seasons and timings for all things and makes everything beautiful in its time (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Look at the gospels and Acts and develop a sense of what the Spirit-led life looks like with prayer and teaching the Word as priorities. (Acts 6:1-3). Understand what the will of the Lord is – and then put it in your day planner!

Be Filled with the Spirit

And do not be drunk with wine, in which is excess, but be filled with the Spirit, (19) speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; (20) always giving thanks for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, (21) submitting yourselves to one another in the fear of God. (Ephesians 5:18-21)

This section on being filled with the Spirit follows the earlier verses on the constructive use of time. They say that the Christian is not to lead a wasted, dissipated drunken life but rather a Spirit-filled, joyful, worshipful and thankful and respectful life.

“And do not be drunk with wine” – why? Because in it is “excess” or “dissipation”. All pleasure should be pursued wisely and in moderation – whether it is alcohol, television or sport. Evangelicals may not often be alcoholics but they can sometimes be excessive day-dreamers, TV watchers, and gossips or infatuated with “working out” hour after hour in the gym. When a legitimate pleasure becomes a huge waste of time, or even a destructive addiction (and you can even get addicted to running) then its time to put it away in the name of the Lord. Addiction to alcohol can ruin years of a person’s life, and Christians should avoid it at all costs.

“But be filled with the Spirit” – we are to be intoxicated with the presence of God, with His love being poured out in our lives and so affected by it that others mistakenly think that we have had too much sweet wine.

Acts 2:11-17

- (11) Cretans and Arabians, we hear them speaking the great things of God in our own languages.
- (12) And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying to one another, What does this mean?
- (13) But others mocking said, These men are full of sweet wine.
- (14) But Peter, standing up with the Eleven, lifted up his voice and said to them, Men, Jews, and all who dwell at Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to my words.
- (15) For these are not drunk as you suppose, for it is the third hour of the day.
- (16) But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel:
- (17) "And it shall be in the last days, says God, I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh. And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

The joy in the life of a Christian is not to be from God not from a substance and it is to result in glory being given to God.

This joy is to affect how we think, and the “self-talk” that goes on in our minds so that we speak to ourselves in “psalms and hymns and spirituals songs” and our heart is renewed as we sing and make melody in our hearts unto the Lord. The heart of the Christian is to be full of song, a happy place where God rejoices to dwell.

When we are filled with the Spirit a happy, God-centered, and melodious self replaces the gloomy, self-centered, addictive self. The darkness is banished and the soul is filled with light and joy.

Instead of railing against the world like a disappointed drunk the Spirit-filled Christian celebrates life and loves God and lives respectfully and is in right submission to those with whom he or she deals in life. The Christians submits to laws and governments and employers in a respectful bit not

obsequious or craven manner. They submit not out of weakness or a docile nature but out of fear of God who orders our world with justice. And yet, when God directs, they can take a costly stand as well.

Always giving thanks for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” this is a key to powerful praying for gratitude is at the very heart of true prayer. We can give thanks for the sunlight, the fresh air, the birds, the earth we dwell on and of course for God Himself and for our salvation. There is enough to be thankful for to keep us going even on the worst of days. We can even thank God for our trials for they help perfect our character. (Romans 5:1-5)

Our life is from the hand of God and we need to thank Him for it. We also need to trust that no trial is too great or any night of the soul too long or too dark. To give thanks in the midst of injustice, illness, death or divorce is very difficult. At such times the world seems to be wrong-sided, fallen and awful. Yet misery is never a good solution. Find something to be thankful for, even something small and trivial. No matter how down I have been I have always been able to give thanks for my food! Cultivate thankfulness in the midst of trials and you will gain a soul-strength that is mighty and awesome.

In our prayers we give thanks “to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”. This is the proper order of prayer – to God the Father and in the name of Jesus.

Well then how do we become filled with the Spirit? It’s a command, it is something we must have a part in, something we must do. It is quite simple:

1. First come before God in thankful and faith-filled prayer.
2. Then confess any conscious sin and ask God to take charge of your life.
3. Ask to be filled with the Spirit that is - invite the Holy Spirit to fill you and control you.

Pray a prayer something like this: Heavenly Father I come to you in the name of Jesus Christ and thank you for saving me and loving me, please forgive my sins, take control of my life this day and fill me with Your Holy Spirit. Amen

If you pray this each morning you will find your days quite different and much more joyful.

