

Shepherding Notes

Ephesians

By Caleb Bunch

I think it is fair to say that Paul loved the church of Ephesus. Of course he loved all of the churches to whom he writes, but it appears to me that he had a special affection for the Ephesians. From his preaching to Apollos in Acts 19, to his tearful goodbye to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, to his sending of his spiritual son Timothy to oversee them — Paul seems to pay special attention to these beloved saints. In Acts 19, we see that Paul spent two years there establishing the church. This is the longest Paul ever stays in one location by choice. (There are multiple times when he spent long years imprisoned or under house arrest.)

How would someone like Paul display his love for a church like the one in Ephesus? By writing to them one of the richest, densest theological presentations of all time. Paul's letter to the Ephesians is second only to Romans in its immense depth of doctrinal truth. Chapter one provides two main sections. Part 1 (vs. 1–14) speaks to the blessings we have been given in Christ and how they were determined and delivered to us. Part 2 (vs. 15–23) is an explanation of how Paul prays for the church. Our focus today will be on the first part of the chapter. Through Paul's pen, the Lord graciously pulls back the curtain to reveal to us what was going on in the heart and mind of God before He even began to speak creation into existence. Let's ask several questions and allow them to be answered by the text.

Q1. What blessings has God provided for His people?

vs. 3

God "has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places." (vs. 3) There is no good gift that God withholds from His people. This indicates that, if you are in Christ, every single circumstance in which you find yourself is truly a blessing from the Lord — even when it feels painful.

Q2. How did we become God's people?

vs. 4

"He chose us in him before the foundation of the world." (vs. 4) God chose His people — and His decision was made long before any acts of good or evil were performed. God hand selected some of His creation upon whom He desired to show mercy and pour out blessings.

Q3. Can we become "chosen" by our works?

vs. 4

No. Our works are the fruit, not the root of our salvation. He chose us so "that we should be holy and blameless before him." (vs. 4) He did not choose us because we were holy and blameless. He chose us so that He could make us holy.

Q4. Why did God decide to choose the people that He chose?

vs. 4-6

First off, it is very important that we never presume upon the Lord to say that we know who God has chosen. However, God does make clear to us in Ephesians 1 at least three reasons why He chose the people that He did.

- In love... (vs. 4) — God determined that He would set His affection upon His people. His choice was not merely the random results of a cosmic lottery. Nor did the Lord make His decisions in a robotic, emotionless, utilitarian manner. He chose His people in love.
- "...he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will..." (vs. 5) — Why did God choose to predestine the people that He chose? The reason Paul gives here is simply, "because He wanted to." For you and I, we don't usually get to use that kind of an answer when asked why we did something. Part of being God means that He does not have to answer to anyone else, nor does God have to explain His reasons for doing the things that He does. (Daniel 4:34-35, Romans 9:14-18, Romans 11:34-36) Our God is in the heavens, He does all that He pleases. — Psalm 115:3
- "...to the praise of his glorious grace..." — God predestined us so that He might receive much glory. What is glory? It is when the beauty, perfection, attributes, character, and holiness of God is seen and perceived and treasured by others. John Piper refers to it as the "going public" of His holiness. Similarly, Paul writes to the Romans about this matter of God's choosing love. In Romans 9:19-22 we find an argument being made about the Potter's freedom to make whatever He wants out of the clay: "What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory..." Once again, one of the purposes of God's choosing is to reveal His glory. God is ultimately desirous for His glory to be made manifest in all of creation.

"God predestined us so that He might receive much glory – the beauty, perfection, and holiness of God seen, perceived, and treasured by others."

EPH. 1:5–6

What makes you a Christian? How did you come to be a Christian? What were the contributing factors that resulted in your sin debt being paid, your soul being redeemed, and your status with God being reconciled? Thankfully, we are not left to guess at the answers to these questions. They have been laid out for us plainly and powerfully in our chapter of the day.

Paul begins by explaining who we were before salvation. The chief metaphor that overshadows vs. 1–3 is that we "were dead" in our trespasses and sins. We were not merely dabbling with devilry or trifling with trouble. The result of our sin nature was spiritual death. That death is expressed by pursuing the path of worldliness and gladly walking in the footsteps of Satan. We were children of wrath. This is the unflattering description of our life before the grace of God.

"But God..." – these beautiful words reveal that there was a transformative moment in our lives that occurred because God was determined to do something. He interjected Himself into our contented pursuit of destruction.

EPH. 2:4

He took dead people like you and I and made us alive. Why? We are told that it was because of His mercy and great love (vs. 4), His saving grace (vs. 5), and His desire to display His immeasurable riches of grace and kindness to us (vs. 7). Those are the motivating factors in the heart of God for seeking us out and applying His unmerited favor to our lives.

