



Grace is the Key!

- Expositions In Paul's Epistle to The Ephesians -

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Apple Valley, CA 92308

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Preface – A Word From Pastor Mark

It has indeed been quite an adventure our congregation has been on these past 14 months as we have wound our way through Paul's Inspired Epistle to the Ephesians.

We have delved into the depths of Christian Doctrine and we have been urged toward the heights of Christian Living.

Through the months of our study we have come to understand that the Secret of the Christian Life is found in Christ Himself ... He is the one whose life defines our living ... He is the one whose spirit enables our living.

By the time we concluded our study, we as a Church Body had embraced one of Paul's great Pastoral Prayers as our own.

I wanted it printed out right at the beginning of this collection of messages so that it might point anyone who picks up this book in the direction that we ourselves have discovered to be so profoundly exciting.

"Christ Dwelling In Our Hearts Through Faith"
That is the Secret of the Christian Life!

Pray this prayer every day ... Pray it for every believer whom you would lift up in prayer ... Pray it for the entire church body to which you belong ... Mention them all by name and then pray this prayer for them all. Pray it as you work your way through this book.

OUR Sonlife PRAYER ...

(Ephesians 3:16-21)

We pray, Heavenly Father, that out of Your Glorious Riches,
You may strengthen us with power through Your Spirit
in our inner being, so that Christ may dwell
in our hearts through faith.

And we pray that we, being rooted and established in love,
may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how
wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and
to know this love that surpasses knowledge — so that we
may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now unto You, who are able to do immeasurably more
than all we ask or imagine, according to Your power
that is at work within us ...

To You be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus
throughout all generations, for ever and ever!
Amen!

After each message there is included a '*Sonlife Reflection*' designed to provoke some additional thought on the passage of the week. At the close of the series, there is printed a '*Warfare Prayer*' that can assist you in '*Putting on the whole armor of God*' each day!

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"IDENTITY AND TREASURE"

(*'Grace is the Key' Series*)
(Ephesians 1:1-2)

Intro ... Last week we concluded our series on Psalm 119 called '**Delighting in God's Law**' which was itself a follow-up to the previous series of messages on the '*Sermon on The Mount*' which we called ... '**Life In The Kingdom**'.

In that message last week (which I said was a kind of transitional message), I introduced ...

Last Week's Key Idea ...

'Grace is The Key' to the abundant life that
The Law was always intended to provide.

However, not until Jesus came and both explained and demonstrated that life did God's People get to fully understand what the '**Law**' was ultimately all about. Last week I shared with you the 'Three Stages of Law-Keeping'. Here's a revised version:

Stage One Law-Keeping Brings Mankind To A Place of **Condemnation**.

Stage Two Law-Keeping Presents Mankind With An Opportunity
To Receive A Christ-Purchased **Redemption**.

Stage Three Law-Keeping Provides Redeemed Man With
The Possibility Of Becoming A **Law-Keeper Himself**.

And that's where God's Marvelous Grace enters the picture for as we saw last week ...

Grace is not only to be understood as 'God's Unmerited Favor'
but also as 'God's Overcoming Power'.

And so as the title of our message last week put it and as the title for this new series of messages from the Book of Ephesians puts it ...

"GRACE IS THE KEY"

Grace is the Key to Successful Kingdom Living – **Grace** is the key that unlocks the door to all that God desires us to know and do.

It was **Grace** that enabled the Apostle Paul to pen a most profound letter to the Church in Ephesus and it's that same **Grace** that will enable us to understand it. So let's begin ...

Please open your Bibles to Ephesians chapter one ...

Our procedure will be to go verse by verse and thought by thought through this incredible New Testament Book ...

Today's Key Scripture ... Ephesians 1:1-2

*"Paul, an Apostle of Christ Jesus by the Will of God, to the **saints** in Ephesus, the **faithful** in Christ Jesus: **Grace** and **peace** to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."*

Paul starts right out employing **TWO KEY TERMS OF IDENTIFICATION** ...

* **THE SAINTS** ... the 'Holy Ones' (those who have been 'declared' holy who are in the process of 'becoming' holy) or to use our most recent terminology ...

The 'Law-Loving, Law-Embracing, Law-Keeping
Citizens of God's Kingdom'.

Paul was not unfamiliar with our terminology.

Check out what he wrote in Ephesians chapter 2 verse 19 ...

"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow-citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone (The Perfect Law-Keeper and Law-Teacher)."

Holiness has always been God's Desire – to have a Holy People living out their lives to His Glory in the midst of a most unholy world.

In this letter of declaration and instruction, the Apostle Paul was used of God to spell out in sublime fashion the nature of that holy life as lived by 'grace-fueled' Followers of Christ ... **God's Saints** – His Holy Ones!

In this letter Paul will add to our understanding of ourselves as 'Citizens of God's Kingdom'. He declares right up front that we are also 'members of God's household' ... declared to be part of the family. Pretty special!

It reminds me of the day when Jesus declared (as he looked around at those who were sitting at his feet and drinking every word) ...

*"Here are my mother and my brothers!
Whoever does God's Will is my brother and sister and mother."
(Mark 3:34-35)*

Feel His Pleasure as you drink in His Word this morning as some of **HIS SAINTS** ...
His Law-Loving, Law-Embracing, Law-Keeper!

Here's a second Key Term of Identification ...

**** THE FAITHFUL IN CHRIST JESUS ...***

Two weeks ago tonight Lori Olsen and Evan Smith were united in marriage here in this place and as they walked down the aisle after being pronounced 'Husband and Wife' these words from the well-known Steve Green song were filling the air ...

"And may all who come behind us find us faithful."

There could be no better desire for a newly married couple.

May all who come behind us find us:

'Faithful to one another' as we have just pledged ourselves to be.

'Faithful to our family and friends' who have stood beside us this day.

'Faithful to this Church' that has found us worthy of its blessing.

'Faithful to our Savior' as we build a Christ-Honoring home.

Surely the last of those four will guarantee the first three!

That's how the Apostle Paul identified the Ephesians: '**Faithful in Christ Jesus**'.
What a wonderful designation for us today!

Think with me for a few moments what that might mean ...

*** It means being ... Faithful to Him as our SAVIOR**

*"Salvation is found in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."
(Acts 4:12)*

Jesus Christ is not 'A Savior'; he is 'The Savior' ... There is no other one whom our righteous and holy God has found worthy to stand in sinful man's place and absorb the full wrath of God upon sin.

There is no one else in whose name we can stand and gain entrance into Heaven itself. We must be faithful to Him not only as 'Our Savior' but as 'The Only Savior' for mankind.

*** It means being ... Faithful to Him as our SOURCE ...**

*"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."
(John 15:5)*

It takes a humble heart to admit that '*apart from Christ's Gracious Provision, I can do nothing*' – It takes a courageous heart to stand against the flow of the world's promotion that tells me that I can be '*anything I want to be*' and the profusion of books and videos that accompany that promotion.

Begin each day in communion with the one who said ...

*'He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood 'remains in me and I in him'.
(John 6:56)*

*** It means being ... Faithful to Him as our SOVEREIGN ...**

*"Let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both LORD and Christ."
(Acts 2:36)*

"Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name - that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is LORD to the Glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:9-11)

That word was first shared with the Jewish People on the Day of Pentecost and then with the Gentile World. Jesus Christ has been placed on the World's Throne whether people today recognize it or not. But there is coming a day when all of them will.

We have the privilege of living under His Sovereignty in the 'here and now' and 'putting his teachings into practice' right now in our lives and showing ourselves in a 1000 different ways to be living under and in keeping with His Lordship Authority.

How tremendous it is to be identified as those who are ...

'THE FAITHFUL IN CHRIST JESUS ...
OUR SAVIOR, OUR SOURCE, OUR SOVEREIGN!

And now Paul would say (having so identified us) ...

To you 'saints' there at *Soulife* Community Church in Apple Valley
in the year 2013 – To you who are among 'the faithful in Christ Jesus' ...

"May **grace** and **peace** from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ **BE YOURS!**"

In that statement Paul identifies **TWO GREAT TREASURES FROM GOD** that he, Paul, (and our Heavenly Father as well) would have us experience:

'GRACE and **PEACE**

A moment ago we defined **Grace** as 'Overcoming Power For Living'.
Peace we can define as 'Internal Tranquility While Living'.

I heard a wise and most experienced Bible Teacher say some years ago that:

'If you are going to receive '**Grace**' (God's Overcoming Power),
then you are going to need '**Peace**' (God's Internal Tranquility).

He made that comment because he understood very well the '**One Great Problem**' that we 'Saints of God' – we 'Faithful Ones To Jesus Christ' inevitably encounter as we seek to live out our Christian Lives in this fallen, sin-filled world.

ONE GREAT BIG PROBLEM

GRACE is what enables us to do 'spiritual stuff' – **GRACE** is what enables us to 'keep God's Law' and to minister effectively 'in God's Name'. However, **GRACE** is also what can get us 'Law-Loving, Law-Embracing, Law-Keeping Citizens of God's Kingdom' into **TROUBLE**.

And here's how and why that 'trouble' comes ...

The **WORLD** is no friend to Grace – the **world** has values that run contrary to those of Grace. The **world** promotes a materialistic and hedonistic lifestyle. The **world** will fight against someone who lives a grace-fueled life.

The **FLESH** is no friend to Grace – the **flesh** has impulses that completely challenge the desires of Grace – the **flesh** is characterized by a spirit of independence and indulgence. The **flesh** will seek to derail the grace-fueled life from within.

Certainly the **DEVIL** is no friend to Grace – the **Devil** repudiates the idea of forgiveness and re-introduces the idea of perfection. The **Devil** accuses and condemns all those who 'Fall Short' (and who doesn't?). The **Devil** seeks to defeat the grace-fueled life by invading the mind with doubt and despair.

Anyone who is going to be living that 'Grace-Fueled Life' is going to need **PEACE** because the **WORLD**, the **FLESH**, and the **DEVIL** are going to do everything they can to create turmoil.

Indeed – that's one '***Great Big Problem***'!

Praise God I can share with you this morning one '***Great Big Solution***'!

ONE GREAT BIG SOLUTION ...

How good to hear these words from our **SAVIOR**, **SOURCE**, and **SOVEREIGN** ...

*"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.
Do not let your hearts be troubled and **do not be** afraid."
(John 14:27)*

In other words ... 'Use your Grace to Grab hold of my Peace'!

The very **peace** that Paul knew we would need the Lord Jesus has gone on record as having provided - it's there for the taking for He will continue to faithfully **provide** as long as we continue to faithfully **follow**.

Final Thought ...

Though the **GRACE-FUELED** Life is indeed a **CHALLENGED** Life, it doesn't have to be a **CHALLENGING** Life. **PEACE** is promised!

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REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson One"

Sunday we started a brand new study in the Book of **EPHESIANS**.
Let's see how much we already know about this New Testament Book ...

Who wrote it? **(PAUL)**

To whom was it written? **(THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS)**

What are some key topics/ passages in it? Which especially interest you?

(THE ARMOR OF GOD; TWO GREAT PASTORAL PRAYERS; THE GREAT 'BY GRACE NOT BY WORKS' SALVATION VERSE; THE FAMOUS 'HUSBAND-WIFE/PARENT-CHILD' PASSAGE; THE 'BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT' COMMAND; THE 'GIFTS TO THE CHURCH' PASSAGE)

Sunday Pastor Mark drew our attention to the opening two verses:

*"Paul, an Apostle of Christ Jesus by the Will of God,
to the Saints in Ephesus, the Faithful in Christ Jesus:
Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."*

Would you say that Paul was writing to all the believers in Ephesus or only to some?
What do you think?

Reflect upon this statement from Sunday's message:

*"Holiness has always been God's Desire – to have a Holy People living out their lives
to His Glory in the midst of a most unholy world. In this letter of declaration and
instruction, the Apostle Paul was used of God to spell out in sublime fashion the
nature of that holy life as lived by 'grace-fueled' Followers of Christ ...
God's Saints – His Holy Ones!"*

And to this one:

*"Anyone who is going to be living that 'Grace-Fueled Life' is going to
need peace because the World, the Flesh and the Devil are
going to do everything they can to create turmoil."*

And this:

*"The very **peace** that Paul knew we would need the Lord Jesus has gone on record
as having provided (John 14:27) - It's there for the taking for He will continue
to faithfully **provide** as long as we continue to faithfully **follow**."*

Point to Ponder ...

Though the Grace-Fueled Life will indeed be a Challenged
Life, it doesn't have to be a Challenging (Anxiety-Producing) Life.

"IT ALL STARTS WITH THE FATHER"

(*'Grace Is The Key'* Series)

(Ephesians 1:3)

Intro ... *'Grace is the Key'* – that's the title of what will be an extended teaching series in the Book of Ephesians – a verse by verse, sentence by sentence, word by word and sometimes even syllable by syllable exposition of one of the greatest of New Testament Books.

We are in for a treat!

As Paul sat down at his desk and took out his quill pen and opened his bottle of dark black ink, he sat down as a man virtually possessed – a man so filled (so intoxicated) with the Spirit of God that the words came from him in a literal flood of inspired thought – one thought leading to another almost more quickly than his pen (or his secretary's pen actually) could move.

He was writing to his beloved church in **Ephesus** – a church that he himself had planted – a congregation with whom he had invested some two years of his life. These people were precious in his eyes and he desired to share with them what he would call (Ephesians 2:7) the *'Riches of God's Grace'*.

And so he began with those opening verses (1-2) we examined last week. Here they are with a bit of amplification based upon last Sunday's message ...

"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the Will of God (saved by the Will of God, called by the Will of God, enabled by the Will of God), **to the saints** (you dear ones who have been declared holy and who are in the process of becoming holy) **in Ephesus** (that hotbed of paganism and idolatry), (to you who are) **the faithful in Christ Jesus** (faithful to Christ as your Savior and your Source and your Sovereign): **Grace** (God's overcoming power) **and Peace** (God's internal tranquility) **to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ."**

What a powerful, expressive opening statement.

It's as though Paul were saying ...

This message is from me, your founding Pastor, and it's to each of you who have been born-again through faith in Jesus Christ and I'm telling you right off the bat that *'Grace is the Key'* to the living of the *'Law-Loving, Law-Embracing, Law-Keeping Life'* God would have us live! Do listen carefully.

As we said a moment ago ... “We are in for a treat!” And we certainly want to ‘listen carefully’ and hear everything that God would have us hear.

As I read through Ephesians again this past week, I discovered **Several Key Verses** that will **Escort Us** into the Fullness of **Grace-Fueled Living!**

These are verses that we would do well to have at the front of our minds and on the tip of our tongue.

Here is ...

TODAY’S KEY ‘ESCORT’ VERSE ...

(The first of several– It will guide us for the next several weeks.)

“Praise be to the **GOD** and **FATHER** of our Lord Jesus Christ
Who has **BLESSED** us in the **HEAVENLY** Realms with
Every **SPIRITUAL** Blessing in **CHRIST**.”
(Ephesians 1:3)

What an incredible expression of **Adoration** and **Information**.

SIX GRACE-FUELED INSIGHTS can be drawn from that marvelous verse ...

These are the things I would have us take home with us today.

1. The Father Is The Provider Of BLESSING ...

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”

It’s the **Father** who has ‘blessed us’ – specifically, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now keep in mind that though the world calls us “Christians” we are most accurately identified as ‘Children of God’ – born into His Family through faith in Christ.

He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ from all eternity – there has never been a time when that relationship did not exist. He has been our father since our Spiritual Birth – there has indeed been a time when that relationship did not exist.

Perhaps for some of you in this room right now that relationship does not exist yet.

However, birth into the family of God can happen for you this very minute – it happens the very moment you consciously place your faith in Jesus Christ alone as your Savior, Source and Sovereign.

Now for all of us who have so placed our faith, for all of us who have experienced the wonders of that 'Second Birth', we have come into a relationship with a Loving and Generous Heavenly Father.

Paul says that the Father has 'blessed us' ...

Picture Jesus on earth 'Blessing the Children' ... He was only doing what His Father would have done if He had been the One to come to earth. Imagine the Heavenly Father placing you on his lap and saying ...

'Bless you my child – Blessings on you, indeed'.

Those are words of delight intended to produce delight in those who hear them. Those are words that come to each of us who belong to His Family.

Notice that these blessings are already given ... "He **has** blessed us" ... It's already a done deal – As we will see later in this great Epistle, those blessings were given long before we were even born.

The Heavenly Father is the **Primary Provider** of His Children's Blessings.

Here's the ***second insight*** that arises from these two verses:

2. The Blessings He Provides Are SPIRITUAL ...

*"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every **spiritual blessing** in Christ."*

Now every Child of God knows (or should know) that those are the very best kind.

Spiritual Blessings are eternal rather than merely temporal; Spiritual Blessings satisfy the soul not just the body; Spiritual Blessings are determined by and consistent with the Wisdom of God and not designed according to our limited human understanding.

Spiritual Blessings come from and prepare us for the 'Realm of the Spirit' – that place where the Spirit of God Himself exercises his God-Given responsibilities – that place where He can 'fill us' – literally 'intoxicate us' with his Goodness and Grace – that place where our 'Growth in Holiness' is accelerated and our 'Commitment to Holiness' accentuated.

No question the Father has chosen to 'bless us' with His very best stuff!

The **third insight** follows the second quite naturally though perhaps quite surprisingly ...

3. The Blessings He Provides Are EXHAUSTIVE ...

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

Not a single thing that His Children require for 'holy living' has the Father overlooked. Not a single thing that the Father desires His Children to have has He withheld. And all those 'things' are available to every one of us who has become a member of His Family.

He has given us (as it were) the key to the storehouse. He has already transferred these blessings to our account. All we have to do is 'access that account' ... We must simply go to the bank and draw upon what is already there. We are 'Rich beyond Compare'.