Order in Relationships

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, as to the Lord. (23) For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. (24) Therefore as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. (25) Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, (26) that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, (27) that He might present it to Himself as the glorious church, without spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that it should be holy and without blemish. (28) So men ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. (29) For no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord loves the church. (30) For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. (31) "For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two of them shall be one flesh." (32) This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. (33) But also let everyone of you in particular so love his wife even as himself, and the wife that she defers to her husband. (Ephesians 5:22-33)

Two sets of holy relationships are in view here. The relationship between Christ and the Church, and the relationship between a husband and his wife, and the two are seen as analogous.

Intimacy requires order. There can be little intimacy in the midst of anger, rebellion, selfishness and disorder. "You in your little corner and me in mine...." is not a recipe for deep love.

Intimacy also requires the mutual ministering of one to the other. The Church ministers to Christ in worship and Christ ministers to us through His Holy Spirit. Similarly the wife ministers to her husband through respect and the husband ministers to his wife through cherishing her in love.

My wife has a Ph.D. in Biology and a well-established international career – yet she needs my love. I have a good ministry – yet I need her respect and submission. Minda is strong and independent and capable but in the marriage relationship she is willingly respectful and submissive. As two strong people in a good marriage we still have to be careful with one another. Minda loves it when I cherish her and honor her and I enjoy it when Minda shows respect and honor to me. I am proud of her achievements and Minda delights in mine. I feel no need to diminish her in order to be "head of the house".

But it was hard for Minda to surrender her independence when we got married and just as hard for me to give up my untidy bachelor ways. Living by the biblical pattern is not at all easy – but it is worthwhile.

Submission does not mean that women are not "equal" to men. They are both part of the image of God. But a woman cannot delight in the strength of her man unless she lets him lead. A wife encourages and develops her husband's leadership skills by letting him lead. Over time a respectful wife will produce a strong man that she can delight in. However, if a wife rips her husband's self-esteem to shreds, takes over, and decides to be in charge then she will experience the "absent Adam" syndrome.

Husbands are called to cherish and love their wives as Christ loves the Church. First of all this means faithfulness in marriage, and then a loving, caring, unselfish regard for one's better half. This verse prohibits polygamy and adultery because Christ has only one Bride. It also prohibits narcissistic, vain and selfish male behavior. Christ does not cherish Himself, but rather pours Himself out for the Church and we should do the same for our wives.

Last Friday I was taking a bible study when a woman asked about who should give way in marriage and I replied that the husband should always be considerate and the one that reaches out to meet his wife's needs. The response from the various women present was a sudden loud "O that is the nicest thing.." It was obvious that they all wanted considerate and caring husbands who gallantly met their needs.

Husbands – if you want a happy wife – then be caring, kind and considerate. But that is not quite enough – you also need to take the lead as Christ leads His Church. Your strength and your consideration will work together to make a joyful marriage.

This is a very deep passage and as I cannot finish without making reference to the relationship between Christ and us. "For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones." Christ is no stranger to us and we are no stranger to Him, rather we are "bone of His bone". We are members of the body of Christ, we pulse with His life and accomplish His will. And Christ cares for us as one would care for one's own body.

This close relationship is outlined in F.J Heugels short book "Bone of his Bone" which you can read online at: <http://www.worldinvisible.com/library/huegel/5f00.0349/5f00.0349.c.htm>

Here is a paragraph: MY purpose is to trace step by step the scope of this great principle of participation in Christ-to measure, as it were, the length and breadth, the depth and the height, of this marvelous identification of the believer with his Savior. Christ, and all true believers, are one. They constitute His body. They are, in the language of Adam, "bone of His bone, and flesh of His flesh." Just what the implications of this oneness with Christ are-the overwhelming glory of such a position most Christians have never had -so much as an inkling. May the Father of Lights enable us not only to understand, but to enter into this holy temple, and to realize our oneness with Christ. This is the only spring that can quench our thirst. There is no other way to the fulfillment of our deepest aspirations as Christians.

Parents and Children

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. (2) Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), (3) so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth. (4) And fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:1-4)

Gentle, nurturing leadership by parents and obedience and honor from children is the biblical mandate.

Children are to obey their parents:

1. "in the Lord" - within the scope of Scripture, not following them into wrong areas such as crime or idolatry.
2. "for this is right" – it is God's righteous order for families.
3. "so that it may be well with you" – relationships with parents affect the whole of life.
4. "and that you may live long on the earth" – respect brings stability and blessing.

In my counseling I find that dysfunctional relationships with parents underlie many problems that adults experience in later life. Getting the parent-child relationship right is essential and a key part of this is for the child to honor their father and mother.