Grace Through Faith

VS. 8–10

How is that grace applied to us? We receive it by grace through faith — the opposite of receiving it through works. Paul rejects works-based salvation by clearly stating, "And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus..." (vs. 8–10) Why are you saved? How did it happen? According to this passage, it is not your own doing. It is something that was enacted for you, upon you, and apart from your pursuit, effort, or desire. If there was literally anything that you could do that would set you apart as deserving of salvation, then it would no longer be salvation by grace — it would become

salvation by merit. And if you are saved by merit, then you have every right to boast. As the great Jonathan Edwards once put it, "You contribute nothing to your salvation but the sin that made it necessary." Christian, you are what you are because you are "His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus..." Just as God called out, "Let there be light," and the light happily, unreluctantly, and immediately sprung into existence, so did you come to life when God the Holy Spirit opened your eyes to believe the gospel. Good works are certainly a part of the picture — but according to vs. 10, they are the outcome of our salvation, not the grounds of it.

"You will never be a greater enemy of anyone than you were of the Lord. Yet He came to find you, restore you, transform you, and adopt you."

Reconciliation

vs. 11–22

The result of the gospel on a community is the elimination of hostilities that might have otherwise divided us. Vs. 11–22 are instructions about reconciliation. Particularly, we see how we have been made right with God, and therefore we are called to be reconciled with His people. The extreme hatred that was fostered between the Jews and Gentiles for centuries was not an easy thing for people to overcome. Of this sharp divide Paul writes that "he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility." (vs. 14–16) If you are a believer, then the most egregiously broken relationship you have ever had has already been reconciled. You will never be a greater enemy of anyone than you were of the Lord. You were so far from Him, yet He came to find you, restore you, transform you, and adopt you. Now, we as the church are able to live without a dividing wall of separation between one another. We (the church) are a single structure being built by God Himself. "In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."

Are you fully trusting in the grace of God for your salvation? Are there any brothers or sisters in Christ with whom you have refused to reconcile? These two questions are good ways to meditate upon your relationship with the Lord today.

Today we have the blessed privilege to listen in on a prayer that Paul prayed over the church at Ephesus. There are so many ways that I have considered approaching this section today. I could take the approach of seeing how this prayer operates as a model for how we can pray for our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. I could zone in on the way this prayer continues the theme of interpersonal reconciliation amongst the brethren that has been the focus since the middle of chapter 2 (such as when Paul notes that every family in heaven and earth is named — originated by — God the Father in vs. 15). However, the aspect of this prayer that I would like to investigate with you today is to see more closely how Paul prays for the minds of these believers.

One part of the great commandment is to serve the Lord with all our mind. Sadly, I would argue that most of us squander the great majority of the time we have to train our minds. Then, when we need them to go into action, they have not been well prepared. It is like being thrown into a boxing match when all you have done for the last two years is eat Burger King and binge watched every new hit show on Netflix. What kind of 'mental bout' am I referring to? What do we need our minds to be trained to do? Not the kind of match that you might think. Let's listen to Paul's prayer and I will explain further.

Faith as Cognitive Decision

vs. 17

Paul prays that Christ may dwell in our hearts richly. If this alone was the prayer, what an immensely powerful concept it would be. Just think — the God of the universe would choose to make His home within us, richly (abundantly, lavishly, generously). How does this take place? "Through faith." Faith is not blind belief based upon a feeling — that is how it is often portrayed in our modern world. Rather, faith is actionable trust. It is looking at who God is, what He has done, and what He has promised to do, and standing firm on that. It is a cognitive decision to take God at His Word. Faith deals with the realm of the mind, not the emotions.

Comprehension & Knowledge

vs. 17–19

Paul continues to pray for their minds by stating, "that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge..." Notice a

few things off the bat. First, the key outcomes for which Paul is praying are comprehension and knowledge. Notice that in order for you to comprehend and know the love of Christ in its fullness, you and I must be given strength. Maybe it is just me, but I find that to be unusual wording. Normally I don't think of having the ability to know something as a form of strength. The reality is that you and I are born with frail, finite, and sin-affected minds. We see the world upside down and backwards. Jesus' kingdom seems so upside down when we first begin to hear His words because it is the direct inverse of our natural way of thinking.

"...and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge..." – that is like saying, so that you might fully wrap your arms around the sun that is unhuggable.

EPH. 3:19

Paul is praying that our minds might be given strength to know the love of Christ. Don't overlook how he defines this love: "...and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge..." Paul is praying that we would grow in our awareness of the extremity of Christ's love for us. Why? "...that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." Do you see what this means? This prayer indicates that your active awareness of God's infinite, boundless, explosive, unquenchable love for you has everything to do with what it means to be "filled with all the fullness of God."