I know what you are thinking – I was thinking the same things ...

So where is my local branch located?

Do I need some kind of spiritual ATM card or password to access my account? (and)

Can I do my banking 'from home'?

Well, since Paul was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he anticipated every one of those questions.

Check them off as we continue.

Here then is Grace-Fueled Insight **number four** ...

4. The Blessings He Provides Are LOCATED In Heaven ...

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

Well, there's the location of our 'Branch of the Blessings Bank' ... It's in heaven.

It's in heaven where our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life ...

It's in heaven where all the records concerning our lives are kept ...

It's in heaven where all spiritual transactions are authorized and surely

It's in heaven where all requests for spiritual assets are to be brought.

No wonder the Apostle Paul would give this instruction in his letter to the Colossian Church ...

*"Set your minds on things above not on earthly things."
(Colossians 3:2)*

Here's how an equally inspired New Testament writer put it in the Book of Hebrews Chapter 4 verse 16 ...

"Let us then approach** (in prayer) **the Throne of Grace** (The Bank of Heaven) **with confidence, so that we may receive** (withdraw from our account) **mercy and find** (already on deposit) **grace to help us in our time of need."

So though the Branch of my Blessing Bank is in heaven, I can do my banking from home for 'prayer is my online connection'. I'm getting it.

Insight **number five** provides the answer to that one remaining question ...

'Do I need a ATM card or Password to access my account?'

5. The Blessings He (The Father) Provides Are LINKED To Christ ...

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

All that the Father desires us to have comes through Jesus!

He is the **ONE** who willingly left the splendor of Heaven and the Adoration of the Heavenly Host to enter into a fallen, broken world and endure the abuse of sinful men.

He is the **ONE** who willingly put the Father's Will above His Own Human Desires.

He is the **ONE** who has been exalted and given the NAME that is 'Above Every Name'.

He is the **ONE** to whom all the blessings of God for mankind are forever linked and in whom they are accessed.

And he is the **ONE** who said (John 15:16) ...

*"The Father will give you whatever you ask for in my **NAME**"*

It is in the Son of God and through faith in His Name that all the Blessings of God are accessed.

This is our Father's Plan; it is his desire to both honor His Son and wonderfully bless His Born-Again Children!

One thing remains. What Paul started with, we end with.

Can any other conclusion be drawn than that revealed in our ***Sixth and final Insight?***

6. The Father Is To Be PRAISED ...

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

Praise Him indeed – It all starts with Him! Though we are commonly referred to as Christians, we are known in Heaven as God's Children!

He has Blessed us in the heavenly realms themselves with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Praise Him now and forevermore - AMEN!

Final Thot ...

One who feels **BLESSED** cannot help but express **PRAISE!**

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REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Two"

Several Key 'Escort Verses' will guide us through our study of the Book of Ephesians. This past Sunday, Pastor Mark introduced the **First**:

*"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ Who has blessed us
in the Heavenly Realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."
(Ephesians 1:3)*

Circle a key word or phrase that seems particularly significant to you ...
Reflect upon what you believe its significance to be.

Consider this statement from Sunday's message:

*"As I read through Ephesians this past week, I discovered Several Key Verses that will introduce us to Certain Key Realities of a Grace-Fueled Life –
Key Verses that will Escort Us into the Fullness of Grace-Fueled Living!
These are verses that we would do well to have at the front of
our minds and on the tip of our tongues."*

How do you feel about discovering (and memorizing) **Key Verses** that will guide you (enable you to think through) the entire Book of Ephesians? Do you think that you can do it? Have you memorized the first one?

Reflect upon these statements from Sunday's message:

* *"It's the **Father** who has 'blessed us' – specifically, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now keep in mind that though the world calls us "Christians" we are most accurately identified as 'Children of God' – born into His Family through faith in Christ."*

* *"Spiritual Blessings come from and prepare us for the 'Realm of the Spirit' – that place where the Spirit of God Himself exercises his God-Given responsibilities – that place where He can 'fill us' – literally 'intoxicate us' with his Goodness and Grace – that place where our 'Growth in Holiness' is accelerated and our 'Commitment to Holiness' accentuated."*

* *"Not a single thing that His Children require for 'holy living' has the Father overlooked. Not a single thing that the Father desires His Children to have has He withheld ... And they are available to every one of us who has become a member of His Family."*

* *"It is in the Son of God and through faith in His Name that all the Blessings of God are accessed – This is our Father's Plan; it is his desire to both honor His Son and wonderfully bless His Born-Again Children!"*

Point To Ponder ...

*"Christian" or "Child of God" – which do you **PREFER** as your Identity?*

"THE BLESSING OF SELECTION"

'Grace Is The Key' Series
(Ephesians 1:4-6)

Intro ... This morning we continue our journey through the Apostle Paul's 'Epistle to the Ephesians'. As I mentioned last week there are **several key verses** that will 'escort us' through this great revelation of Divine Truth – verses that will open up key sections of thought.

Last week we identified the first and here it is again.

OUR FIRST KEY 'ESCORT' VERSE ...

*"Praise be to the **GOD** and **FATHER** of our Lord Jesus Christ
Who has **BLESSED** us in the **HEAVENLY** Realms with
Every **SPIRITUAL** Blessing in **CHRIST**."
(Ephesians 1:3)*

What a tremendous statement – it's worthy of memorization and meditation. Last Sunday we unlocked it and drew from it Six Wonderful Grace-Fueled Insights.

However, in addition to being a tremendous verse in its own right, this third verse of chapter one also 'opens the door' and then serves as our 'escort' into an awesome set of verses (4-14) which identify **FOUR** of those 'Spiritual Blessings' that come to us 'in Christ' – four blessings designed to bring great joy to every Born-Again Child of God.

The first is found in ...

TODAY'S KEY PASSAGE ... Ephesians 1:4-6

*"For He (The Father) **CHOSE** us in him (Jesus) before the creation
of the world to be **HOLY** and **BLAMELESS** in His Sight.*

*In love He predestined us to be **ADOPTED** as His sons through Jesus Christ,
in accordance with His pleasure and will to the praise of His **GLORIOUS**
Grace which He has **FREELY** given us in the **ONE** He loves."*

Here now is ...

OUR ESCORT TEXT APPLIED TO TODAY'S PASSAGE ...

Praise Be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with ... the **BLESSING** of **SELECTION**.

This is the first of **Four Great Spiritual Blessings** that Paul identifies in this opening section – four great blessings that come to all those who are 'in Christ'.

Out of **Today's Key Passage** arise ...

FIVE FAITH-DEFINING DECLARATIONS OF DIVINE TRUTH

Here is the **First** ...

1. SELECTION Has Always Been A Fundamental FUNCTION Of The Father

Our Heavenly Father does not just '*let things go*' – Our Heavenly Father did not just create the universe and then '*sit back and watch*' – Our Heavenly Father has taken a proactive role from '*Before the Beginning*'.

Here's how the Apostle Paul expressed it ...

"He (the Father) **Chose** ... Before the **Creation** of The World"

Before the **First Moment** of Creation, God the Father looked down through time and foresaw all that would ever take place:

The Rebellion of a portion of His Own Heavenly Host led by Lucifer, the star of the morning ... **The Creation** of a perfect world and of an awesome creature made in His Own Image called Man ... **The Fall of Man** and **The Curse** the Father Himself would place upon the earth ... **The Promise** He would give of **ONE** who would someday come and defeat both sin and death ... **The Rise of a People** that he would call '*His Own*' and the distinctive nation that they would become ... **The Moments** of that nation's glory and **The Years** of that nation's shame ... **The Sending of His Own Son** into the world to do for man what man could no longer do for himself – live a pure and holy life ... **The Sacrifice of that HOLY ONE** on Calvary's Cross to pay for the sins of the world and to make possible the rise of a truly Holy People in whom His Own Spirit would dwell and finally ... **The Resistance** of fallen man's will and **The Spiritual Blindness** of fallen man's heart and **The Foolishness** of fallen man's mind.

All this God the Father foresaw before the first star was ever flung into space; before Adam and Eve ever took their first breath.

Way back then, the Heavenly Father made some **decisions** about how things would have to go if His Desire for a People of His Own was to **ever** be realized.

He made some **choices** – definite **choices** ... eternal **choices** consistent both with His Own Nature and with the Coming Order of Things.

One of those choices Paul identifies in the verse we reflect upon this morning.

“**He** (the Father from His Eternal vantage point) **chose us** (everyone who through faith would one day be declared righteous in His Sight) **in Christ**.”

So here’s the **second** great life-defining **declaration** that arises from this great passage of Scripture:

2. The Father’s Selection Has Always Been THROUGH JESUS.

“He (the Father) chose us **IN HIM** (Jesus) ...”

All who have ever been chosen (whether they knew it or not) have been chosen ‘*in Christ*’ ... Christ has always been the **ONE** through whom and by whom and in whom Saving Grace could be extended – the only **ONE** in whose name forgiveness could be granted. Selection ‘*in Christ*’ has always been the Father’s Method.

So if you are following what I am saying here, then you will understand when I say ...

“When God chose **Abraham**, he chose him ‘*in Christ*’.”

“When God chose **Moses**, he chose him ‘*in Christ*’.”

“When God chose **David**, he chose him ‘*in Christ*’.”

“When God chose **Isaiah**, he chose him ‘*in Christ*’.”

For the simple yet awesome fact is ...

“**Whomever** the Father has chosen, **whenever** the Father has chosen,
The Father has chosen ‘**in Christ**’.”

Jesus has been in the Father’s mind and heart the whole time ...
From eternity past until the present moment.

And so we can say today, August 25, 2013, even as the Apostle said in his letter to the Ephesians so long ago ...

“He (long before any of us was born) chose us (those of us here at *Sonlife* Community Church who through faith have been declared righteous in His Sight) in Christ.”

Rejoice in this Declaration that the Father's Selection Is and Has Always Been **Through Jesus!** His Selection is not based on works or family heritage or church affiliation or any other possibly impressive thing.

Here's a **Third Declaration**:

3. The Father's Selection has always been intended to PRODUCE HOLINESS

“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be **HOLY** and **BLAMELESS** in His sight.”

Now what I'm about to say is viewed by some in our lackadaisical contemporary Christian world as almost heresy but praise God it's still seen as an absolute 'no-brainer' by others.

God has always wanted a 'People He Could Be Proud Of' ...
A people who brought honor not dishonor to his Name.

To use our current terminology, God has always been seeking to produce in the midst of this fallen world some 'Law-Loving, Law-Embracing, Law-Keeping Citizens of His Heavenly Kingdom'.

You see, it is not and never has been acceptable to God to simply take a bunch of sinful people for whom His Son died, declare them to be righteous in His Eyes and then Close His Eyes Tight so that He, like the monkey with his hands over his eyes, would 'See no Evil' anymore.

God's choice of us 'in Christ' is so that we might become 'like Christ' so that He in turn might receive honor and glory through our lives even as He received (and still receives) glory through Christ's life.

He wants His People to be the kind of people who cause the unsaved world to 'sit up and take notice' ... people who are 'sought out' and 'valued' ... people who 'give God a good name' as in ... 'I thank God for you people'.

And the truth is when we are *'holy and blameless in God's sight'* we generally are seen that way by those around us and that's the kind of people God has always wanted to have identified with Him ... He chose us for that very purpose – to be *'holy and blameless'*.

Recognize and be **challenged** by the fact that *'The Father's Selection has always been intended to **Produce Holiness**'* – both positionally and practically.

Now that challenging recognition leads us quickly to announce the **fourth declaration** that arises from this key passage:

4. "The Father's Selection Has Always Been ACCOMPANIED BY GRACE."

And by that I mean both the *'unmerited favor'* that brings forgiveness to those who do not deserve it and the *'overcoming power'* that brings godly behavior to those who would otherwise never get anywhere near it.

You can't even begin to embrace the idea of seeking to live a life that is pleasing to God and that is a blessing to others without realizing that *'in and of ourselves'* we are not able.

We are far too familiar with failure to anticipate very much success.
We need more than just the knowledge of God's Choice if we are going to even approach fulfilling His stated purpose for choosing us.
We need more than just forgiveness.

Here's how Paul put it ...

"In love, he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ in accordance with His Pleasure and Will to the praise of His Glorious Grace which he has freely given us in the One He Loves." (vs. 5-6)

In this verse Paul turns to a well-known practice in the Roman world – the practice of **adoption** which was generally practiced by some noteworthy man who having no heir of his own found someone worthy in his eyes and adopted him into his family and gave to him all the privileges that any son of his own flesh would have had.

The idea here is that there is both a transfer of identity and an assumption of responsibility. The adopted son is now identified with his adoptive father and is expected to live in light of this new identity.

As adopted son he assumes the responsibility of carrying on the name of the family with the expectation that he will bring honor to that name. Along with his new identity also comes all the family authority.

Now Paul knows that it's through the new birth that we become full, natural members of God's family (he will point that out in chapter 2) but here he uses this legal identification terminology to make the point that the 'new identity (which we receive in Christ) *brings with it new responsibility*'.

God's glorious grace brings a transforming power into the lives of all those it truly touches ...

God's Glorious Grace delivers us not only from the **Penalty** of Sin but also from the **Power** of Sin. And that's where the rubber starts meeting the road and the **practice** of Grace-Fueled Living starts showing up and **praise** to God starts going up.

For this purpose God has chosen us from before the creation of the world – that His Grace displayed in our lives might bring great praise to Him.

Rejoice that the Father's Selection of us has been '*Accompanied by the Riches of His Grace*' and thus we are enabled to fulfill the very purpose that the Father had in mind when He Selected Us!

Here now is the ***fifth and final Declaration*** ...

Following on the heels of the first four, it should strike us also as a '*no-brainer*' – a powerful and obvious conclusion to this discussion though some would say it's tough to wrap their minds around. Here it is ...

5. The Father's Selection Has Always Been A SURE THING!

Paul writes ...

"In love, he predestined us to be adopted as his sons ..."
(vs. 5)

It's in the very nature of God for God to **cause** to happen the things that he has **chosen** to happen. God didn't say in the beginning '*Let there be light*' and then wait and wonder if any light was going to show up.

God did not (before the Creation of the world) '*chose us in Christ*' and then wait and wonder if any of us would respond to the Gospel Message.

It's all part of one wonderful, awe-inspiring, worship-generating God-Designed Program ...

God has foreseen man's need; God has foreseen man's rebellious, resistant heart; God has foreseen the Willing Sacrifice of His Son; God has foreseen the transforming power of His Enabling Grace; God has foreseen the wonders of Christ's Church; God has foreseen the Glory that will arise in Praise to His Glorious Grace and so ...

God has decreed (predestined, if you will) that such an outcome would indeed take place.

As sure as the Law of Gravity is the certainty that the things that God has decreed **to** take place **will** in fact **take** place!

His Selection '*In Christ*' of a People that will bring Glory to His Name is one of those things.

So out of this three-verse-passage identifying the **Blessing of Selection** have arisen these ...

FIVE POWERFUL FAITH-DEFINING DECLARATIONS OF DIVINE TRUTH ...

1. Selection Has Always Been A Fundamental Function of the Father
2. The Father's Selection Has Always Been Through Christ
3. The Father's Selection Has Always Been Intended To Produce Holiness
4. The Father's Selection Has Always Been Accompanied By Grace
5. The Father's Selection Has Always Been A Sure Thing!

These are awesome truths indeed – truths worthy of deep reflection and meditation – these are truths that professors and theologians have spent their entire lives investigating and even debating.

However, these truths are of more than mere 'academic interest' for the more successfully we can 'wrap our minds' around these incredible **Faith-Defining Declarations of Divine Truth**, the more we will experience what I'm calling this morning ...

THREE HEART-SATISFYING OUTCOMES!

As a result of 'wrapping our minds' around these Declarations we will experience a sense of ...

SECURITY ...

The Father did the choosing; The Father does the keeping.

STABILITY ...

Knowing that I have been 'Chosen in Christ' keeps me from 'selling my soul' to those who peddle mere earthly promises.

SERENITY ...

Condemnation has been eliminated; Eternal Life has been granted;
Daily Grace is being provided; My Heavenly Father is in charge.
My heart is at peace.

Not Bad – Not Bad At All!

So now we come to the thing that might be running around in many a person's mind ...

TODAY'S MOST IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION ...

How do I **KNOW** if the Father has **SELECTED ME?**
Can I **KNOW** for **SURE?**

Indeed you can ... The Father absolutely wants you to know for sure.
That sense of **Security** and **Stability** and **Serenity** depends upon it.

Consider these ...

THREE DIAGNOSTIC QUESTIONS ...

1. Have you **ACCEPTED** Jesus Christ as your Savior from the **PENALTY** of Sin?

(The 'unselected' consider the Gospel to be foolishness – the 'selected' embrace the truths of the Gospel for their 'eyes are opened' and their 'hearts energized'.)

Jesus Himself said ... "No one can come to me unless the Father draws him."
(John 6:44)

2. Have you **RESPONDED** to the Christ's Call upon your life: 'Follow me'?

(The 'unselected' are involved in following their own 'life path' not His – the ears of the 'selected' hear Christ's Call like sheep hear the call of their shepherd.)

Jesus testified in his High Priestly Prayer ...

*"I have revealed you (Father) to those that you gave me out of the world. They were yours and you gave them to me ... I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them."
(John 17: 6, 8)*

3. Are you **SEEING** some **PROGRESS** – Are you **GROWING** in **GRACE**?

(The 'unselected' remain 'trapped in sin' – 'bound up in blindness' – the 'selected' find themselves hungering and thirsting for the life that pleases God and they find that that hunger and thirst is being satisfied – change is happening.)

The Apostle Paul wrote ...

*"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come."
(2 Corinthians 5:17)*

Final Thot ...