Honor is more than respect - it also includes financial provision in their old age.

But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially his family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel. (1Timothy 5:8)

These are strong words – to breach major family responsibility makes us "worse than an unbeliever". Right family relationships are thus part of the very core of biblical Christianity.

However, how can one honor a bad-tempered, violent drunken or abusive parent? With some caution – is the only answer. The relationship may be in tatters, the parent may be dangerous to us emotionally and physically, but we should still seek to honor them as much as possible within the bounds of common sense and good judgment. In such cases we should prayerfully bring that relationship to God for His healing touch.

The relationship with one's father is often the most awkward. Which is why Paul writes: "And fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

Fathers can wreck their relationships with their children by abusive use of their headship. Parenting is not a power trip but a stewardship. We men are to bring up our children in "the nurture and admonition of the Lord" – notice the word "nurture" men are to have a nurturing aspect to their life in Christ.

When the parent-child relationship works well then "you will live long in the land". I think we see the fulfillment of this in cultures such as China and Japan, which greatly respect parents – and consequently have never been scattered or moved out of their lands. As Confucius said – peace begins with the family.

The “first commandment with a promise” is meant to bring us great blessing. If we give our best to our parents then God will give His best to us.

Let us not blame our parents for who we have become. Yes, they played a part, but we can also did our part as well, we made certain choices and as adults our life is our responsibility – not theirs.

When the relationships between parents and children break down across a whole society then that society quickly comes under a curse – and prophetic intervention may be needed to turn the country around.

Behold, I am sending you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of Jehovah. (6) And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the sons, and the heart of the sons to their fathers, that I not come and strike the earth with utter destruction. (Malachi 4:5-6)

Thus parent-child relationships are under constant spiritual attack and many of the inexplicable arguments may even have a spiritual basis – for Satan accuses the parents to the children and the children to the parents. Therefore, prayer, daily family times in the Word, forgiveness, keeping short accounts with God and each other, and alertness to each other’s needs are all ways the family can be protected from the breakdown in relationships.

The biblical guidelines on communication and on relationship repair are vital to family life.

Therefore if you offer your gift on the altar, and there remember that your brother has anything against you, (24) leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:23-24)

Family relationships form a foundation to both society and true Christian spirituality. They will never be “perfect” in a fallen world but they can be rugged and strong and built on honor and consideration.

Slaves and Masters

Slaves, obey your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as to Christ; (6) not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, (7) with good will doing service as to the Lord and not to men (8) (knowing that whatever good thing he does, he shall receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or a freeman). (9) And masters, do the same things to them, forbearing threatening, knowing that your Master also is in Heaven. There is no respect of persons with Him. (Ephesians 6:5-9)

Slaves and masters are equal before God who is “no respecter of persons”. Therefore slaves are to serve their masters as if they were doing the will of God and masters are to treat their slaves with equality and respect and not threaten them.

Firstly, human employers are “masters according to the flesh”, they are not masters in the spiritual sense and have no abiding claim on the employee – their claim goes as far as the employment contract and no further.

Yet they are to be served with due respect, and given good single-hearted service. Not just to please them for a moment but high quality work, the sort you would do if you were serving Christ. This says a lot about Christian ministry as well where we claim to be serving Christ but which so often is done half-heartedly or to please men.

Servants/employees are to “do the will of God from the heart”. In so far as their work is within God’s will they are to perform it well. Obviously they are not to be lazy, corrupt, dishonest or fraudulent in their dealings. Pilfering is not to be part of the life of the Christian employee.

Work is to be done “with good will” (v. 7 above). That is it is not to be performed resentfully or grumpily. There is a savage ill-will in some workplaces that makes the air miserable and sour. This should not come from Christians.

The good we do at work is noted by God and is part of our reward in Heaven. “Knowing that whatever good thing he does, he shall receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or a freeman” (V. 8 above). This is an interesting verse and seems to imply that we receive “in kind” from God the good that we have done for others.

Masters are to do the same for their slaves. No Christian is to treat another with superiority, disdain or contempt. Rather there is to be mutuality within the body of Christ.

Employers are to act “without threatening”. There is to be no abusiveness, no tirades, in a Christian workplace and security of employment should be present (within the limits of good work being done). If the staff is fearful, uncertain and insecure, walking on tip-toes, then the firm will not only be less productive – it will also be out of the will of God.

(I thoroughly commend “God in Work” by Christian Schumacher as a guide to good Christian work practices. The author served as a consultant to British government and industry and has thought deeply about work structuring in the light of Christian theology.)