Practical Strength

What does this "knowledge" and "comprehension" look like in real, day-to-day life? Because, let's be honest, very few of us have the freedom from responsibilities that would permit us to sit at our kitchen table for 16 straight hours and read, study, and meditate upon the Word while doing nothing else day after day. (To be honest, I would venture to guess that most of us would not have the self-discipline to do that even once a year.) At our house it is hard to even have a conversation without interruption from a child in need. You have a life, a job, maybe a family — how can you genuinely have your mind strengthened in this way?

Thankfully, this is not very complicated. It isn't that the concept is difficult to understand. God loves you. A child who has faith in Christ can grasp enough of that truth to feed their soul and lead them to genuine worship. Although you might understand the concept, you and I will never in this lifetime fully grasp its depth. In fact, in most of our daily

interactions we tend to forget it altogether.

"What if you remembered in every moment, in every circumstance that God truly, deeply loves you? How would your relationships with others be different? Your suffering? Your sorrow? Your response to temptation?"

Having a mind strengthened to hold fast to these truths radically changes the way you approach and respond to every situation in your life. So, to close this note, let me plagiarize a bit and simply pray over you the final words of Paul's prayer: "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

One of the common traits of Paul's epistles is the shift somewhere around the center of the book where the attention will move from theology to application. To put it a better way, the first part is typically an explanation of who God is and how He works while the second part helps us to understand how to operate based upon those truths. We have come to the shift in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. We have primarily seen the theology of God's work of salvation. Moving forward, Paul emphasizes God's outworking of sanctification. Chapters 4–6 function as a guide to Christian conduct rooted and grounded in divine truths.

Ephesians 4 is a chapter containing 19 direct commands in just 32 verses. However, these commands are built around a very simple framework:

- Walk in a Manner Worthy of the Calling (vs. 1)

- Walk in Unity with One Another (vs. 13)

- Do Not Walk like the Gentiles do (vs. 17)

- Walk like Jesus (vs. 32)

Do Not Grieve the Holy Spirit

vs. 30

Having said that, I want to take a brief moment to examine one particularly perplexing command. Verse 30 says, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." What does that mean? The Holy Spirit is a person, always referred to in the Bible with the masculine pronoun "He." Consider some of the ways that we are able to interact with the Holy Spirit. I encourage you to take a moment and look up the following verses and see exactly how these play out in context.

- Acts 7:51 teaches that we can resist the Holy Spirit.
 - *This means to press against, reject, refuse, and forcibly deny the work of the Holy Spirit.*
 - *This is something only said of unbelievers — such as the unconverted Jews who stoned Stephen in Acts 7.*

- 1 Thessalonians 5:19 teaches that we can quench the Holy Spirit.

- By using the plural "you," we see that Paul is stating that the church as a group is able to quench the Spirit.

There is not full agreement about what it means to quench the Spirit. Some, such as Edward Hiebert, argue that a church which refuses to prioritize holiness quenches the Spirit. Some scholars, such as F.F. Bruce, argue that a refusal to listen to or inattentiveness to preaching the Word faithfully is what quenches the Spirit. Charles Spurgeon believed it means to neglect the Holy Spirit. John MacArthur believes it to mean a church that collectively refuses the process of sanctification.

- Admittedly there are similarities in these positions. Regardless of which is correct, we learn that the sinful actions of a local church can dampen or stifle the Holy Spirit's activity amongst them.

- Ephesians 4:30 refers to the fact that we can grieve the Holy Spirit.

- This indicates that the Holy Spirit is not merely an impersonal force. He experiences things personally — because He is a person.

The fact that it says, "by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" indicates that this is a sin that is committed by believers.

- We can also clearly deduce that this is not an unpardonable sin because even those who do grieve Him are still sealed for salvation.

In context, it seems that the way in which we are able to grieve the Spirit is by our mistreatment of one another — particularly in the way we misuse our words to destroy one another. Consider this verse like the meat on a sandwich. Directly before vs. 30 we read, "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear." That is our first slice of bread. Then, — directly after verse 30 we read, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice." Although bitterness and wrath and anger are all matters of the heart, they primarily express themselves outwardly through words of clamor, slander, and malice. That is bread slice number two. When you place a statement like "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit" right between them, it seems to indicate that our treatment of one another is the chief component of our grieving of the Holy Spirit.

"Let us never grieve the Holy Spirit, but always love one another — and in so doing honor and please the Lord."

How much do you think that the culture of our nation or city has affected you? The fact of the matter is that we are all swimming in the same water. We are constantly influenced to think a particular way by music, movies, and moguls. We adopt far more of their philosophy than we actively realize. Here is an example found in our text today. Vs. 22 says, "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord."

Don't miss the word "as" in that sentence. Paul is declaring that wives should submit to their husbands as (like, in the same way, to the extent) that they submit to God Himself. 1 Peter 3:5–6 also speaks to this issue stating, "For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord." That word "lord" literally means "master." (To be clear on our terms, submission is even more than just doing what one's husband demands — it is to do so with deep respect, according to verse 33.)