Blessed indeed are those who have experienced the
BLESSING of the **HEAVENLY FATHER'S SELECTION!**

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"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Three"

Sunday we allowed our First **'Escort Verse'** to escort us into the first major section of Ephesians ... the **'BLESSING SECTION'** ... verse 4-14. In Sunday's message, Pastor Mark focused our attention upon the

'BLESSING of SELECTION'.

Here was our **key passage**:

"For He (the Father) chose (selected) us in him (Jesus) before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight.

In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will to the praise of His glorious grace which He has freely given us in the one He loves." (Ephesians 1:4-6)

What immediately jumps out at you in that three verse passage?

Here are the **Key Declarations** that Pastor Mark formulated from this passage ...

1. Selection Has Always Been A Fundamental Function of the Father.
(*'chose us before the creation of the world'*)

2. The Father's Selection Has Always Been Through Christ.
(*'chose us in him before the creation of the world'*)

3. The Father's Selection Has Always Been Intended To Produce Holiness.
(*'to be holy and blameless in his sight'*)

4. The Father's Selection Has Always Been Accompanied By His Glorious Grace.
(*'To the praise of His glorious grace which he has freely given us in the one he loves'*)

5. The Father's Selection Has Always Been A Sure Thing!
(*'He predestined us to be adopted as his sons'*)

Find the word or phrase in the passage that underlies each of these five declarations. Which of these (if any) is a new thought for you? Which of them presents a particular challenge to you? Which of them provides comfort for you?

Reflect upon this statement from Sunday's message ...

"As a result of 'wrapping our minds' around these Declarations, we will experience a sense of ...

SECURITY – The Father did the choosing; The Father does the keeping.

STABILITY – Knowing that I have been 'Chosen in Christ' keeps me from 'selling my soul' to those who peddle mere earthly promises.

SERENITY – Condemnation has been eliminated; Eternal Life has been granted; Daily Grace is being provided; My Heavenly Father is in charge – I'm at peace."

Point To Ponder ... Does it bother me that God chose me **BEFORE** I chose Him?

"THE BLESSING OF REDEMPTION"

'Grace Is The Key' Series
(Ephesians 1:7-8)

Intro ... This morning we continue our journey through the Apostle Paul's 'Epistle to the Ephesians'.

As I mentioned several weeks ago there are **several key verses** that will 'escort us' through this great revelation of Divine Truth - key verses that each 'open the door' to a unique section of this great New Testament Book.

Three weeks ago we identified the first and here it is again.

OUR FIRST KEY 'ESCORT' VERSE ...

*"Praise be to the **GOD** and **FATHER** of our Lord Jesus Christ
Who has **BLESSED** us in the **HEAVENLY** Realms with
Every **SPIRITUAL** Blessing in **CHRIST**."
(Ephesians 1:3)*

TODAY'S KEY PASSAGE ...

*'In him we have **REDEMPTION** through His **BLOOD**, the forgiveness
of sins, in accordance with the **RICHES** of God's **GRACE** that
He **LAVISHED** on us with all wisdom and understanding."
(Ephesians 1:7-8)*

OUR ESCORT TEXT APPLIED TO TODAY'S PASSAGE ...

*Praise Be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has
blessed us in the heavenly realms with ... the **BLESSING** of **REDEMPTION**.*

This is the **second** of **Four Great Spiritual Blessings** that Paul identifies in this opening section – four great blessings that come to all those who are 'in Christ'.

(The First was '**The Blessing of Selection**' – Paul tells us that ...

'We were chosen in Him before the creation of the world'.)

Today we add to our list the '**Blessing of Redemption**.'

TODAY'S KEY DEFINITION ... REDEMPTION

To be **DELIVERED** from **BONDAGE** (usually at a **PRICE**).

To be 'redeemed' a person must first be 'held in some form of captivity' ... a kidnapped person for instance is 'redeemed' by the paying of a ransom.

In the Roman world of Paul's day, it was common for slaves to be 'redeemed from slavery' – sometimes by their own efforts ... other times by the efforts of others.

It's a fascinating concept to apply to the Christian Life ...

In this passage Paul is saying that all born-again believers in Jesus Christ – all those who have been included in God's Great Act of Selection – have been 'bought back from bondage' in the process of them becoming Children of God.

Consider with me **first** of all this morning that we are:

REDEEMED FROM:

* The **PENALTY** of Sin (Romans 8:1) ...

'There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus'

There's the initial and most fundamental 'bondage' that human beings experience. From the moment of our birth into this fallen world, we are trapped in a bondage to sin and live under the sentence of death.

We are sinners not because we sin but we sin because we are by nature sinners. By our own efforts we can never break free from this bondage – we are 'slaves to sin' and thus we are under God's Just Condemnation.

But, praise God, those who have become Children of God are freed from the condemnation that is the rightful Penalty of their sinful behavior.

They have been **redeemed** from that frightful consequence – Eternal Judgment in Hell is no longer their expectation. God the Father has granted them full and complete forgiveness of sins!

Now surely that would be blessing enough, wouldn't it – to be redeemed from Condemnation and know that God has forgiven you for all your sins?

But there's more to this blessing called “**Redemption**” ...

According to the verse that we looked at two weeks ago, God chose us in Christ not only to 'redeem us from condemnation' but also to present us 'holy and blameless in His Sight' – to show us to the universe as His Adopted Sons and Daughters – bearing the '**Family Name**' with pride and distinction.

Now to do that a 'more extensive Redemption' is needed, for being forgiven doesn't all by itself change our behavior. Many times the very behaviors that require forgiveness still remain and would continue to remain unless something more took place.

Here's the next installment of God's Revelation on the subject.

The Scripture goes on to tell us that we are **REDEEMED FROM:**

* The **PRACTICE** of Sin (Romans 6:14; 2 Peter 1:3-4; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

It's a frustrating thing, isn't it, to keep '*practicing sin*' even after we have been saved from the '*Penalty of Sin*' – even after we have been adopted into God's Family and taken on the Family Name and Family Function?

Don't we all want to live in such a way that the Father can look down from heaven and easily identify us as one of His Own?

Listen to these incredible Scriptures ...

Romans 6:14 - “*Sin shall no longer be your master ...*”
(Can't condemn – Shouldn't control)

2 Peter 1:3 - “*His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness ...*”
(Provides both the '*want to*' and the '*how to*')

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 - “*You are not your own; you were bought at a price.*”
(Bottom line – It's no longer my decision.)

But even 'Deliverance from the Practice of Sin' is not the fullest expression of God's Redemptive Work in our lives though it is most appreciated.

God's Work goes on to tell us that there is coming a day when we will be **REDEEMED FROM:**

* The (very) **PRESENCE** of Sin (2 Peter 3:13)

Here's how the Apostle Peter expressed it in his second letter of instruction and exhortation to the Early Church ...

*"We are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth –
the home of righteousness."*

That's our Ultimate Redemption ... Deliverance from even the **Presence** of Sin.

Our glorified bodies will contain no remnant of our old fallen nature –
no '**flesh**' to deal with ...

The old '**world system**' will have passed away – no worldly patterns of thought
to contend with ...

The '**Devil**' himself will be cast away in Eternal Judgment along with all who
have allied themselves with him – no adversary for us to any longer resist.

Sin will be a thing of the past and the full expression of unhindered
righteousness will be ours to experience – **Full complete Redemption!**

So that's all that we are '**REDEEMED FROM**' ...

(From the **Penalty** of Sin and from the **Practice** of Sin and
ultimately from the very **Presence** of Sin)

Consider with me **second** of all this morning that we are:

REDEEMED THROUGH:

* **BLOOD** (Leviticus 17:11; Hebrew 9:22; 1 Peter 1:18-20)

That's what our **Verse of the Morning** declares ...

*'In him we have **REDEMPTION** through His **BLOOD** ...'*

That has been the Plan of God all along ...

It was not only the **RECIPIANTS** of His Grace that the Father Selected before the creation of the world, it was also the **METHOD** of His Grace that the Father Selected.

His Gracious Forgiveness would require the **Blood Sacrifice** of an Innocent One for the Guilty and that's just how it would have to be.

In the Garden – innocent and perfectly created animals were slain that Adam and Eve's nakedness might be covered – life for life.

In establishing the order of the emerging Nation of Israel, God explained to Moses that ...

"For the life of a creature is in its blood" ...
(Leviticus 17:11)

The New Testament Book written especially to the Hebrews – those descendants of that ancient nation – reminds them that ...

"without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" ...
(Hebrews 9:22)

The Apostle Peter, himself a descendant of those ancient saints and one who saw the application of those ancient revelations to his current situation, reminded his fellow believers that they had been ...

"redeemed with the precious blood of Christ" (who was himself)
"chosen before the creation of the world." (1 Peter 1:18-20)

This has always been and will always be the Plan of God ...

Redemption comes **through** the Shed Blood of Jesus Christ.

There is **no other way** but praise God there **is this way** whereby we can be redeemed!

And now **consider** with me **third** of all this morning that we are:

REDEEMED IN ACCORDANCE WITH:

* The **RICHES** of God's **GRACE** which He **LAVISHED** upon us
(Ephesians 2:6-7; 1 John 3:1; John 12:3; 2 Corinthians 2:14-15)

Once again here is **Today's Key Passage** ...

*'In him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the **riches** of God's Grace that He **lavished** on us with all wisdom and understanding.'*

We could spend the entire afternoon just pondering the significance of the word 'lavish' ... God gave us 'the whole nine yards' – He didn't 'hold anything in reserve' ... He had a purpose in mind and he threw everything He had into the accomplishment of that purpose. And he did it for his own pleasure as well as for our blessing.

Listen to these incredible scriptures:

"God raised us up with Christ and seated us in the heavenly realms in order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable Riches of His Grace expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus" ... Ephesians 2:6-7

"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God!" ... 1 John 3:1

Reflect upon this incredible example of a lavish action:

"Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume and poured it on Jesus' feet (and) the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume." ... John 12:3

Put yourself in this verse:

"Through us (God) spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of (Christ) ... We are to God the Aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing." 2 Corinthians 2:14-15

KEY CONCEPT ... (Today's Bottom Line)

We are not just '**SAVED** a little bit' – not just '**BARELY** saved' ... We have been 'saved to the **MAX** – Entirely Set **FREE** – We have been totally **IMMERSED** in God's Liberating and Enabling **GRACE** - Declared **COMPLETELY** Righteous – Made **FULLY** Functional – Intended to fill the earth with the **AROMA** of Christ!
(Put yourself in this statement – repeat it regularly.)

Final Thought ...

The old Gospel Writer had it right!

*"Redeemed how I love to **PROCLAIM** it – Redeemed by the **BLOOD** of the **LAMB** – Redeemed through His infinite **MERCY** – His **CHILD** and forever I am."*

Indeed ... What a Blessing is **REDEMPTION!**

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Four"

Sunday our First 'Escort Verse' ...

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

'Escorted us' one step further into the first major section of Ephesians ...

The '**BLESSING SECTION**' ... Ephesians 1:4-14.

In Sunday's message, Pastor Mark focused our attention upon the
'BLESSING of REDEMPTION'.

Here was our **key passage** (Ephesians 1:7-8) ...

"In him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's Grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding."

What immediately jumps out at you in that two verse passage?
What word or phrase catches your eye?

In your growing up experience (in the process of you 'Coming to Christ'),
how aware were you that you 'needed to be redeemed'?

What did you believe you needed to be redeemed (delivered) from?

What did you think of the three-fold redemption identified Sunday?
(Redeemed from the **Penalty** and the **Practice** and the **Presence** of Sin)

Did Sunday's message:

Remind you of things you have heard your whole life;
Challenge you concerning things you have heard your whole life; or
Inform you of things that you have never heard before in your life?

Point To Ponder ...

We are not just 'saved a little bit' – not just 'barely saved' ...
We have been 'saved to the max – Entirely set free –
We have been totally immersed in God's liberating and enabling grace –
Declared completely righteous – Made fully functional –
Intended to fill the earth with the aroma of Christ!
(Now 'personalize' it.)

"THE BLESSING OF COMPREHENSION"

'Grace Is The Key' Series
(Ephesians 1:9-10)

Intro ... What a great day (the 19th Anniversary of our *SonLife* Fellowship) to open the Word of God and discover the particular '**Blessing**' that is found in **Today's Key Passage** – Ephesians 1:9-10.

First of all, let me remind you once again of the **First** of the **Escort Verses** that will guide us into and through our Study of this Great Letter of Instruction and Exhortation written by the Apostle Paul to the Church in Ephesus (and to all of us who have followed in their train).

OUR FIRST KEY 'ESCORT' VERSE ...

*"Praise be to the **GOD** and **FATHER** of our Lord Jesus Christ
Who has **BLESSED** us in the **HEAVENLY** Realms with
Every **SPIRITUAL** Blessing in **CHRIST**."
(Ephesians 1:3)*

And now here is **today's key passage**. I can't think of a more appropriate one for an Anniversary Sunday – it speaks to the ultimate goal that God has for this and for every Congregation of Believers.

TODAY'S KEY PASSAGE ...

*"And he made **KNOWN** to us the **MYSTERY** of His **WILL** according to his good pleasure, which he **PURPOSED** in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached fulfillment – to bring all **THINGS** in heaven and on earth together under one **HEAD**, even **CHRIST**."
(Ephesians 1:9-10)*

He – the Father Himself – has made something 'known to us' –
He has informed us about something that had formerly been a mystery!

It's something that men (and angels) have long wondered about.

(Here's) **OUR ESCORT TEXT APPLIED TO TODAY'S PASSAGE**

*Praise Be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ
who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with ...
The **BLESSING** of **COMPREHENSION**.*

This is the **third** of **Four Great Spiritual Blessings** that Paul identifies in this opening section – four great blessings that come to all those who are 'in Christ'.

(The First was '**The Blessing of Selection**' – Paul tells us that ...
'We were **chosen** in Him before the creation of the world'.)

(The Second was '**The Blessing of Redemption**' – Paul tells us that ...
'In him we have **redemption** through his blood – the forgiveness of sins')

Today we add to our list the '**Blessing of Comprehension**.' – Here Paul tells us ...
(He has made **known to you** the Mystery of His Will ...)

If I were to Sub-title our message this morning, that subtitle would be:

"Seeing The Big Picture"

Today's Key Question ...

What in the world is God **DOING** - What is His over-all **PLAN** for **MAN**?

It became a standing joke in our family when our two children were growing up that our youngest, Jeffrey, who was always involved in (and preoccupied by) some creative and sometimes bizarre investigations of his own design, would frequently exclaim:

"Nobody ever tells me anything!"

Such an outburst of frustration could be stimulated by things as far ranging as him discovering (maybe when we are getting in the car) where we are going on vacation or to him (when we are sitting down at the table) discovering what we are having for supper. We made sure (with his wife and children's help this summer) that he '**knew**' well ahead of time that we were planning a trip to London and Paris!

It's a Terrible Feeling to be 'Out of the Loop'!

On the other hand ...

It's a Wonderful Feeling to be 'In the Know'!

God wants us to be 'In the Know' ...

He wants us to 'See the Big Picture'

He has provide for us '**The BLESSING of COMPREHENSION**'

The ability to say ... *"I get it – I understand – I see what's really going on."*

So the question for us on this special *Sonlife* Anniversary Sunday is:

*"What is really going on? What is it that we have been made part of?
What is the essential plan of God for us individually and collectively?"*

That has long been a tough question – a **mystery** even!

But praise God – through the outpouring of His Grace, (Paul says) ...

God has made known to us the "**Mystery of His Will**".

First to the Son – then to the Apostles and then through them to all of us.

It can be expressed in a single **PHRASE** – It can turn upside down the designs of men – It can jumpstart a life-time of diligent study – It can generate both wonder and worship – It can simplify the complex and yet make complex the simple – It can challenge the brainpower of the smartest among us and yet be understood by the least endowed. It can save us from endless debate and yet it can stimulate unending discussion – It is the Over-Arching Will of God for mankind.

It is the ***ultimate answer*** to the Question ...

"Why am I here and what is the real plan of God for my life?"

It's tucked away in our passage of the morning:

*"And he made known to us the mystery of His Will according to
his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect
when the times will have reached fulfillment ...*

To bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ."

So what is the over-all plan and purpose of God?

*And in a single phrase here it is ... **UNITY** in **CHRIST!***

*"To bring all things in heaven and on earth
together under one head, even Christ."*

*All things in heaven and on earth brought together in a perfect unity
and harmony under the loving leadership of Jesus Christ ...*

That's what God is ultimately **Planning to Do** ... That will be His ultimate thank you to His Son for His 'Sin-Defeating Sacrifice' on Calvary.

That is the thing that the Father envisioned and determined to set in motion before the Creation of the World - to one day bring all things in heaven and on earth together (in perfect, beautiful unity and harmony) under the authority (and to the ever-lasting Glory) of His Son, the Eternal Word made flesh – Jesus Christ Himself.

This has long been the Father's Plan; this is the Father's Deepest Desire ...

However the **Discovery** of This Plan – This Plan that all the universe will one day be brought to a wondrous Unity Under Christ - causes us to **DRAW SOME IMMEDIATE CONCLUSIONS:**

*** This Plan Of God Was Certainly Not Fulfilled at Christ's First COMING.**

John tells us (John 1:11) even His own 'received him not'
His sacrifice for sin was made violently and hatefully.

It could have been made worshipfully with a profound sense of awe
at the provision the Father has made for the sins of men even as
the animal sacrifices were intended to be made.

But it wasn't.

Jesus himself was finally forced to say:

*"I did not come to bring peace but a sword. I have come to turn a man against
his own father (and) a daughter against her own mother." (Matthew 10:34)*

He wound up doing just that!

As he left the earth, he warned his disciples:

"In this world you will have tribulation" (John 16:33)
And they did.

In no way was this Great Plan of God fulfilled at Christ's First Coming!
That's a conclusion that we can definitely draw.

Now **secondly** consider with me that ...