Masters / employees have a Master in heaven who is no respecter of persons or of socio-economic indicators or class structures. Heaven has no Hilton for rich Christians. We are all equal before God – and equally poor before God as “all our righteousness is as filthy rags”. (Isaiah 64:6)

Therefore whether we are rich and employ many – there is no ground for elitism; or whether we are a clerk in the basement – we have no ground for inferiority. God does not judge as men judges and many of the first will be last. (Matthew 20:16)

We are judged by the standard of Christ in our place. If Jesus was doing your job – how would he be doing it, if Jesus walked in your shoes, where would He be going? Jesus does dwell in you if you are born again and can do your job and does walk in your shoes. As you surrender to Him and walk in the Spirit you will discover how he would do your job.

Thus even at work we can be taught of God, as we listen to Christ in us, in the midst of the bustle of life. As we listen to our conscience, and to the prompts of the Holy Spirit we will hear a voice behind us saying “this is the way, walk ye in it”. (Isaiah 30:21) We can learn of God in the pressures and challenges of work if we determine to do that work as if it were for Christ.

The Armor of God

Finally, my brothers, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. (11) Put on the whole armor of God so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. (12) For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the world's rulers, of the darkness of this age, against spiritual wickedness in high places. (13) Therefore take to yourselves the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. (Ephesians 6:10-13)

Today my cell-phone was snatched for the second time in a few months, two weeks ago my wallet was stolen on a bus, just before that all our personal documents were stolen including birth and marriage certificates. What am I fighting? Just thieves – or something more than thieves?

Perhaps behind all the hassles of being a missionary lie malevolent spiritual powers that target servants of God to defeat, discourage and destroy them. Perhaps the one who comes to “Steal, kill and destroy” was in the mind or the heart of the person who snatched my cell-phone as I stepped out of the taxi today. Maybe...

In the verses we are looking at today Paul emphasizes concepts such as: “be strong”, “be able to stand”, “be able to withstand”, “in the power of His might”, and “wrestle” – its warrior language, the language of conflict and combat where strength is the main virtue.

Strength is very much a Christian virtue and it underlies the sustainability of all other virtues. The strong Christian holds to God’s will longer than the weak Christian. The strong Christian is not easily overthrown by temptation, or by suffering – or be thieves and robbers. Neither is the strong Christian easily discouraged in the work of God.

How we react “in the evil day” is critical. How do we react when we face corruption or theft or delay or mindless criticism? How do we react to threats to ourselves, our property, our ministry or our reputation? Evil will attack and sometimes will succeed – so how will we handle it? At the moment I feel discouraged but I am fighting back that discouragement because I know it will do me no good. How do you react when things go wrong?

Armor is the stuff that makes us tough. The swords and shields and boots are all there to make us tough to deal with in battle. Christians are to be spiritually tough and resolute. We should be able to take a few hits – and dish them out as well! When evil strikes we are to strike back – but spiritually, not physically!

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the world's rulers, of the darkness of this age, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”
(Ephesians 6:12)

In other words our main battle is in our spirit, in who we are as a person and for who we are as a person. The battle is also external to us in resistance to powers and principalities that dominate cities, districts and even entire nations. These spiritual beings create an atmosphere of entrenched evil and hopelessness and a feeling of defeat. They give the impression that nothing will ever change and that the evil will never lift and all that can be done is to accept it.

But Paul says we are to fight. We are to wrestle the demons into the dust and pulverize them like a mighty gladiator at war. We are not just to accept evil, but to wrestle it to earth, to pin its arms, to slam dunk it and leg-lock it and render it inoperative.

There is wickedness in high places – in some corporate boardrooms, in greedy, grasping finance houses, in the minds of dictators, in unjust economics, in the machinations of mullahs and the networks of terrorists, drug dealers, the sex trade, illegal arms trade, illegal wild-life trade and the like. The world is in the coils of a dragon and it is we the Church who must slay the beast.

And the great dragon was cast out, the old serpent called Devil, and Satan, who deceives the whole world. He was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. (10) And I heard a great voice saying in Heaven, Now has come the salvation and power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ. For the accuser of our brothers is cast down, who accused them before our God day and night. (11) And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony. And they did not love their soul until death. (Revelation 12:9-11)

The demonic realm is in layers from grubby little demons indwelling cell-phone snatchers to the cold deadly monsters behind the eyes of Osama Bin Laden. They inspire a whole agenda of stealing, killing and destroying (John 10:10) and especially work on the deception of leaders and the production of idolatry. (Revelation 13)

Demons resist God – (that’s what “devil” means) and His will and His kingdom. They tempt, accuse, sicken and kill. They steal, harass and hinder, they pollute and defile and deny the good at every turn. There is even some justification for the belief that they are assigned against Christian workers if 2 Corinthians 12:7 is translated literally “an angel of Satan to torment me.”