"Does this language make you uncomfortable? To be honest, it makes me uncomfortable. Even though most cultures throughout history would read those words and never blink an eye, we swim in a pond of culture diametrically opposed to such ideas."

I believe that submission has always been an issue of the heart for women. But, for almost all of human history, and in almost every culture, this idea was widely accepted as a moral good. On the other hand, what would have been extremely novel to the culture to which Paul was writing was the idea that the husband had such immense responsibilities toward his wife.

The Husband's High Calling

VS. 25–30

Consider these words: "In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself." Now consider — does it seem like Abraham or Jacob or David understood these things? Solomon certainly failed to grasp this concept. The idea of lavishing love on one's wife is almost absent from the biographical examples of the men we find in the Old Testament (Hannah's husband and Boaz are rare exceptions). Husbands have a far greater role than just providing an income. They are

called to lead, but do so with love. The comparison and high bar that is given is that husbands are to love their wives "as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her." This leading love is not self-seeking, but self-sacrificial.

Greater still, Paul describes the husband in a priestly way. Just like the role of the Old Testament priests included ritual washings for the purification of a person so that they might be prepared to worship in the temple, so the husband is to seek the sanctification of his wife. The traditional perspective of these verses (and the simplest reading of the text) indicates that a husband will be responsible to "present" not only himself before the throne, but his wife as well. This implies intense responsibility placed on the shoulders of the husband that are not transferred onto the wife.

There is so much more to be said of these things, but for now I think it is good to close with a reminder of these simple, but difficult responsibilities. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church. Wives, submit respectfully to your husbands. Why? Because, as Paul states, your marriage is a picture of the gospel. And, when your marriage is operating as it was designed to function, it can serve as a beautiful picture of God's love for His people and their submission to Him.

"Your marriage can be either a wonderful testimony to your community, or a major detriment to your preaching of the gospel. Strong biblical marriages make for credible gospel proclamation."

Well done, friends. We have arrived at the conclusion of another book of the New Testament. Contained within this chapter lies the most well-known passage of Ephesians — a section that has come to be known as "the full armor of God." It is my assumption that many of those reading these notes have heard many lessons and sermons on the armor of God. So, what I would like to do for a moment is to help us think about the hermeneutics of these verses. (Hermeneutics is just a fancy-schmancy word for the methodology of interpretation.)

The reason for taking this approach is to help us get a proper grounding for this text. We want to ensure that we are hearing what God is actually saying, not what we imagine these words to mean. One of the ways people tend to misunderstand or misapply this passage is by overstating or overemphasizing the function of each piece of armor and its effects. The question is much more, "what is necessary to fight spiritual battles," and much less "which piece of armor best symbolizes faith or love or righteousness." Let me show you how we know this to be true. Consider the following verses that likely served as Paul's Old Testament inspiration for Ephesians 6.

Old Testament Foundations

- Isaiah 11:5 — "Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins."
- Isaiah 52:7 — "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns.""
- Isaiah 59:17 — "He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak."
- Psalm 91:4 — "He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler."
- 1 Thess. 5:8 — "But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation."

Notice that righteousness is described as the belt (Is. 11:5), and the breastplate (Is. 59:17). But, the breastplate is also spoken about by Paul himself as the breastplate of faith and love (1 Thess. 5:8). So again, the metaphors utilized by Paul are not the main point of the text. So then, what is?

The Armor Belongs to God

VS. 10-18

Here is the key. What do all of the Old Testament verses above have in common? They are all speaking about this armor as being worn by God Himself, or by the Messiah He would send (which, as we know, is God Himself). Consider the phrase, "the full armor of God." Don't overlook the little words. "Of" can be used in a variety of ways — nine to be precise. In this case, it is a genitive of possession. That simply means that you could also literally translate it as, "the armor that is owned by God."

The point that Paul is making is that in order to stand, we must put on Jesus' armor. He wore it before us. He wore it better than us. He freely gives it to us. He expects us to use it. We must do this, or we will fail. As Paul says, our battles are not being fought against physical armies. We are waging a spiritual battle every single day. I love how the King James Version translates 2 Cor. 10:4: "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds..."

"Paul is not speaking in Ephesians 6 about an offensive attack. He is informing you that even if you do not move a muscle, attacks are being aimed at you. The fiery darts of the evil one are trained on your soul."

Spiritual warfare is real, but it doesn't need to be scary. We have no need to fear it. We simply must prepare for it by being "strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might." We have been given the tools of truth, righteousness, the gospel message, faith, salvation, the Word, and prayer. Don't let the armor grow rusty. Today is a day to dress for war so that you can stand firm.