*** *This Plan of God has definitely not been fulfilled during the 2000 Year History of CHRISTENDOM nor will it be ...***

Frequently His own have '*received each other not*'.
They reject one another – they fight with one another.
And they have had little success in bringing the various
religions of the world under Christ's banner.

The world is as fractured a place religiously as it has ever been. The Name of Christ, though received today in places long closed to the Gospel, is stirring animosity and hatred in places long felt to be His Territory.

Those who have believed that the Gospel will wend its way around the World until the Knowledge of Christ covers the world the way the waters cover the sea have been most disillusioned.

And of course there frequently are those who pretend to be His Own who are not.

He warned us about them ...

"Wolves in sheep's clothing" he called them in his famous '*Sermon on the Mount*' ...

John the Apostle would write in the first little epistle that bears his name that '*many false prophets have gone out into the world*'. Many of these claim to '*speak for Christ*' and '*work for His Cause*'.

Therefore life in this world frequently requires great discernment – in fact, our need to be sure who it is we are wrapping our arms around actually can work against the Father's Desire for unity and harmony in Christ.

So the very fact that the church is still '*in the world*' (let alone the fact that sometimes the world is '*in the church*') has kept (and will keep) this wondrous Desire of the Father from being fulfilled during the 2000 or more years of Christendom. That we can definitely **conclude**.

*** *And sad to say this Wondrous Plan of God*** (This deep desire of the Father's Heart to see all the universe united under the leadership of His Son) ***will not even be fulfilled during the Millennial Kingdom when Christ will rule over all the NATIONS ...***

He will rule (the Scripture says in Rev. 2:27) as it were with a '*Rod of Iron*' ... and it will be pretty evident that in the midst of the true believers in that kingdom there will be many who will just be '*knuckling under*' for when the Devil is set free at the end of that 1000 year reign, he will have no trouble amassing a vast host from the earth to confront Christ's Kingdom itself.

So even a near- perfect world and a near-perfect environment overseen by Jesus himself will not be sufficient to accomplish this grand purpose of God. What a sad but eye-opening **conclusion** that is!

Here then is our ***fourth and final conclusion*** on the matter ...

*** *The ultimate fulfillment of God's Plan to bring all things in heaven and on earth into a wondrous Unity in Christ will require the CREATION of a NEW heaven and a NEW earth.***

And that is exactly what the Scripture says will happen following the destruction of the present heaven and earth and the final judgment upon the Devil Himself and all those who '*resist yielding their hearts to Christ as their Savior and Lord*'.

John writes in Revelation 21:1 ...

*"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth,
for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away."*

And in that new place which Peter called (2 Peter 3:13) '*the home of righteousness*' all the '*Righteous*' (both redeemed men and faithful angels) will find perfect oneness and fellowship under the headship of the Glorious Son of God.

Both men and angels will be unified in their unceasing praise for the **ONE** who left the glorious of heaven and laid down his life that sinners might be saved and made '*Citizens of the Heavenly Kingdom*'.

And that's what it's all about ...

That's the moment toward which this is all heading ...

That is the Truth – the **Big Picture** – the understanding that God would have us wrap our minds around.

His desire ...

*to bring all things in heaven and on earth together
under one head, even Christ."*

And we can do just that ... We can wrap our minds around it ...

That's the '**BLESSING** of **COMPREHENSION**'.

Now if that is the **REAL PLAN OF GOD**, then several **IMMEDIATE OBSERVATIONS** arise ...

* ***This Plan of God goes way beyond just 'GETTING people SAVED' ...***

It involves us in blending all born-again believers into a family of faith here on earth that anticipates and fore-shadows that ultimate congregation in heaven.

It involves us in the creation of a congregation of worshippers – a worship-centered congregation – a '*little bit of heaven on earth*' kind of congregation.

And how I have been blessed to participate in just such a congregation for these past 19 years!

19 years ago (after but a few months of our *Sonlife* Experience) I exclaimed to some friends of mine that I felt like I had '*died and gone to heaven*'. I feel that even more so 19 years later.

Here at *Sonlife* Community Church we have sought to strip away as much as we can of the '*earthly trappings*' of church life and we have sought to zero in as much as possible upon the '*heavenly realities*'.

All who have come through our doors have sensed that this is a 'different kind of place' ...

For some, those 'earthly trappings' are too important to do without and in time they seek for them elsewhere; for others of you, those 'heavenly realities' touch your heart and draw you in and you cannot conceive of ever 'leaving them behind'.

Indeed, we have come to understand that the great Plan of God for the church involves much more than 'just' getting people saved – His Plan involves the development of a 'worshipping community' on earth that mirrors the very community of worshippers found in heaven.

Here now is a **second observation** that arises from our comprehension (our true understanding) of the Real Plan of God ...

*** This Plan of God takes us way beyond just
'TOLERATING' our fellow-believers...**

This Plan of God can cause us to value them and
to seek ways to endear ourselves to them.

God is not only building a 'congregation of worshippers', he is building a 'community of faith' – a close-knit body of believers who seek to live out Christ's Great Command to 'Love one another as I have loved you'.

To love one another; to watch out for one another; to support one another; to share our lives with one another; to even confess our faults and failures to one another; to find the love and affection of Christ **in** one another.

To this end we place great emphasis upon a Cell Group Ministry Strategy – 8-10 people out of the larger congregation who commit themselves to 'walk the path' together – to love and support and care for and cherish one another as members of an eternal family of faith.

In a word ... Understanding the Mystery of God's Great Plan for man keeps us from ever again viewing the Church as an Organization defined by policies and procedures.

We now see the Church of Jesus Christ as a Living Organism with each member intricately linked to all the others ... We value them and seek ways to endear ourselves to them.

One final Observation ...

*** This Plan of God moves us way beyond any excessive
CONCERN about our LIFE on this EARTH**

This Plan of God keeps us from becoming so earthly focused that we never think about our connection with those who already walk on streets of gold – both the redeemed of the earth who have preceded us into heaven through death and the Heavenly Host themselves who have never failed for a moment to love and honor and worship the One who has become our Savior ...

Think about it ... someday you and I are going to have the opportunity to not only sit down with the saints of old and our loved ones who have gone before but also with the Heavenly Hosts ... with angels like Gabriel and Michael ... and share with them the wonders of the Son of God Himself – the One under whose leadership we all have been linked together. To sit and ‘*remember all the things He has done*’!

This Plan of God can create a longing in us for that fellowship which is yet to come and cause us to marvel at the steadfastness of that heavenly host.

This Plan of God – this ‘**Mystery**’ now made known to us – is bigger than all of these things we mention. It can move us way beyond anything we have previously experienced.

And now finally it's time for ...

Today's Key Concept ...

God the Father is working out an **HONOR** for His Son – an **HONOR** that you and I are part of – An **HONOR** that He has enabled us to **COMPREHEND** and to **CONTEMPLATE**. What A **BLESSING**!

And are we not now ready for this ...

Final Thot ...

Understanding the Plan of God for Man is a **BLESSING**.
Participating in the Plan of God for Man is a **PRIVILEGE**.
Let's do so **PERSISTENTLY** and **PRODUCTIVELY**!

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Five"

Sunday's message focused our attention upon the '**Blessing of Comprehension**' – that is, the blessing of understanding the Overall Grand Plan of God.

Paul revealed that plan in Ephesians 1:9-10 ...

*"And he made known to us the **MYSTERY** of His **WILL** according to his good pleasure, which he **PURPOSED** in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached fulfillment – to bring all **THINGS** in heaven and on earth together under one **HEAD**, even **CHRIST**."*

What would you say is the significance of each of these phrases?

"He made known to us The Mystery of His Will" ...

(God has chosen to reveal to us through Paul something that had long been a mystery namely, "What is the Over-All Plan of God in this universe of ours?")

"According to His Good Pleasure" ...

(God the Father is pleased with the Plan that He has devised (purposed) and it would appear that He is also pleased for us to know about it.)

"To be put into effect when the times will have reached fulfillment" ...

(God's Plan is operating according to a particular time-table – a schedule. That time was still future in Paul's day and it is still future in ours. God's Plan will not be 'put into effect' until the creation of the new heaven and the new earth.)

"To bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one Head, even Christ" ...

(This is the 'Plan' ... "*Universal Unity in Christ*". All living beings existing in a spirit of awe and reverence under the Leadership of the Son of God.)

Reflect upon this concluding statement from Sunday' message ...

"Think about it ... someday you and I are going to have the opportunity to not only sit down with the saints of old and our loved ones who have gone before but also with the Heavenly Hosts ... with angels like Gabriel and Michael ... and share with them the wonders of the Son of God Himself – the One under whose leadership we all have been linked together ... to sit and 'remember all the things He has done'!"

Point To Ponder ...

How does **COMPREHENDING** this over-all Plan of God
IMPACT my life on this earth and as a member of this Church?

"THE BLESSING OF IDENTIFICATION"

'Grace Is The Key' Series
(Ephesians 1:11-14)

Intro ... So once again I would ask you to open your Bibles to the Great New Testament Book of Ephesians – this great letter written by the Apostle Paul to the Congregation established by the Holy Spirit in the Greek City of Ephesus. Several Key Verses that we will seek to commit to memory will escort us through the major sections of teaching that this great book contains. Here once again is the first of them ...

OUR FIRST KEY 'ESCORT' VERSE ...

*"Praise be to the **GOD** and **FATHER** of our Lord Jesus Christ Who has **BLESSED** us in the **HEAVENLY** Realms with Every **SPIRITUAL** Blessing in **CHRIST**."*
(Ephesians 1:3)

Is not such a Father worthy of our praise? Should not that verse all by itself stimulate our worship ...

"The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessings in Christ!"

So when someone asks you "How are you doing?" can you imagine yourself saying (or at least thinking to yourself) ...

"I am doing great – my Heavenly Father has blessed me in the heavenly realms themselves with every single spiritual blessing at His Disposal!"

What an awesome truth Paul shared with those young believers ... No wonder we selected that verse as one of our key ones. If we only had that general statement, we would have cause to praise God endlessly.

But Paul didn't allow that verse to just stand alone ... He used that verse to open the door as it were to some more specific truth – that why I've called it an 'escort verse' for it guides us – escorts us as it were right into that 'additional truth' ... truths regarding some of those 'spiritual blessings' that are to be found 'in Christ'.

So far we have discovered three of them – three incredible spiritual blessings that come to those who are 'in Christ' ...

The Blessing of Selection

(We were 'Chosen in Him' – verse 4)

The Blessing of Redemption

(In him we have 'Redemption through His Blood' – verse 7)

The Blessing of Comprehension

(He made known to us the 'Mystery of His Will' –
The Ultimate Unity of all things 'in Christ')

We've been chosen; we've been delivered; we've been informed ...
all because of the Father's Desire to Shower Us with Spiritual Blessings.

There's one more such Blessing tucked away in this opening section
verses 4-14 ... specifically it's found in Today's Key Passage – verses 11-14.

TODAY'S KEY PASSAGE (amplified)...

In him we (Jews/Apostles) were also chosen, (made heirs) having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we (Jews/Apostles), who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

And you also (the Ephesians – we here in Apple Valley) were included in Christ when you heard the Word of Truth, the gospel of your salvation.

Having believed, you were marked in him (branded and thus identified) with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession - to the praise of his glory.

Now that's a mouthful of words and a mindful of thoughts ... That's the most extensive passage that we have looked at so far ... There's a lot of significant stuff mentioned in those four verses but all of it centers around one key idea – one key blessing that God would have every member of His Family experience.

It's a blessing that can help carry us through many of the tough times of life ... times when we might be tempted to doubt or even despair.

Here's how our 'escort verse' applies to **Today's Passage** ...

OUR ESCORT TEXT APPLIED TO TODAY'S PASSAGE ...

*Praise Be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with ... The **BLESSING** of **IDENTIFICATION**.*

There are few things in life as important – as necessary for mental and emotional health – as knowing **who** you are and **whose** you are. A solid sense of Identity is essential for life – that's the foundation upon which everything else is constructed.

Consider with me **Today's Key Illustration** ...

Allow it to sink into your mind for it will provide a **Key Image** for today's lesson.

Some years ago my younger brother's wife Cheryl gave birth to twin boys – they were and are still today just about as identical as two human beings can be. Their names are Robbie and Jason. There was only one small difference between them – Robbie had a single small freckle on the left side of his face. As they grew, they both enjoyed and took advantage of (though they were at times frustrated by) the fact that people (even their relatives) could not tell them apart.

We did not get to visit them very often ... During a lot of their early years we did not live in the same part of the country so we would only see them occasionally.

On one occasion when we did get to visit I remember walking into their home and seeing one of them coming to greet us, I called out confidently ...

"Hi Jason, how are you doing?"

Now I knew that I had a 50/50 chance, right? – And if I got it right I would be their brilliant Uncle Mark and if I got it wrong I would be no worse than everybody else.

The response I received is the phrase I want you to put in your mind this morning. It's **Today's Key Illustration** and **Image** ...

Picture that young boy running my way who without missing a beat said ...

TODAY'S KEY ILLUSTRATION ...

*"Uncle Mark ... I'm **ROBBIE** ... I've got the **FRECKLE**."*

*I wonder if he ever had to say that to himself in front of the mirror –
"I'm Robbie. I know I'm Robbie. I've got the freckle – It tells me who I am."*

And that leads to ...

TODAY'S KEY CONCEPT...

It's a tremendous blessing to be **IDENTIFIED** as a **CHILD** of **GOD** –
To know beyond a **SHADOW** of a doubt that that's exactly
WHO you are and **WHOSE** you are!

In our passage today I find Three '*Freckles of Identification*' that demonstrate our membership in the Family of God. God wants those who are His to know that they are His – Paul wanted the Believers in Ephesus to know that. I want you who are truly His to know that.

THREE 'FRECKLES' OF IDENTIFICATION ...

The **first** of these **Identifying Freckles** we can call ...

1. THE FRECKLE OF HEARING ...

(Cannot identify yourself as a Child of God unless you have **HEARD** the **GOSPEL**)

*"And you also (the Ephesians – we here in Apple Valley) were included in Christ
when you heard the Word of Truth, the gospel of your salvation."
(vs. 13a)*

Until a person has '*Heard the Word of Truth, the Gospel itself*' they are not and cannot be '*in Christ*' – they are not heirs to any of the promises of Christ; they are not born-again into the Family of Christ – they are not Children of God.

The Gospel contains the Truth that unsaved men and women must hear if they are to become sons and daughters of God and thus identified with Christ and His Coming Kingdom.

The Gospel, the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 1:16 ... "*Is the power of God unto Salvation*". The Gospel assumes that people are under the condemnation of God and are in **NEED** of salvation – salvation from eternal damnation in Hell.

The Gospel communicates clearly that people have a far bigger problem than that they have somehow '*made a mess of their lives*'. The Gospel does not call upon people to '*get their act together*' or even promise that Jesus will help them '*get their act together*'.

The Gospel clearly points out that by the '*Deeds of the Law*' – by our own '*Good Deeds*' - no one can be declared '*righteous*' (acceptable) in God's eyes. (Romans 3:20)

Now there are many today who have never '*Heard that Gospel*' – there are many in Churches today who have never '*Heard that Gospel*' ...

There is a "Gospel" being preached today that is more 'earth-centered' than 'heaven-centered' ... more 'self-centered' than 'Christ-Centered' ... more 'mistake-centered' than 'sin-centered' ... more philosophically and psychologically based than theologically based ... more filled with man's notions and declarations than God's Revelations.

The fundamental missing piece is the Biblical Teaching of Eternal Judgment – that man is a sinner by nature and choice and that the wages of sin is death and that that death is ultimately eternal.

The correlating piece of Biblical Teaching is that Jesus Christ died in man's place and offers to man the possibility of redemption from judgment – the forgiveness of sins.

The Mormon Church does not teach that; The Jehovah Witnesses do not teach that; The Seventh Day Adventists do not teach that; The Liberal Protestant Churches do not teach that; The "*Be All You Can Be*" fluff Churches do not teach that; even the Catholic Church (with its invention of Purgatory as a kind of '*second chance for everyone*') does not teach that true Biblical Gospel.

And the fact is, unless you have '*Heard the True Gospel*' unless you bear the '*Freckle of Hearing*', you do not have any possibility of becoming a genuine born-again Child of God.

Hearing these other 'Gospels' does not draw people into a relationship with the Almighty God ... Hearing these 'Gospels' does not open the door by which a sinful human being can become a genuine 'Child of God'. Hearing these Gospels in fact draws one away from what Paul called the '*truth of salvation*'.

I've got good news for you. Even if you have never heard it before, you have heard it this morning ...

At the very least you can go home today and say I've got the '*Freckle of Hearing*' on my face. I've heard both the bad news and the good news of the '*Gospel – the Truth of Salvation*' ...

"I understand that I am a sinner under the judgment of God and that my eternal destiny hangs in the balance. And I've heard that Jesus Christ died on the cross to save me from eternal judgment and to provide for me eternal life."

But simply hearing the Gospel (especially hearing the 'bad news' of the Gospel) doesn't save anyone ... **Secondly** Paul drew the Ephesian Believers' attention to what I am calling this morning ...

2. THE FRECKLE OF BELIEVING ...

(Cannot identify yourself as a Child of God unless you have **BELIEVED** the **GOSPEL**)

And you also (the Ephesians – we here in Apple Valley) were included in Christ when **you heard** the Word of Truth, the gospel of your salvation. **Having believed**, you were **marked in him** (branded and thus identified)... (vs. 13a, b)

Just 'knowing all that' is not enough ... Knowing it links you to the '**Truth** of Christ' ... Truly believing it (committing yourself to it) links you to the '**Person** of Christ'.

And it's when you commit yourself personally to Jesus Christ as your Savior from Condemnation that something remarkable happens. You become identified with him ... branded even. A new '*freckle*' appears - You are '*born-again*'. The Apostle Paul told the believers in Corinth that ...