Ephesus was loaded with the demonic (see Acts 19:1-41) so Paul told the Ephesians be strong and get tough and put on God’s fighting equipment to deal with the occult powers in your city. Paul did not just sympathize – he energized. The Christians are to be the resistance force in a world dominated by evil powers, and we have no option but to be strong in the power that God provides. Tomorrow we shall look at the armor of God –piece by piece.

The Armor of God – Part 2

Therefore stand, having your loins girded about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness (15) and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. (16) Above all, take the shield of faith, with which you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. (17) And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, (18) praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching to this very thing with all perseverance and supplication for all saints. (Ephesians 6:14-18)

The first injunction is “stand” and it’s a word that can also mean “abide” or “continue” so the idea is to stand firm, on a permanent basis, to take one’s stand and hold the fort.

Christians need to stand firm against evil. God has not called us to be passive observers of the decay of mankind, standing aside and cheering on the wrath of God. Rather we are to stand against the tide, we are to be transformers of society, to be salt and light and to do good deeds that make a difference to the world. We are to stand in the truth, we are to stand for the teachings of Christ and we are to stand opposed to all forms of wickedness.

To stand in battle is to face the enemy head on and to never yield an inch of ground. We are not to yield the battle to the media, to the pornographers, to the violent, to the wicked or to the corrupt. We are not to let our honesty slip, our doctrine be pushed into error, or our standards be lowered. We are to stand in the face of criticism and persecution and unpopularity because we are standing firm for Christ.

“Having your loins girded about with truth” – truth secures and limits the Christian’s walk with God. Christians walk in the truth that is in Christ and in factual truth - as truth as generally known in the world. Christianity never asks the believer to walk in delusion or in falsehood. You can be a good scientist and affine Christian; you do not have to deny the facts in order to believe. Inside the truth is inside God’s safe zone. We are protected spiritually when we become discerning of truth and error and stick with the truth.

“And having on the breastplate of righteousness” – Righteousness is the hardened plate steel of the Christian life. It is the “Kevlar”, the bulletproof jacket. This righteousness is the righteousness of faith, which is in Christ; it is the work of the blood of Christ, securing us in God. If we doubt our righteousness, if we think we must earn it in this way or that, we become vulnerable to spiritual fraud and manipulation. If righteousness depends on pleasing this leader or giving so much money, then we are trapped. But in Christ we are set free.

By having on the breastplate of righteousness we place ourselves within the righteousness that is by faith and end the righteousness that comes through works or the rule of law. We then live out a righteous life and have the additional protection of the clean and godly life that protects from much harm.

“And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” Our task is to stand and we stand on the gospel and in Christ. We stand firm and solid because we know we are at peace with God and not in religious turmoil or under condemnation. We are established in God, at peace with God and able to stand firmly in the midst of life as stable people who are peace with themselves and the universe. The gospel protects us with inner stability and peace. When we grasp the glory of the gospel we are prepared to face life and its trials and tribulations with an equanimity born of a new nature, a pure conscience and a glorious destiny in Christ.

“Above all, take the shield of faith,” – Faith gives us the sure knowledge of God’s approval so that our heart is not smitten by accusation and condemnation. Faith takes all Satan’s accusations and extinguishes them with the knowledge of the sure love of God and His justification of us – even though we are sinners. Faith finds the truth in Scripture and believes it to the defeat of the Devil. Faith grasps the goodness and mercy of God and lays hold of God’s promises so that we can rejoice even in the midst of trials.

“And take the helmet of salvation” – Or more correctly the knowledge of their salvation. Paul is writing to Christians, to those already saved and asking them to understand their salvation, to get it “into their thick skulls” so to speak- that God loves them and is redeeming them and has wonderful plans for them and will make them like Christ. We need to deeply understand our salvation so that we are can rest in all that God has done for us. (1 Corinthians 2:9-16) Much of Ephesians is devoted to explaining that salvation –along with Romans and Galatians and Hebrews. This is not just theology – it is spiritual survival. Wrong ideas about salvation lie at the heart of many cults, sects and heresies.