*"If anyone is 'in Christ', he becomes a new creation –
The old is gone, the new has come."* (2 Cor. 5:17)

You become identified by your belief ... **You have become a 'Believer'**

You look in the mirror and you see one who not only **knows** the truth of the Gospel but one who **believes in** (has committed himself to) the truth of the Gospel – to all the Truths of the Gospel. Those two '*Freckles*' announce to you and to the world around just **who** you are and **whose** you are!

There's one more thing ...

In addition to the identifying 'Freckle of Hearing' and the 'Freckle of Believing' there is added to our appearance ...

3. THE FRECKLE OF SEALING ...

(Cannot identify yourself as a Child of God unless you have been **SEALED** by the **HOLY SPIRIT**)

"And you also (the Ephesians – we here in Apple Valley) were included in Christ when you heard the Word of Truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him (branded and thus identified) with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession — to the praise of his glory." (vs. 13-14a)

Here is an action of God that just puts the final touch on our altered appearance ... He puts the final 'Freckle' on us himself and He uses an indelible marker ... He '*marks us with His Own Eternal Spirit*'.

And so the Holy Spirit of God Himself takes up residence within us.

That Holy Spirit testifies (Paul says in Romans 8:16) with our own spirit that we are in fact '*Children of God*' – This is a most important ministry.

But as our awareness grows that we are now indeed '*Children of God*', He brings into our lives the very '*Nature of Christ*' – He develops within us the '*Fruit of the Spirit*' – He brings out of us '*gifts of ministry*' by which we serve our fellow-believers.

We sense His Presence ... teaching us, guiding us, sometimes chiding us but always linking us to the Savior and to the Father above who has indeed '*Blessed us with every Spiritual Blessing in Christ*'.

We know that we have been 'sealed' and 'secured' ...

We have become Children of God and we are His Treasured Possession. That's **Who** and **Whose** we are!

Final Thot ...

What a blessing is the **BLESSING** of **IDENTIFICATION!**

We are **IDENTIFIED** with all who have been **SELECTED** – We are **IDENTIFIED** with all who have been **REDEEMED** – We are **IDENTIFIED** with all who **COMPREHEND** God's Great and Wondrous **PLAN** – We are **IDENTIFIED** with all who have been **SEALED** by the **SPIRIT**.

We are Children of God ... We've got the **FRECKLES!**

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Six"

In Sunday's message from Ephesians 1:11-14, we examined the ...

BLESSING of **IDENTIFICATION**.

Here was the **Key Concept** ...

"It's a tremendous blessing to be **IDENTIFIED** as a **CHILD** of **GOD** – To know beyond a **SHADOW** of a doubt that that's exactly **WHO** and **WHOSE** you are!"

Are you enjoying the '*Blessing of Identification*'?

Do you know for sure that you are a Child of God and that you belong to Him or is this something that you struggle with? (Check out 1 John 5:13; Romans 10:9-10)

In Sunday's message, we discovered **Three Essential Elements of Salvation**:

"HEARING the **WORD** of **TRUTH**" - Could call that the '**Encounter**'.

"BELIEVING the **WORD** of **TRUTH**" - Could call that the '**Commitment**'.

"SEALING by the **HOLY SPIRIT**" - Could call that the '**Guarantee**'.

Consider These Diagnostic Questions:

"Have I heard the True Gospel – both its 'bad' and the 'good' news?"

"Is this the 'Gospel' that I share with others?"

Do I believe the True Gospel – Have I committed myself to the Savior?

"Is this the appeal I make to others i.e. Commit yourself to Christ?"

Have I been sealed by the Holy Spirit – Do I sense His Presence within me?

Is this the testimony I share with others?

Reflect upon this statement from Sunday's message:

There is a "*Gospel*" being preached today that is more 'earth-centered' than 'heaven-centered' ... more 'self-centered' than 'Christ-Centered' ... more 'mistake-centered' than 'sin-centered' ... more 'philosophically and psychologically based' than 'theologically based' ... more filled with 'man's notions and declarations' than 'God's Revelations'. This is not a '*saving gospel*' ...

Point To Ponder ...

Consider the "**Gospel Integrity**" of the **ROMAN** Road.
(Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23a; Romans 5:8; Romans 6:23b; Romans 10:9-10)

"ONE GREAT SOURCE OF DELIGHT"

*'Grace Is The Key' Series
(Ephesians 1:15)*

Intro ...

Last Sunday we completed our study of the first major section in the Apostle Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. Could call it the **'Blessing Section'**.

The verse that **'Escorted Us'** into and through that section was Eph. 1:3 ... We have committed it to memory, haven't we?

'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the Heavenly Realms with Every Spiritual Blessing in Christ!'

What an awesome cause for Praise! God has blessed us with every conceivable spiritual blessing ... some we will enjoy in this life while others will no doubt have to wait until we are *'in the Heavenly Realms'* ourselves.

In that opening section – that *'Blessing Section'* - we identified four *'spiritual blessings'* that impact our lives in the here and now – blessings that should bring forth praise from our lips whenever we think of them.

They were (and are):

*** The Blessing of SELECTION ...**

(God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world.)

*** The Blessing of REDEMPTION ...**

(We have received *'forgiveness of sins'* through the blood of Christ.)

*** The Blessing of COMPREHENSION ...**

(God has revealed to us the *'Mystery of His Will'* – His ultimate Plan to one day bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head – even Christ.)

*** The Blessing of IDENTIFICATION ...**

(We belong lock, stock and barrel to our Heavenly Father – We are his Possession)

What an almost breathlessly written flood of spiritual truth ... Once Paul started I doubt that he took a breath until he got it all out – surely his secretary's pen must have been flying as he wrote down every word that came from Paul's mouth.

These are fundamental things – these are some of the core truths that set the Church of Jesus Christ apart from all the religions of men. But these are the truths that can only be understood and accepted as God gives us the ***'Grace'*** to do so. **Therefore** it is an impressive thing when we see it happening.

Paul understood just how impressive a thing that is ...

Here's what he wrote to the Church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 2:14) ...

"The man without the Spirit (the natural man) does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned."

So when it does happen – when people do understand – when people do respond to the Gospel, it's indeed an impressive thing – it's a Spirit-Produced thing, a Grace-Enabled thing ... It's a note-worthy thing.

Today I would have us 'note' that Paul did indeed 'take note' and that by doing so he modeled for us a 'God-Honoring' and thus 'Desirable' Behavior.

It all grows out of **Today's Key Verse** which is a kind of '*transitional*' verse ... a thought-provoking testimony statement from the Apostle Paul himself.

It's a verse I would have us consider before we enter into the next major section of this revelation. Here's how it goes ...

TODAY'S KEY VERSE ...

For this reason, ever since I heard about your **FAITH** in the Lord Jesus and your **LOVE** for all the saints, I have not stopped giving **THANKS** for you, remembering you in my **PRAYERS**."
(Ephesians 1:15)

As I read that verse this week, I tried to just push past it and move us immediately into the next major section of thought in this great book which will be introduced by our 'Second Escort Verse' but I couldn't.

There's just too much in it ...

There's just too much for us to learn from it ...

Too many good '*things*' that we would miss if we just jumped over it ...

Now the '*First Thing*' I've already mentioned. Let's just call it ...

THING ONE ...

It's truly impressive when people (enabled by the Grace of God) do indeed **PUT** their **FAITH** in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.

"Ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ ..."

Never take lightly a person's commitment to Christ – it's not an easily done thing. To truly put one's faith in Christ, much must happen.

One's **eyes** must be opened to see and perceive spiritual truth (that's a miracle) for the natural man does not even begin to '*understand*' these things.

One's **heart** must be enlarged to embrace the Son of God who challenges every other allegiance that men hold dear (that's another miracle) for man in his natural state (and in his carnal state) generally has his heart set upon many things – most notably his own comfort and enjoyment.

One's **will** must be surrendered to the Call of Christ who simply and yet challengingly said '*If any man would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me*'. It's truly a miracle when willful men bow before the Son of God and say, '*My Lord and my God*'.

Surely a genuine conversion to faith is a tremendously impressive thing. It's the main thing to which we call people to yield themselves.

'Give yourself to Christ' ... That's our appeal – whether to an unsaved friend or family member or to one who once professed faith but has since wandered away ... 'Give yourself to Christ'.

And when they do, when such a miracle of conversion and commitment occurs it's a most impressive thing ... that's **Thing One** this morning.

Consider with me now this morning what I would call ...

THING TWO ...

It's equally impressive when people (aided by the Spirit of God) develop a genuine **LOVE** for their Fellow **BELIEVERS**.

"And your love for all the saints ..."

Here again I would counsel us ... Even as we should never '*take lightly*' a genuine commitment to Christ made by a formerly lost soul, neither should we '*take lightly*' the presence of genuine love within a body of believers. This too is not an easily accomplished thing.

For genuine love to develop among a particular body of believers – for genuine love to develop between one body of believers and the larger body of Christ, there is also much that must happen.

Man's natural **competitiveness** must be set aside; one's fellow believers must be seen as partners and companions in the faith and not as competitors for top honors. Seeing value in their accomplishments (even if it's just 'showing up') must become a regular practice.

Man's natural **self-centeredness** must be set aside; the needs of one's fellow believers must take priority over our own. Meeting our own needs can no longer be the top item on our agenda.

Man's natural **laziness** must be set aside; it takes energy and effort to reach out lovingly to those around us ... to greet; to assist; to listen; to comfort; or to simply 'be there' when needed.

Therefore, because of all that must be overcome to achieve it, Genuine Love within the 'Body of Christ' is also a tremendously impressive thing ... That's **Thing Two** this morning.

And now consider with me the **third thing** that I find within our passage of the morning ... The **third thing** that arises from this testimony statement of the Apostle Paul ...

"For this reason, ever since I heard about your **FAITH** in the Lord Jesus and your **LOVE** for all the saints, I have not stopped giving **THANKS** for you, remembering you in my **PRAYERS**."
(Ephesians 1:15)

And here it is ...

THING THREE ...

THANKSGIVING to God is the almost automatic **RESPONSE** when a true believer **OBSERVES** 'Thing One' and 'Thing Two' actually **HAPPENING**.

"I have not stopped giving thanks for you ..."

Unbelievers intuitively know and believers definitely know that **Thing One** and **Thing Two** are not only 'Good Things' ... They are 'God Things'.

They do not happen unless the Spirit of God is at work and thus Praise to God should be an almost automatic response. And once that Praise begins it's almost impossible to stop.

That's how the situation in Ephesus affected the Apostle Paul.

"I have not stopped giving thanks for you" ...

Notice he didn't say '*Thanks to you*' but '*Thanks for you*'.

He recognized that what had happened there in that congregation was indeed a '*God Thing*'- a '*Good Thing*' brought about by the Spirit of God! And God is the One to whom our Gratitude should be directed.

There are two more '*Things*' that I would share with you this morning. Two things that are direct applications of this '*testimony statement*' of the Apostle Paul ...

THING FOUR ...

All believers ought to be **LOOKING** for such a group (person) in whom they can **DELIGHT**.

For more than 19 years now, I have said that when *Sonlife* Community Church came into being, I (as a man who had spent the previous 22 years in traditional Pastoral Ministry) '*felt like I had died and gone to heaven*'.

There has been manifested in this place – in this fellowship - some remarkable evidences of '***Things One and Two***' ...

Over these years we have seen souls saved and baptized – some well past 70 years of age (unheard of) ...

I have observed men and women of all ages opening up their minds to and wrapping their hearts around and surrendering their wills before the Teachings of Christ.

Most recently we have experienced just such an outworking of "**Thing One**" in our study of the Sermon on the Mount and of the 119th Psalm.

I thank God for the way His Word has impacted and affected us all as we have begun to identify ourselves as ...

'Law-Loving, Law-Embracing, Law-Keeping Citizens of God Kingdom'.

Also over the years, we have seen people 'sacrifice greatly' for one another; we have committed ourselves to seeing to it that no physical need goes unmet within this fellowship – that no one can be here long without feeling the embrace of this Body of Believers.

I would tell you this morning (as I have told you before) ... I thank God for you!
And I have not and will not 'stop thanking God for you'.

Every time the Lord sends a new person through our doors, I consider that this might be yet one more person in whom God would have me find delight. And I know that I am by no means the only person here who looks upon every visitor/newcomer in that way.

Every year on our Commitment Sunday we go on record that this fellowship is indeed the place where we have found Things **One**, **Two** and **Three** to exist.

Just one more 'thing' before we close ...

It's pretty much a no-brainer but it needs to be officially put on the list ...

THING FIVE ...

We (I) ought to be the kind of **GROUP (PERSON)** in whom other true believers can **DELIGHT**.

Just a couple of **Diagnostic Questions** ...

Am I continuing to put my faith and trust in Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord?
Do those around me know that I am?

Am I concerned for the well-being of those who make up my family of faith?
Do I keep track of them?

Do they know that I am concerned for them and committed to them?
Does seeing their progress bring me delight?

Final Thot ...

DELIGHTING in the work of God accomplished in the lives of our **FELLOW BELIEVERS** is one of the greatest **DELIGHTS** of all.

Seek to be both a **GIVER** and a **RECEIVER!**

Sunday's message (based on Ephesians 1:15-16) was titled:

'One Great **SOURCE** Of Delight'.

*"For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers."
(Ephesians 1:15)*

What were the two things that brought Paul to such a place of Thanksgiving?

*"Their **FAITH** in the Lord Jesus and their **LOVE** for all the saints"*

Would you agree with Pastor Mark that these two things are 'truly impressive' things? Why or why not?

Pastor Mark shared that there are at least three things that must happen before a full commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ can be made and three things that must be set aside if a genuine love for the saints is to be felt.

Six things altogether that really make this **faith** and **love** the Ephesians had tremendously 'impressive'. Do you remember what they are? Were these 'things' new or already familiar?

Prerequisites For The Making Of A Genuine Commitment To Christ:

Man's **EYES** must be opened to understand the Truth of Christ.

Man's **HEART** must be enlarged to embrace the Person of Christ.

Man's **WILL** must be surrendered to the Call of Christ.

Eliminations Required For The Expression Of Genuine Love:

Man's natural **COMPETITIVENESS** must be set aside.

Man's natural **SELF-CENTEREDNESS** must be set aside.

Man's natural **LAZINESS** must be set aside.

Point To Ponder ...

Are these the things you '**THANK GOD FOR**' today?
Are these things that are commonly experienced today?
(True faith in Jesus Christ and genuine love for all the saints)

"WHEN THE 'LIGHT GOES ON' "

'Grace Is The Key' Series
(Ephesians 1:17)

Intro ... This morning in this brief communion meditation it is my privilege to introduce you to the **Second** of the **Key Escort Verses** that will guide us into and through the Apostle Paul's great Epistle to the Ephesians. Here it is ...

ESCORT VERSE #2 ... Ephesians 1:17

*"I keep **ASKING** that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of **WISDOM**
and revelation so you may **KNOW** ..."*

Yes, I know (for those of you who are following along in your own Bibles)
I stopped two words short of the whole verse.

Well there's a reason for that. Those next two words form the focus on next Sunday's message. The '*shortened version*' establishes our focus for today's introductory meditation.

This verse communicates a passion of Paul's heart for the Ephesian Believers ... something about which he was deeply concerned.

Listen to it again ...

*"I keep asking (in prayer of course) that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the glorious Father (Himself), may give you the spirit of wisdom and
revelation so you may know (something or someone) ..."*

Here's how the New Living Translation puts it ...

*"I pray for you constantly, asking God, the glorious Father of our
Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding
so that you may grow in your knowledge ..."*

Several Immediate Observations can be drawn from this verse ...

* There is always **MORE** to **KNOW** – More that we **NEED** to **KNOW**.
(There's both **URGENCY** and **PERSISTENCY** in this prayer.)

Never can we get to the place where we '*know it all*' – we will never empty the pantry of spiritual truth – never master the full curriculum.

There will always be '*more to know*' – to learn – to ponder and reflect upon – things will continue to '*come together*' throughout our Christian lives.

Also there are some things that are absolutely essential to know and until we know them, we will be somewhat limited in our ability to function as true children of God.

Three of those '*things*' are going to be discovered in this next section of Ephesians. Three Great Subjects for Investigation and Explanation!

So there is always "*More to Know – More that we Need to Know*".

* This **KNOWLEDGE** doesn't automatically come with our **SALVATION**.
(If it did, the Ephesians would have already **POSSESSED** it.)

Paul has already identified them as '*saints*' (vs. 1) – as ones '*made holy*' by the gracious action of God.

The knowledge that Paul is praying that they receive is beyond the elementary truths of salvation – the truths of the Gospel.

Paul is praying that they (and we) will gain a level of knowledge that will sustain them through trial and comfort them through distress and lead them into the deepest and most satisfying aspects of the Christian Life.

This kind of knowledge develops over time – this kind of knowledge must be persistently pursued and then passionately embraced – this kind of knowledge leads to maturity and wholeness.

So indeed ... this knowledge doesn't automatically come with our salvation though only those who are '*saved*' can ever attain it.

Here now is a third observation that can be draw from this **Key Verse** ...

* This **KNOWLEDGE** comes through spiritual **ENLIGHTENMENT**.
(It's a work of the **SPIRIT** of **GOD** who indwells every believer.)

Last week we heard Paul telling the Corinthian Believers that ...

*'the natural man does not understand the things of the Spirit of God –
they are in fact foolishness to him'. (1 Corinthians 2:14)*

Have you noticed that some of the things of God can still seem a bit 'foolish' to you even after you have gotten saved?

Does it make sense to you that your 'Loving Heavenly Father' would allow you to still struggle and even suffer in the midst of this fallen, broken world?

Wouldn't it make more sense – wouldn't it be a better 'selling point' for the Gospel, if God's Children lived their lives free from all the effects of sin and even from the effects of the deeds of evil men?

Wouldn't it be a tremendous testimony if every Christian could say ...

*"I've never been sick a day of my life; I've never experienced a reversal
in my business; I've never even struggled with a gloomy thought";
I've never had anyone triumph over me"?*

And yet Christians – true born-again Children of God – battle with all of these things and much more ... Is there a 'wisdom' that goes beyond what even believers would just 'naturally think'?

Indeed there is ... and it is given to us by the Holy Spirit Himself who Jesus said would 'Lead us into all truth' ... that is, into all the truth that God desires us to have – all the truth that is necessary for the 'light to go on' in our hearts and minds and for us to say at last ... "I get it - I understand".

It's the Holy Spirit who 'throws the switch' that turns on the light ...
He is the One who 'illuminates us' ... who 'enlightens us'.

That's his job but he must find us cooperative ...

'Seek and you shall find' Jesus once said.

Paul's great letter to the Ephesians is one great place to 'Search' ...
Do be faithful in that task.

Sometime the 'light will go on' while you are reading and pondering.
Sometimes it will happen while I am explaining the text to you.
Sometimes it might happen as you sit around a Cell Group table.
Sometimes the light will come to you in the most unexpected way or place.
Be faithful in your search and the Holy Spirit will reward you with insight.
That's His Task and His Delight.

Indeed ...

This necessary knowledge comes through spiritual enlightenment.

And that observation leads to this final one ...

* This **KNOWLEDGE** is absolutely **TRANSFORMATIONAL**.
(Could a **GLORIOUS** Father be involved in anything less?)

Paul says that he was bringing his request to ...

*'The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the **Glorious** Father' ...*

Think of ***Isaiah*** who testified ...

"I saw the Lord High and Lifted Up and His Glory filled the temple"

Think of the ***People of Israel*** at the foot of Mt. Sinai as the Glory of God descended upon it ...

Think of the ***Pillar of Fire*** that guided the people of Israel through the desert ...

Think of the ***Dedication of the Temple*** in Solomon's day when the Glory of God came down and filled it with splendor ...

Paul, Jewish Scholar that he was, was no doubt thinking of all these things when he chose to use the term '*Glorious Father*' ...

It's a glorious thing that we have been caught up in and the more we come to understand it the more glorious it will appear to be and the more glorious it appears to be the more enthralled by it we will be and the more enthralled by it we become the more immersed in it we will be and the more immersed in it we become the more transformed we will be until knowledge completes its work and we reach maturity in our faith.

Final Thought ...

Once the '**LIGHT** goes on' our life really '**TAKES** off'.
Are you **READY** to be **ENLIGHTENED?**

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Eight"

On Sunday, Pastor Mark identified our second Ephesians' '**ESCORT VERSE**' ...

*"I keep **ASKING** that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the Glorious Father, may give you the spirit of **WISDOM**
and revelation so you may **KNOW** ..."*
(Ephesians 1:17)

How important would you say 'knowledge' is in the Christian Life?

List five '*things*' that you would say are important/desirable for a believer to 'know' pretty thoroughly. Are these things you 'know' or 'need to know'?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

What do you think of this '*sequence of cause and effect*' shared Sunday ...

*"It's a glorious thing that we have been caught up in and the more we come to
Understand it the more glorious it will appear to be and the more glorious it appears to be
the more enthralled by it we will be and the more enthralled by it we become the more
immersed in it we will be and the more immersed in it we become the more transformed
we will be until knowledge completes its work and we reach maturity in our faith."*

Point To Ponder ...

Until the '**LIGHT** goes on' we are '**STUCK** in the dark'
but once the 'light **DOES** go on', darkness is forever **GONE**.

"WHEN THE 'LIGHT GOES ON' – We will Know Our GOD Better."

'Grace Is The Key' Series
(Ephesians 1:18)

Intro ... As we begin this morning, let me remind you of the 'Escort Verse' we introduced ourselves to in last Sunday's communion meditation ...

ESCORT VERSE #2 ... Ephesians 1:17

"I keep **ASKING** that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of **WISDOM**
and revelation so you may **KNOW** ..."

Last week we identified **Four Key Observations** that arise out of that heart-felt prayer request of the Apostle Paul ...

- * There is always more to know – more that we need to know.
- * This knowledge doesn't automatically come with our salvation.
 - * This knowledge comes through spiritual enlightenment.
 - * This knowledge is absolutely transformational.

To use a phrase that might '*stick in our minds*', we said that Paul was praying (persistently and urgently) that '*The Light Would Go On*' in each of those believers in Ephesus.

He was praying that each of them would arise to a true '*enlightenment-level*' in their knowledge – that they would come to possess a true hands-on, experiential knowledge with regard to the Realities of the Christian Life - to three of them in particular.

Paul revealed that desire by the very Greek word he chose here in the second of our **Key Escort Verses** ...

TODAY'S KEY WORD ...

"KNOW" – '*epignosis*'

Gnosis means '*to know*' ... to be **AWARE** of – to acknowledge as true.

Epi-Gnosis means to '**REALLY**' know – to '*personally*' know – to have first-hand '*experiential*' knowledge.

Indeed, this is knowledge that goes beyond mere information – goes far beyond just general 'knowledge of' ...

This is the kind of knowledge that shapes one's life – that captivates and focuses one's attention.

As I was looking for a Biblical Example of such knowledge this week, my mind went back to the Fourth Chapter of the Book of Genesis – to the very beginning of human history – and recalled the old King James translation of that fourth chapter's first verse ...

Here's what it says:

"And Adam 'knew' Eve his wife and she conceived and bore Cain ..."

Now that old English usage communicates something of what we are talking about this morning.

This **knowledge** that Paul is talking about here – this knowledge that Paul is praying would be the result of the Ephesians receiving a spirit of wisdom and revelation is ...

* **EXPERIENTIAL** Knowledge (There's personal initiation and involvement)
(*'A man shall leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife' – Gen.2:24*)

* **INTIMATE** Knowledge (There's identification/connection at the deepest level.)
(*And they shall become one flesh – Gen. 2:24*)

* **PRODUCTIVE** Knowledge (There's an incredible outcome.)
(*She conceived and bore a son – Gen. 4:1*)

Now the Holy Spirit gave Paul a '*spirit of wisdom and revelation*' that he might reveal to us **Three Key Spiritual Realities** that God would have us 'know' in this way.

Today we consider ...

**THE FIRST KEY SPIRITUAL REALITY THAT
GOD WOULD HAVE US KNOW...**

*"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father,
would give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation so you can ...*

KNOW HIM BETTER."

*'The **ONE** from whom all things **COME**'*

To Know Him '**Better**' ...

Cannot be saved without 'knowing God' at least a little bit.

Here's one thing you've got to know to be saved ...

*** GOT TO KNOW HE LOVES YOU.**

("For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only son ..." – John 3:16)

Got to know something of the **HEART** of God if you would be saved,
otherwise you might simply find yourself stuck in a great quandary.

Why would Jesus sacrifice himself for me? How can I dare to believe that his death on the cross was on my behalf? How can I presume to believe that a righteous God would seek to alter my condemned condition?

To be saved I must believe the truth of the Bible's most basic verse: Jesus came to give his life on Calvary because the Father loves me. To be saved, I've got to 'know' and 'believe' that God loves me. (Do you believe that?)

But there is so much more to 'know' about the Love of God for you ...

It's more than just the merciful love, the compassionate love for the lost and wayward – more than the stirrings one might feel for a kitten with an injured paw, more even than the Samaritan felt for the traveler who had been ambushed and beaten and thrown in the ditch, though that compassionate, saving love is surely enough to generate heartfelt praise.

There's greater depths to the Love of God – More than just the love of a protector and a provider, He feels the love of a parent.

He delights in those who are His Own ... He cherishes them. He wants them to feel His Delight and to delight themselves in it. The better we come to 'know Him' the more we will experience that delight.

Generally the problem with depressed, mournful believers is that they have failed to fully understand – to be enlightened about – the Love that God has for them. Somehow they have missed it.

So as Paul would say ... They need to know him 'better'.

Here's another thing – another 'little bit' about God that must be known if a person is to be saved ...

*** GOT TO KNOW HE IS THE ONE IN CHARGE.**

("Man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment" – Heb. 9:27)

Got to know something of the **AUTHORITY** of God if you would be saved otherwise you wouldn't understand your vulnerability.

Got to know that God is the one to whom all men must give an account.

Got to know that He is a righteous, sin-hating God.

Got to know that He is the one who will consign sinners to hell and who will open the doors of heaven to the redeemed. (Do you know that?)

But that's just the beginning, there is so much more for us to know about the Authority God exercises over our world ...

We can come to know that the entire course of history is in His Hands and that all things are progressing according to His Over-All Purposes.

The Apostle Paul told the believers in Rome (Romans 8:28)

*"In all things God works for the good of those who love him,
who are called according to His Purpose"*

God told His people thru Jeremiah (Jeremiah 29:11)

"I know the plans I have for you ..."

God had the Apostle John record these words (Revelation 21:1, 5) ...

"Then I saw the new heaven and the new earth (and) He who was sitting on the throne said, 'Write this down for these words are trustworthy and true.'"

The believer who gets all frazzled and frustrated over the way things are going; the one who feels like '*throwing in the towel*' and just retreating into a corner ... needs to 'know Him better'.

And now here's a third thing that you must know about God if you would be saved...

*** GOT TO KNOW HE PLANS TO TRANSFORM YOU**

"Jesus declared, 'I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.'" (John 3:3)

GOT to know something of the **PROCESS** of God if you would be saved otherwise you would fail to see your inadequacy.

GOT to know that man is fundamentally flawed – that your own best efforts are nowhere near good enough.

GOT to know that a total make-over is necessary.

GOT to know that ***Spiritual Birth*** into the Family of God is the process God employs in providing salvation. (Do you know that?)

But again there is so much more that we need to know beyond the re-birth that makes us a member of God's family and brings us into a relationship with the Heavenly Father.

God is committed to seeing each of his children become in reality what He has declared them to be legally.

He declares them to be His Children; He gives them the right to be called Sons of God but He also places His Own Transforming Holy Spirit in their hearts.

It's that Spirit within who continues the **PROCESS** of **TRANSFORMATION**.

Paul reminded the Corinthians in his second letter (2 Corinthians 5:17)

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation ..."

Paul urged the believers in Philippi to ...

"become blameless and pure, Children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the Word of Life." (Philippians 2:15-16)

It's God's desire that His Children act '*like His Children*' – not like the fallen, sin-filled, world-focused, devil-deceived human beings all around them.

The truth is that the more God's Children come to "*Know Him*" the more they desire to live the very kind of life that '*honors Him*'.

Those professing faith in Christ who fail to demonstrate some measure of the Life that pleases God, those who place such emphasis on God's declaration of forgiveness that they pay very little attention to the quality of the life they are living, those who actually believe that their '*performance doesn't matter*' ... desperately need to '*Know Him Better*'.

And so we come to sense the urgency and the persistency of Paul's prayer for the Ephesians.

There's a tremendous amount of God-Pleasing Christian Living depending upon the believer's level of 'God-Knowledge'.

And so it's that '*spirit of wisdom and revelation*' that we desperately and continually need.

Pray for it yourself – pray for it for others.
Seek it out – Open your heart and mind to it!

Final Thought ...

"KNOWING God BETTER and BETTER" ...
What a life GOAL – What a prescription for SUCCESS!

What would you say is 'implied' by the title of Sunday's message?

"When the 'Light Goes On' – We Will Know Our God Better."

(The 'Light Going On' is necessary for us to gain 'Better Knowledge of God' –
The 'Light' isn't always on – It's possible to 'Know God Better Than We Presently Do' –
It's desirable to 'Know God Better' – We already 'Know God' to some degree.)

Reflect upon this statement from Sunday's message ...

"Cannot be **SAVED** without 'knowing God' at least a **LITTLE** bit."

Here's how Pastor Mark shared the **three things** that we must know at least something of if we would be saved ...

1. "Got to know something of the **HEART** of God if you would be saved, otherwise you might simply find yourself stuck in a great **quandary**."

(Why would he sacrifice his own son? Because **HE LOVES US**)

2. "Got to know something of the **AUTHORITY** of God if you would be saved otherwise you wouldn't understand your **vulnerability**."

(**WE ARE CONDEMNED BY HIS HOLINESS**; our eternal destiny hangs in the balance.)

3. "Got to know something of the **PROCESS** of God if you would be saved otherwise you would fail to see your **inadequacy**."

(In and of ourselves we are fatally flawed; **TOTAL TRANSFORMATION** is required.)

But there's much, much more to **KNOW** about these three things isn't there?

Since you have been saved, what would you say you have come to know better about the **HEART** of God and the **AUTHORITY** of God and the **PROCESS** of God?

Points To Ponder ... What do you think of these statements from Sunday?

"Generally the problem with depressed, mournful believers is that they have failed to fully understand – to be enlightened about – the **LOVE** that God has for them. Somehow they have missed it. So as Paul would say ... They need to 'know him better'."

"The believer who gets all frazzled and **FRUSTRATED** over the way things are going – the one who feels like ... just retreating into a corner ... needs to 'know Him better'."

"Those professing faith in Christ who **FAIL** to demonstrate some measure of the Life that pleases God, those who place such emphasis on God's declaration of forgiveness that they pay very little attention to the quality of the life they are living ... need to 'Know Him Better'."

“WHEN THE ‘LIGHT GOES ON’ – We will Know Our HOPE Better.”

*‘Grace Is The Key’ Series
(Ephesians 1:18)*

Intro ... Once again, here is the verse that is escorting us through the second section of thought in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians ...

ESCORT VERSE #2 ... Ephesians 1:17

*“I keep **ASKING** that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of **WISDOM** and revelation so you may **KNOW** (stuff) ...”*

Last Week ...

So you may ‘**KNOW HIM BETTER**’ ...
Know more of His **Love** and of His **Authority** and of His **Process**

This week ...

So you may ‘**KNOW** (fully and completely know) the **HOPE** to which He has **CALLED** you.’

That *loving, authoritative, methodical* Father has called us (invited us) to lay hold of some kind of **HOPE** ... He has placed in front of us a target – a destination – an ultimate destiny.

Might think ... Well, that’s a no-brainer. That’s our ‘**Hope of Heaven**’.

God the Father has called us to salvation and that salvation provides for us eternal life in heaven when this life is over ... That’s our **HOPE!**

It’s a **Hope** that can sustain us through times of trouble and assure us during attacks of doubt – the writer of the Book of Hebrews said that this hope we have can serve as a literal ‘*anchor for our souls*’ (Hebrews 6:19).

It can keep us from drifting away and being run aground by the storms of life.

So this should be a short message ...

This is one that we have already pretty well figured out.

Except that's not what Paul was saying here ... that's not the direction that Paul's mind was running. Paul was not saying that he was asking God to help us better understand and thus more clearly perceive the wonders of Heaven – as wondrous as that would be.

Paul's mind was going down a completely different track ... Paul choose to focus upon something that the average Christian might not ever even think about – something that the average church-goer might not ever even hear about.

Take a look with me at what Paul actually said ...

TODAY'S KEY VERSE ...

*"I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be
enlightened in order that you may know
the **HOPE** to which he has called you,*

*The **RICHES** of His Glorious **INHERITANCE** in the **SAINTS**."*

This is a different 'kind of knowledge' altogether – this is something that God wants you and me to know. But just by reading those words we don't automatically 'get' what he's saying, do we?

So let's work our way along step by step and pray for enlightenment as we do so for there's something here that God definitely wants us 'to know' – something that will require the 'light to go on' if that knowledge is going to indeed become our own.

First Thing ...

"God Is Talking About 'His INHERITANCE' Not Ours."

*(Something that is **COMING** to Him and that will **BELONG** to Him.)*

That's what the verse says ... Paul says He keeps asking God that our hearts will be enlightened so that we know something of 'His Inheritance'.

So he's definitely **not** talking about heaven ... God already owns heaven and all that it contains – God created heaven. The Bible actually says that God

already owns everything ... *'the cattle on a thousand hills and the gold in every mine'* (Oh, wait ... that was a gospel song, wasn't it?)

But we get the idea ... However, an ancient Hebrew songwriter (David in fact) did once write similar lyrics to one of his tunes (Psalm 24 he called it) ...

*"The earth is the Lord's and everything in it,
the world and all that live in it."*

So how does someone who already owns everything ever receive an inheritance? Some enlightenment is definitely needed.

But nevertheless, whether we understand it right off or not, God is talking about 'His Inheritance' in this verse – not ours. There is something **coming** to him that will surely **belong** to Him forever.

Now here's a **Second Thing** ...

"This Inheritance Is EXTRAVAGANT And AWESOME."

(Adds to His already unfathomable **WEALTH** and to His unmatched **GLORY**)

Paul refers to the 'Riches' of His 'Glorious' Inheritance ...

Whatever it is, it's impressive enough to make God '*sit up and take notice*'; it's impressive enough for the Heavenly Father to eagerly anticipate; it's impressive enough that the Apostle Paul believed that knowledge of it was and is vital for every believer to possess.

This inheritance is **rich** even by God's Standards and it possesses a level of **glory** that is actually compatible with the magnificence of His Own Being.

Paul would have us '*sit up and take notice*' also. It's the kind of thing that would cause us endless wonder if we really could wrap our minds around it.

God wants us to know that there's something incredibly extravagant and awesome coming His Way that will belong to Him forever – something that He will cherish forever – His eternal inheritance!

What in the world could that '*something*' be – How in the world would such an inheritance be figured – In what '*Coin of the Realm*' would it be calculated?

Here now is the **Third Thing ...**

"This Inheritance Is Calculated Not In DOLLARS But In SAINTS."

(There is no more **TREASURED** possession to the Heavenly Father.)

Paul said ...