“And the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God” – The cutting edge of Christianity is bible study and Scripture memory. Jesus used it against Satan in the wilderness and believers can use

it still. The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edge sword (Hebrews 4:12) and is able to enter into human hearts and life situations and change them. It is when we take the Word to the world and apply it, and even smite it with it, that society changes. I do not mean crude bible-bashing but rather thinking biblically and commenting accurately from a Christian perspective.

The word can be powerfully used in intercessory prayer in the Spirit. We can claim Scripture, proclaim Scripture aloud and pray through scripture to defeat the enemy of souls. Thus Paul enjoins us to be “praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching to this very thing with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” We are to watch over life like a hawk, bringing the Scriptures to bear on it, with prayer and supplication in the Spirit. We are to guard ourselves, our families, and all the saints through prayer. And not just casual prayer but prayer from an awake and watchful spirit, alert to spiritual motions and able to discern and pray according to God’s will.

An Ambassador in Chains

(19) And pray for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, (20) for which I am an ambassador in bonds; so that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. (21) But, so that you also may know my affairs and how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things, (22) whom I have sent to you for the same purpose, that you might know our affairs and that he might comfort your hearts. (23) Peace to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (24) Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen. (Ephesians 6:19-24)

Paul is in prison and yet his only thought is for the advancement of the gospel. Paul does not say: "Please pray that I may be discrete, I am in big trouble and if anyone finds out I am a Christian then I am in for it." Paul is no secret believer but rather is a bold testimony. The priority is not his own life and comfort but the knowledge of the gospel – even to prisoners, guards and officials of Rome. (It is generally agreed that Ephesians was written during the Roman captivity of Paul probably between 58 AD and 64 AD)

Studies on persecution show that the main aim of persecution is to silence the Church. But Paul will not be silenced by persecution! Paul says, "Pray that I may be given utterance". Pray that Paul may be louder still! This is Christian courage at its best.

It is wise to be discrete about the names of believers and the existence of underground churches – but not about the gospel itself. There is no long list of greetings at the end of Ephesians, and only Tychicus, the actual bearer of the message is mentioned. This is doubly unusual because of his long stay at Ephesus and his dear friend Timothy's location in that city. He must have known hundreds of people there but none are greeted - possibly out of concerns for security. His greeting is a simple "Peace to the brothers..and grace be with all".

So Paul is silent about the local church but bold about the eternal Christ. Christ cannot be hurt by our proclaiming Him - only exalted!

Paul knew things were coming to an end for his ministry. He was not going to go out quietly. Rather he was going to go boldly, proclaiming, and testifying to the gospel.

Paul calls himself "an ambassador in chains". This shows the contempt the world has for God. Ambassadors of worldly governments generally cannot be imprisoned and must be released and returned to their home country. Paul, an ambassador for Christ, is given less respect than an ambassador from the smallest principality would receive.

However, over the centuries, Paul has received greater honor than many kings. Great men still study Paul's writings but few read whatever Nero may have written. Paul's words are in the Bible while the words of the dignitaries of Rome are on their tombstones.

What does an ambassador do? The ambassador communicates the will of the government and enters into offers and negotiations on behalf of the realm. Paul's message, from God, to all the world was - "be reconciled to God".

Then we are ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as God exhorting through us, we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

(21) For He has made Him who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:20-21)

As an ambassador Paul pleaded with fallen humanity “be reconciled to God” and his message was to be proclaimed even to Caesar and to the powers and principalities behind the political forces of the first century.

Today there is still a need for the gospel to be boldly proclaimed to the powerful, to those deeply entrenched in the world system, that even they may be reconciled to God. We need highly educated Christians who can take the gospel to politicians, investment bankers, the United Nations, the military and the influential institutes of higher learning.

Such people will not accept “canned” approaches but need to be influenced one by one, with intelligent persuasion and thoughtful reasoning. It is indeed necessary that people in these high-level ministries pray that “utterance may be given them” and that they be both bold and wise in presenting the gospel and telling the influential to be reconciled to God.

God’s will in areas as different as global economics, the use of force, the treatment of the poor, the enactment of just laws, the taking of bribes, and the use of information needs to be spelled out – not just as a “Christian” position or a Church position but as the will of the King of Kings and the Creator of All Things. The rulers of this age need to be told, by God’s ambassadors, that they will have to give an account to the King of Kings for all their decisions.

The rulers of this age need to be told that they have erred many times and need mercy and thus need to be reconciled to God in both their heart and mind and in the standards of their deeds.

Let us pray that God will raise up some more ambassadors for Christ.