*"I am praying that the eyes of your heart might be enlightened that you may know the **Hope** (His Hope and ours) to which He has called you – The Riches of His Glorious Inheritance **in the saints**."*

There's the 'Coin of the Realm' identified ... there's the medium of exchange by which this glorious inheritance is calculated.

The 'Saints' – all those who have been 'Declared Holy' by the Decree of God Himself – are the Father's Inheritance. They will one day all 'Come to Him' and then 'Belong to Him' forever. He will be enriched by them and made even more glorious because of them.

Jesus revealed something of this possibility – this divine reality – when he said in His High Priestly Prayer (speaking of his earthly disciples) ...

"Glory has come to me through them."
(John 17:10)

There is coming a day when all things pertaining to this present earth will have come to their conclusion, when the Heavenly Hosts will marvel at the Glorious Inheritance of the Father as His Saints assemble around His Throne thus demonstrating their Victory over Sin and Death through their Faith in the Son of God who loved them and gave himself for them.

And there they will be ... dressed in robes of white – gloriously transformed into immortal beings who will exist to the Praise of His Glory for all eternity – the fulfillment of His Hope!

And in that moment, as the Father gazes upon that which His Love (and His Son's Sacrifice) has accomplished, He will be filled with delight. These Glorified Saints will be His Inheritance forever – His Treasured Possession!

And as we think about such a moment – as we try to visualize such a setting – need I even mention these next three things ...

Fourth Thing ...

“The Knowledge Of This Calling Should BLOW Our MINDS.”

(To think that our Heavenly Father puts such confident HOPE in us.)

Words fail one whose ‘*mind has been blown*’ ...

The knowledge of this calling that God has given to us transcends all the earthly stuff with which we typically fill our minds.

Surely this is ‘*one thought*’ by which we can heed the instruction the Apostle Paul gave in his letter to the Colossians when he said ...

*“Set your minds on things above not on earthly things
for you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God ...”*

(Colossians 3:2-3)

It is by no means a waste of brain-power to think deeply and regularly about that incredible day when you as a born-again believer in Jesus Christ will stand in the midst of that glorious band which the Father will officially receive as ‘*His Own*’ – His Everlasting Inheritance!

The Father has ‘called us’ to be part of the fulfillment of His Hope!
What more purposeful life could we possibly have – it blows the mind.

Fifth Thing ...

“The Knowledge Of This Calling Should EXCITE Our HEARTS.”

(To think that our lives can produce Eternal BENEFIT to our Heavenly Father.)

To do something amazing for one who has done something amazing for you is something our hearts can truly get excited about ...

How exciting to think (once our minds get done being ‘*blown*’) that we can bring an eternal benefit to our Heavenly Father.

We desire to live in such a way that we are seen to be ‘*saintly*’ ... living as we heard Paul say to the Philippians last Sunday ...

*“As Children of God in the midst of a crooked and depraved generation
in which you shine like stars in the universe ...”*

(Philippians 2:15)

Think about this ...

“When we want to see the ‘*stars in the universe*’ we look up;
when God wants to see them He looks down.”

And on that final glorious day, He will simply have to ‘look around’.
How exciting to think that our lives can produce that kind of pleasure for him!

Only one thing left to say this morning.

This Sixth Thing (this most important thing) ...

“The Knowledge Of This Calling Should ACTIVATE Our WILLS.”
(Could there be anything more WORTHY of our EARTHLY efforts?)

We certainly won’t think so when we stand in the Father’s Presence on that most momentous day ...

The Father will rejoice in us individually as well as in us collectively.

He will remember the deeds done during our earthly sojourn.

Glory will come to him as each God-Honoring action of our lives is acknowledged.

Each of them is added to the ledger of His Inheritance ...

Each of them will add to His Eternal ‘*Glory in the Saints*’.

Consider with me now our ...

Final Thought ...

Christians not only HAVE an inheritance; they ARE an inheritance!
God the Father is their BENEFICIARY!

Let’s live so as to ADD to His RICHES and GLORY!

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REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Ten"

Check out the 'Key Verse' from Sunday's message (Ephesians 1:18) ... What is it that Paul is praying that the Ephesian Saints might come to '*truly and fully know*'?

"The **HOPE** to which He (the Father) has **CALLED** you."

And, according to this verse, what is that **Hope**?

"The **RICHES** of His (the Father's) Glorious Inheritance in the **SAINTS**"

Reflect upon the Six 'Things' Pastor Mark 'pulled out of this verse'.

1. "God Is Talking About 'His INHERITANCE' Not Ours."

(Something that is COMING to Him and that will BELONG to Him.)

2. "This Inheritance Is EXTRAVAGANT And AWESOME."

(Adds to His already unfathomable WEALTH and His unmatched GLORY)

3. "This Inheritance Is Calculated Not In DOLLARS But In SAINTS."

(There is no more TREASURED possession to the Heavenly Father.)

4. "The Knowledge Of This Calling Should BLOW Our MINDS."

(To think that our Heavenly Father puts such confident HOPE in us.)

5. "The Knowledge Of This Calling Should EXCITE Our HEARTS."

(To think that our lives can produce Eternal BENEFIT to our Heavenly Father.)

6. "The Knowledge Of This Calling Should ACTIVATE Our WILLS."

(Could there be anything more WORTHY of our EARTHLY efforts?)

Of those six, which to you is ...

The most surprising ... The most enlightening ... The most encouraging ...

How do these statements strike your mind and heart ... Reflect upon their meaning.

* God wants us to know that there's something incredibly extravagant and awesome coming His Way that will belong to Him forever – something that He will cherish forever – His eternal inheritance!

* The 'Saints' – all those who have been 'Declared Holy' by the Decree of God Himself – are the Father's Inheritance. They will one day all 'Come to Him' and then 'Belong to Him' forever. He will be enriched by them and made even more glorious because of them.

* There they will be ... dressed in robes of white – gloriously transformed into immortal beings who will exist to the Praise of His Glory for all eternity – the fulfillment of His Hope!

* When we want to see the 'stars in the universe' we look up;
when God wants to see them He looks down. (Phil.2:15)

* The Father will rejoice in us individually as well as in us collectively. He will remember the deeds done during our earthly sojourn. Glory will come to him as each God-Honoring action of our lives is acknowledged. Each of them is added to the ledger of His Inheritance – Each of them will add to His Eternal Glory in the Saints.

Point To Ponder ...

How does it affect me when I think:

"I not only **HAVE** an inheritance; I actually **AM** an inheritance"?

“WHEN THE ‘LIGHT GOES ON’ – We will Know Our POWER Better.”

*‘Grace Is The Key’ Series
(Ephesians 1:19-23)*

Intro ... Once again, here is the verse that is escorting us through the second section of thought in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians ...

ESCORT VERSE #2 ... Ephesians 1:17

*“I keep **ASKING** that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of **WISDOM**
and revelation so you may **KNOW** (stuff) ...”*

Two Weeks Ago ...

So you may ‘**KNOW** (fully and completely know) **HIM BETTER**’ ...
Know more of His **Love** and of His **Authority** and of His **Process**.

Last Week ...

‘So you may ‘**KNOW** (fully and completely know)
the **HOPE** to which He has **CALLED** you.’

It’s a Hope that ‘**Blows Our Minds**’ and
‘**Excites Our Hearts**’ and ‘**Activates Our Wills**’ ...

It’s the Father’s Hope in us His Born-Again Children who will
one day stand before Him As His Eternal Inheritance –
His Perfected Family of Faith!

I trust that each of us left the service last Sunday more determined than ever to live **God-Honoring lives** – lives that will add to the Father’s Glory on that awesome day.

I’m sure we left the service with a desire and a determination to ...

‘Break Free From The **THOUGHT PATTERNS** Of The World’ and to ...

‘Completely Squelch The **URGES** Of The Flesh’ and to ...

“Successfully Resist All **ADVANCES** Of The Devil Against Us’.

In a word –

‘To Honor God in all that we would do or say or think or feel.’

I'm pretty sure that many of us also left the service last Sunday wondering exactly how we were going to do that – how we would in fact ‘pull off’ what our minds had envisioned and our hearts embraced and our wills settled upon.

Well ... last Sunday's message didn't give us that answer, did it?

Last Sunday's message was designed to give us the determination – Today's message is intended to provide us the direction.

For you see there is one more thing that the Apostle Paul wanted the readers of his letter to “**Know**” ...

Here's how he put it ...

The Third and Final Thing ...

‘So you may **KNOW** (fully and completely know, experientially and authentically know) ...

‘His Incomparably **GREAT POWER** For Us Who **BELIEVE**’.
(Ephesians 1:19)

“Paul wanted them to know that there was available to them
SUFFICIENT POWER to **PULL it OFF!**”

Here's how he put it (Ephesians 1:17-23)...

“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe.”

That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”

Three incredible 'revelations' contained in this passage ...

*** THIS POWER IS 'DIVINE POWER'**

"The working of his mighty strength"

Paul called it '*His incomparably great power*' ... God's power is so great that it cannot even be '*compared*' to anything else – it's in a class by itself.

It's Divine Power – it's the power that belongs to and is wielded by the Almighty God Himself.

The Jews of Paul's Day were well aware of that kind of power – their family history was filled with it.

This was the **Power** that spoke the world into existence ...

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth"

(reported Moses in Genesis 1:1)

And it didn't even require a great effort (for as Moses went on to explain) ...

God merely had to speak – to envision – to declare – and the stars arranged themselves in the sky and the sun and the moon took their place and accepted their function ...

"And God said ... 'Let there be light' ... and there was!

"And God said ... 'Let the water teem with living creatures' and it did!

"And God said ... 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures' and it did!

What awesome, incomparable power did the God of the Hebrews possess! It was the Power of Creation.

They also knew something of God's Power of Judgment and Destruction ...

Had He not '*opened up the windows of heaven*' and sent the destructive flood waters upon the earth in Noah's Day? Had he not devastated the Land of Egypt with the plagues that He sent upon it; Had he not opened up the Red Sea for them; Had he not collapsed those towering Walls of Jericho right before their eyes; Had He not descended upon Mt. Sinai in visible splendor and glory? Any true Jew knew that there was no power anywhere that could compare to the Power of their God!

This Paul declares is the very 'Power' that God had now made available to the Followers of Christ ... Incomparably great power that they can come to 'know' firsthand.

The Apostle Peter (another dyed in the wool Jewish believer) announced the same truth when he wrote in His first letter to the early church ...

*"His Divine Power has given us **EVERYTHING** we need for life and godliness."*
(1 Peter 1:3)

Any Jewish believer would find that statement to be almost overwhelming.

How awesome to think that God's Divine Power had been made available to them as they sought to make it through their earthly lives as Followers of Jesus Christ. Overwhelming and wonderfully comforting.

However, Paul was not primarily writing to Jewish believers there in Ephesus and he was not really interested in bringing up what was certainly ancient (though impressive) history ...

Paul was interested in tying their faith to and stimulating their knowledge by a much more recent event – an event that one did not have to be Jewish to appreciate.

Paul goes on to say that ...

*** THIS POWER** (that he would have them know) **IS LIKE 'RESURRECTION POWER'**
"Which He exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead"

Now ... here's a power-display that had taken place no more than 30 years earlier – hundreds were still living who had witnessed it – This was the distinctive Christian Power display – the application of God's incomparable power in laying the foundation of the Christian Faith.

God raised Jesus Christ from the grave ...

He brought back to life that which was dead. He brought back to wholeness that which had been broken. He declared to be righteous once again that which had been declared sinful. God's mighty power was unleashed in multiple ways in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This Paul says is the very power that is 'For Us Who Believe' ...

Paul would share his personal desire to 'experience *this power*' in his letter to the Philippian Believers ...

"I want to **KNOW** Christ and the **POWER** of His resurrection ..."
(Philippians 3:10)

This is 'Transforming Power' – this is 'Overcoming Power' – this is 'Nothing Can Get Me Down And Keep Me Down Power' and the reason it is is because of the **Third Great Revelation** contained in this passage ...

*** THIS POWER IS AN AUTHORIZING POWER**

"Appointed him to be head over everything for the Church"

This power which God 'exerted in Christ' did not only 'Raise Him From The Dead' it also 'Seated Him At The Father's Right Hand In Heaven'.

It placed him 'far above all (lesser) rule and authority' ...

It placed 'all things under His feet' and it 'appointed him (authorized him) to be head over everything for the church'.

The Father was not content to simply say 'Welcome Home' – He said, 'Take this exalted place of authority' – I authorize you (as it were) to wield my power yourself on behalf of your body, the church, which is our on-going witness in the world'. (My Glorious Inheritance!)

This then is the "**Power**" that the Apostle Paul wanted the Ephesian Believers to '**Know**' – to fully and completely know, to experientially and authentically know ... He wanted them to know in their lives the very authoritative power that had been given by the Father to their Savior Jesus Christ Himself!

This is the type of reality that Paul was talking about when he wrote these words in his letter to the Colossians ...

"And you have been given **FULLNESS** in Christ"
(Colossians 2:10)

We have the opportunity to 'Know' – to grasp and to employ, to experience and demonstrate - the very authoritative power of Christ Himself.

And where should we employ it?
Should we 'March on Washington'?

Here's my suggestion ...

We should use this authority – this fullness – that we have been given in Christ to '*Exercise authority over those areas of life for which we are directly responsible and thus accountable*'.

Here's my short list:

Exercise Authority Over Your MIND

*'Do not conform (any longer) to the pattern of this world (its way of thinking)
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind'*
(Romans 12:2)

Exercise Authority Over Your FLESH

"Put to death (mortify) whatever belongs to your earthly nature."
(Colossians 3:5)

Exercise Authority Over The DEVIL

"Resist the devil and he will flee from you."
(James 4:7)

Final Thought ...

In Christ, believers not only have the **ABILITY**
but the **AUTHORITY** to live **GOD-HONORING** lives!

In Sunday's message we identified the **Third** and **Final Thing** that Paul wanted his readers to (fully and completely/ experientially and authentically) '**know**' ...

"The **FATHER'S** incomparably **GREAT POWER** for us who **BELIEVE**."

Without looking at your notes ... Choose three words (or phrases) to describe this power that the Father makes available to His Children ...

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Reflect upon the significance of these words or phrases that you have chosen. Do they describe the kind of spiritual power that you are experiencing currently in your life?

In Sunday's message, based upon Ephesians 1:19-23, Pastor Mark pointed out that this 'Power For Us From The Father' is ...

***DIVINE POWER** – "Like the working of His Mighty Strength"

* **RESURRECTION POWER** – "which He exerted in Christ when He raised him from the dead" and

* **AUTHORIZING POWER** – "appointed him head over everything for the Church."

Have you ever considered yourself to be an '**Authorized Agent**' of the Lord?

What were the **Three Primary Things** identified Sunday that God has
AUTHORIZED us to use his incomparably great **POWER** to do?

* **Exercise Authority Over The MIND**

"Do not conform (any longer) to the pattern of this world (its way of thinking)
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind"
(Romans 12:2)

* **Exercise Authority Over The FLESH**

"Put to death (mortify) whatever belongs to your earthly nature."
(Colossians 3:5)

* **Exercise Authority Over The DEVIL**

"Resist the devil and he will flee from you."
(James 4:7)

Point To Ponder ...

If we really have the **POWER** to do these things,
why are they not more universally **DONE?**

"TRUTH AND TESTIMONY"

'Grace Is The Key' Series

(Ephesians 2:1-10)

Intro ... Today in preparation for communion, I'm going to introduce to you the next two of our **Key 'Escort Verses'** that are leading us into and through Paul's Epistle to the Ephesian Church ...

These verses (dual verses each) are going to lead us into and through the Third Key Section of this great New Testament Book (Ephesians 2:1-10) ...

Here they are:

ESCORT VERSES #3 ...

*"Because of His great **LOVE** for us,
God, who is rich in **MERCY**, made us **ALIVE** in Christ
even when we were **DEAD** in transgressions ..."*
(Ephesians 2:4-5)

And a little further on in the section –

ESCORT VERSES #4 ...

*"For it is by **GRACE** you have been **SAVED** through **FAITH** –
and this not of yourselves, it is the **GIFT** of God –
not by **WORKS**, so that no one can **BOAST**."*
(Ephesians 2:8-9)

These are two (four actually) of the most significant verses in the New Testament – they are verses that we will do well to have memorized – they open up this key section of thought ...

Today by way of introduction let me point out that in this section of thought (Ephesians 2:1-10), we are going to ...

1. ENCOUNTER SOME OF THE MOST PROFOUND TRUTHS OF THE SCRIPTURE

* The Truth of SPIRITUAL Death ...

What does that term really mean and **who** experiences it and **when** does it actually occur?

* The Truth of SATANIC Authority ...

What authority does Satan possess and where and when does he exercise it?

* The Truth of FLESHLY Domination ...

What is the 'flesh' and how does it dominate and why is it so difficult to overcome?

* The Truth of GOD'S Wrath ...

Is the God of the New Testament an 'Angry God' or was that only in 'Old Testament Days'? Aren't love and anger actually incompatible emotions – doesn't the one squelch the other?

* The Truth of HUMAN Regeneration ...

Does God actually provide a 'do-over' for those who come to Him?
Is there such a thing as a 'fresh start' – an actual spiritual 're-creation' of our lives?
How extensive is it and how exactly is it done?

* The Truth of GOD'S Grace ...

Is Grace 'God opening the door and me deciding to walk through it' or is grace more than that? Does grace come alone or is it packaged with other spiritual qualities and realities?

Paul's prayer for enlightenment – that God would grant us 'a spirit of wisdom and revelation' – is going to need to be answered as we plunge into these verses over the next several weeks for in this section of thought we are going to encounter and seek to wrap our minds around some of the most profound truths of the Scripture.

But **secondly** in this third great section of thought in this letter of Paul's to the Ephesians we are going to ...

2. IDENTIFY THE ESSENTIAL TESTIMONY OF ALL TRUE BELIEVERS

We're going to discover the **form** that that testimony should take and the **content** that that testimony should contain ...

This morning let me just point out the '**Form**' that that testimony should take ...

Three Parts:

*** What We WERE Before We Were SAVED**

This content of this part of our testimony is both theological and historical – the theological part is the same for every believer whereas the historical part is unique to every believer.

*** What God DID To Get Us SAVED**

This part of a believer's testimony also has both a theological and a historical component – understanding the theological as well as remembering the historical are absolutely necessary if we would share (what I'm calling) the ...

'Essential Testimony of a True Believer' –

A testimony that contains the essence of the Gospel's Truth.

*** What We Have BECOME As A Result Of Being SAVED**

This part of the testimony is frequently overlooked in our day today.

This passage in Ephesians spells out clearly the purposes and the expectations of the Father as he grants us Spiritual Life.

God has a plan in mind – our salvation is but the beginning –
Our testimony needs to include the story of how that
Plan of God is working itself out in our lives.

This is a potent passage of Scripture ... perhaps there is as much packed into and suggested by it as any other 10 verses found anywhere.

Read it this week ... Read it numerous times ...

Take the outline that we just completed (the list of topics) and seek to fill in some of the content yourself. Seek to flesh out your own testimony in light of what you find in these verses.

And as you do so reflect upon today's ***Final Thot*** ...

Final Thot ...

TRUTH and **TESTIMONY** should go hand in hand ...
When they don't, we either get **LIGHT** w/o **HEAT** or **HEAT** w/o **LIGHT**.

Our Ultimate Confession:

*"My Mind's **ENLIGHTENED** and my Heart's on **FIRE!**"*

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REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Twelve"

Sunday Pastor Mark identified **Six Spiritual Truths** that will be 'touched on' in the next main section of our Ephesian Study (Chapter 2:1-10). Take time to read that passage right now ...

Read the list and share which of the 'questions' you particularly want to hear some answers to. **Score** them 1-6 (1 being your top interest) ...

___ The Truth of **SPIRITUAL** Death – What does that term really mean and who experiences it and when does it actually occur?

___ The Truth of **SATANIC** Authority – What authority does Satan possess and where and when does he exercise it?

___ The Truth of **FLESHLY** Domination – What is the 'flesh' and how does it dominate and why is it so difficult to overcome?

___ The Truth of **GOD'S** Wrath – Is the God of the New Testament an 'Angry God' or was that only in 'Old Testament Days'? Aren't love and anger actually incompatible emotions – doesn't the one squelch out the other?

___ The Truth of **HUMAN** Regeneration – Does God actually provide a 'do-over' for those who come to Him? Is there such a thing as a 'fresh start' – an actual spiritual 're-creation' of our lives? How extensive is it and how exactly is it done?

___ The Truth of **GOD'S** Grace – Is Grace 'God opening the door and me deciding to walk through it' or is grace more than that? Does grace come alone or is it packaged with other spiritual qualities and realities?

Pastor Mark also shared the three 'Essential Elements' of a 'True Believer's Testimony' ...

What I **WAS** Before I Got **SAVED**

What God **DID** To Get Me **SAVED**

What I Have **BECOME** As A Result Of Being **SAVED**

Have you ever been asked to share your 'complete' testimony?
Have you ever 'thought yourself through it'?

Point to Ponder ...

Which is more possible to possess: **HEAT** without **LIGHT** or **LIGHT** without **HEAT**?

"DEAD MEN WALKING"

'Grace Is The Key' Series
(Ephesians 2:1)

Intro ... Last week we opened the door (as it were) into the third great section of thought in Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians – Chapter 2:1-10.

We identified the two 'verses' that will '**Escort Us**' into and through this significant section ...

*"Because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,
made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in transgressions ..."*
(Ephesians 2:4-5)

*"For it is by grace that you have been saved through faith – and this not
of yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast."*
(Ephesians 2:8-9)

I pointed out last week that in this particular section we will encounter some of the most Profound Truths of the Scripture (6 to be exact) ... truths that we absolutely need to know as 'Followers of Jesus Christ'.

Here's the First of the Six with the questions that I posed last week ...

PROFOUND SPIRITUAL TRUTH #1 ...

The Truth of SPIRITUAL Death – WHAT does that term
really mean and WHO experiences it and
WHEN does it actually occur?

In the very first verse of the passage, Paul introduces us to this critical truth.
Check it out ...

Today's Key Verse ...

"As for you, you were DEAD in your transgression and sins ..."
(Ephesians 2:1)

So what does that term really mean? What does it mean to say that someone is *Spiritually Dead*? What did Paul mean when he said that those believers in Ephesus used to be '*dead in their transgressions and sins*'?

Well ... In answer to that question, consider with me first of all what it means to be '**Truly Alive**' and for that we need to go all the way back to the beginning of time.

Please turn in your Bibles to Genesis chapter two.

Let's take a good look at ...

LIFE AS GOD CREATED IT ...

*"The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground
and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,
and the man became a **LIVING BEING**."
(Genesis 2:7)*

MAN BECAME A LIVING BEING ...

*** A PHYSICALLY – ALIVE BEING**

*(Completely capable of carrying out God's **WILL** and doing God's **WORK** in the **WORLD**)
(Genesis 2:15)*

*'The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden
to work it and take care of it.'*

God gave Adam a physical task to do and Adam was completely capable of doing it. He probably '*talked to the plants*' as though they were capable of understanding. What a delight it must have been to care for the animals – to call them all by name and have them run or bound or trot or leap or even scurry into his presence. Adam was a '*physically-alive being*'.

*** A SPIRITUALLY – ALIVE BEING**

*(In tune with God's **GREATNESS** – filled with and capable of expressing
God-Honoring **WORSHIP**) – Genesis 2:19*

*'Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and
all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them;
and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.'*

Of all men who ever lived would not Adam have been the most able to '*put two and two together*' and come to the conclusion that he was the beneficiary and the friend of a most awesome God!

No dedicated, compassionate zoo-keeper has ever experienced the wonder of God's animal creation as Adam did. No human being was ever able to more accurately link the wondrous creation with its wondrous Creator. Worship must have been in the air continually! Adam was a 'spiritually-alive being'.

*** AN EMOTIONALLY – ALIVE BEING**

(In tune with God's **HEART** – filled with and capable of expressing God-Honoring **EMOTION**) - Genesis 2:23

'The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman' for she was taken out of man."

You don't have to read too much '*between the lines*' – you don't have to '*activate your imagination*' too much to hear and feel the depth of emotion being expressed here.

God had allowed Adam to sense his uniqueness among all the other life that filled the earth and then he had prepared for Adam '*another like himself*' ... another '**human**' being with whom he could share his life.

The strings of Adam's heart were plucked and the emotions of joy and delight and wonder and gratitude filled the air with their harmonies. Adam was an 'emotionally-alive being'.

*** AN INTELLECTUALLY –ALIVE BEING**

(In tune with God's **MIND** – filled with and capable of reflecting upon God-Honoring **THOUGHTS**) – Genesis 3:2-3

'The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

Man was created capable of hearing and understanding and remembering and reflecting upon God's truth – man's mind was what placed him '*above the glorious animal kingdom*' and but a '*little lower than the angels*'. Adam (and Eve) were 'intellectually-alive beings'.

In a word or phrase we could say that Adam and Eve were '*fully functional*' human beings and that they (for a time) '*functioned fully*' **as** human beings. Life as God created it was an awesome and wonderful thing.

Consider now ...

LIFE AS SIN PERVERTED IT...

*"**SIN** entered into the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way **DEATH** came to all men ...
(Romans 5:12)*

*Genesis 3:13 ... God said to the woman, 'What is this you have done?'
What indeed!*

Only God fully understood the consequences of their actions.

MAN BECAME A DEAD AND DYING BEING ...

(No longer either fully functional or fully functioning.)

They became depraved versions of themselves – the harshest indictment of fallen man found anywhere in the Scripture is found in Romans 1:31 verse ...

"They are (have become) senseless, faithless, heartless and ruthless."

SENSELESS (Intellectually Dead); **FAITHLESS** (Spiritually Dead)
HEARTLESS and **RUTHLESS** (Emotionally Dead) and eventually,
of course, they would be **BREATHLESS** (Physically Dead)

No wonder Paul would so bluntly say to those First Century Ephesian Believers ...

"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins."

Indeed they had been! That's the natural condition of all of us who are born upon the earth. From the moment of our birth we are really no more than ...

"DEAD MEN WALKING".

And of course, there is even coming on that day of final judgment that the Apostle John spoke of in Revelation 20 yet one more outcome of '***Spiritual Death***' ...

It's what John called the '**SECOND DEATH**' or '**ETERNAL DEATH**'.

*"The lake of fire is the **SECOND DEATH**. If anyone's name was not found in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."
(Revelation 20:14-15)*

TODAY'S KEY CONCEPT #1 ...

Until we come to **GRIPS** with the **TRUTH** of Spiritual Death
We can make no **PROGRESS** toward Spiritual Life.

Jesus came into this world in His Day and through His Church He comes into the world in our day saying ...

*"I have come that they might have life and have it abundantly."
(John 10:10)*

In other words ...

'I can solve your problem of Spiritual Death by providing you with Spiritual Life. All you have to do is acknowledge the reality of your spiritual deadness and turn to me for salvation'...

But the sad truth is ... most people respond by saying one way or another:

*"No thanks – I'm already alive – I'm doing just fine.
Go help someone who actually needs it.'*

But the truth is ... **They aren't.**

A most **sad reality of life** in this fallen world is that most people don't **ever** 'Come To Grips' with that basic truth and much too late they come face to face with the even sadder reality expressed in ...

TODAY'S KEY CONCEPT #2 ...

Those who are **SPIRITUALLY DEAD** simply cannot **LIVE** the **LIFE** that God **DESIRES** and **REQUIRES** and **ACKNOWLEDGES** and **COMMENDS**.

God **desires** that human beings live life as He originally designed it to be lived.

God **requires** that human beings live that kind of life (that they somehow meet that standard of living) if they would be granted entrance into heaven.

God **acknowledges** proudly those human beings who do in fact live that kind of life (beginning with His Own Son) and God will one day **commend** all those who have lived such a life with these most sought after words ...

'Well Done, Good and Faithful Servant, enter into the joy of your Lord'.

Those who are '*Spiritually Dead*' do not have a prayer of living such a life! They are completely incapable of functioning in this God-Honoring, God-Requiring way for sin has disabled them and their failure to function has disqualified them for any heavenly blessing.

It was no casual use of words and no insignificant statement when Paul said to the Ephesian Believers ...

"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins".

Now lest there be any misunderstanding, let me make it clear what I am saying this morning ...

*** All UNSAVED Persons Are Spiritually Dead**

(Trapped in transgressions and sins and missing the blessings that Christ would bring into their lives.)

As Paul will point out just a few verses farther on, all unsaved people are:

'Separate from Christ, excluded from Citizenship in Israel, foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.'
(Ephesians 2:12)

That is a terrible spot to be in ... that's another way of describing what it means to be '*Spiritually Dead*'.

That's what all of us Gentiles at one time were ...

That's an important part of our Testimony and an absolutely essential part of our Gospel Witness.

Just one last thing as we close this discussion – It's a distressing thing but a necessary thing for there may be some here this morning experiencing the reality of it.

* **Sometimes The SAVED Can Still Seem More DEAD than ALIVE**

They have been forgiven of sins by the gracious action of God and they have been 'born-again by faith' into His Family but the new life doesn't seem to have taken a solid hold on them; there is little vigor or vitality in Christian Living; they too are missing out on many of the blessings that Christ would bring into their lives.

They seem to be still following the old patterns and thinking the old thoughts and doing the old things.

As someone said to me just this past week ...

"I was saved but I hadn't really been 'born-again'.

I would probably just modify that statement a bit to say,

'Though I was born-again, my apgar score was low and 'I stayed in the incubator' for a long time – my new life took quite a while to get going.'

Then there are others who might confess that they used to be a whole lot more 'spiritually alive' than they presently are.

They feel like some of the characteristics of 'spiritual death' are being demonstrated all over again. This is not good – this leads to frustration and temptation.

Now some of the other '**Key Truths**' in this passage will address these issues but suffice it today to point out as does our **final thot** that ...

Final Thot ...

Spiritual **DEATH** is basically the **ABSENCE** of spiritual **LIFE**.
Those who **HOLD FAST** to Christ **HOLD FAST** to Life!

If you're **not** saved, **TAKE** hold of Christ;
if you **are** saved, **KEEP** hold of Him!

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REFLECTIONS

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Thirteen"

This past Sunday Pastor Mark zeroed in on the first of the six 'Spiritual Truths' that are tucked away in the first ten verses of Ephesians chapter two ...

"The Truth of **SPIRITUAL DEATH**"

He titled the message: "**DEAD MEN WALKING**" ... What does that title suggest to you – Is that an accurate description of unsaved human beings? What do you think?

Here were the two **Key Concepts** shared in Sunday's message:

KEY CONCEPT ONE ...

Until we come to **GRIPS** with the **TRUTH** of Spiritual Death
We can make no **PROGRESS** toward Spiritual Life.

KEY CONCEPT TWO ...

Those who are **SPIRITUAL DEAD** simply cannot **LIVE** the **LIFE** that
God **DESIRES** and **REQUIRES** and **ACKNOWLEDGES** and **COMMENDS**.

Do you agree with these two concepts ... How widely held would you believe them to be? Can you see yourself explaining to someone what the Bible teaches about man's 'natural' condition? Do you really believe that man is doomed apart from Spiritual Birth?

Reflect upon this observation shared Sunday ...

God **desires** that human beings live life as He originally designed it to be lived. God **requires** that human beings live that kind of life (that they somehow meet that standard of living) if they would be granted entrance into heaven. God **acknowledges** proudly those human beings who do in fact live that kind of life (beginning with His Own Son) and God will one day **commend** all those who have lived such a life with those most sought after words ...

'Well Done, Good and Faithful Servant, enter into the joy of your Lord'.

And upon this one ...

* **Sometimes The SAVED Can Still Seem More DEAD than ALIVE**

They have been forgiven of sins by the gracious action of God and they have been 'born-again by faith' into His Family but the new life doesn't seem to have taken a solid hold on them; there is little vigor or vitality in Christian Living; they too are missing out on many of the blessings that Christ would bring into their lives. They seem to be still following the old patterns and thinking the old thoughts and engaging in the old behaviors.

Would you agree that that's a possibility? What would cause such a situation to exist?

Point to Ponder ...

Can it help to regularly say ...
"**BEFORE I TRUSTED** Christ, I was just a Dead Man Walking"?
What do you think?

“THAT ‘OTHER’ RULER – THAT ‘OTHER’ KINGDOM”

‘Grace Is The Key’ Series
(Ephesians 2:1-2)

Intro ... Last week we began our examination of the third great section of thought in the Apostle Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians – a section that we said ‘touches on six profound spiritual truths’.

Here’s how the entire section reads.
Let’s look at it together.

The first two verses form our focus of the morning ...

Today’s Key Scripture ... Ephesians 2:1-10

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

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

Six profound spiritual truths are touched upon in that incredible rush of Paul’s thought.

Last week we examined ...

PROFOUND SPIRITUAL TRUTH #1 ...

The Truth of **SPIRITUAL** Death – **WHAT** does that term really mean and **WHO** experiences it and **WHEN** does it actually occur?

“*Spiritual Death*” is the natural condition of unsaved human beings – though they appear to be alive and functioning they are in fact ‘*dead as doornails*’ in God’s eyes. There is nothing that God desires or requires of man that they are capable of doing. They are in a desperate condition – they are (to use Paul’s language) ‘*dead in transgressions and sins*’. Every aspect of their lives has been affected by sin – they need to be saved!

Today we take a look at ...

PROFOUND SPIRITUAL TRUTH #2 ...

“The Truth of **SATAN’S AUTHORITY**”

WHAT authority does Satan possess and **WHERE** and **WHEN** does he exercise it?

That there is a Devil – Satan or Lucifer – is a fundamental teaching of the Scripture. It was the devil who led Adam and Eve into sin in the Garden. He has been in existence for a long time. It’s essential that we have at least a basic understanding of His authority and how he seeks to exercise it.

Now let me say as we begin today ... there is coming an extended passage in Ephesians chapter six where Paul explains in great length how we as believers can ‘*stand against attacks of the devil*’ and where we will discuss in some detail how those ‘*attacks*’ come.

Today we seek to take a more general approach to the subject – mostly limiting ourselves to the text that is right in front of us this morning. And as we do so, note with me the ...

THREE KEY INSIGHTS ARISING FROM THIS PASSAGE ...

1. SATAN IS A RULER ... He has a KINGDOM

"The Ruler of the Kingdom of the Air" (NIV)

"The Prince of the Power of the Air" (KJV)

That's a most interesting description, isn't it? Let me tell you right off the bat that most Bible Scholars are not at all sure (let alone in agreement about) what that designation means – it's really only found here in this passage.

"Prince of the Power of the Air" - that has a real ring to it, doesn't it?

Years ago when televisions were first coming out, there were cautious Christians who determined that they would never own one because those TV signals were sent *'through the air'* and that was Satan's realm. What good could possibly come of such a system of communication?

It's as though they imagined that every Television Broadcast Company would be negotiating its own special *'Deal with the Devil'*. The Broadcast Company would get permission to use his *'airwaves'* and in return they would agree to produce at least a certain amount of programming that would aid in *'undermining the Cause of Christ in the world'*.

This programming would expose Christ's People to sinful things that they would not ever otherwise see; this programming would create in people urges and passions that they might otherwise never feel; this programming would so fill people's lives that other more *'Godly pursuits'* would be laid aside. Why this programming might even cause Church Attendance to dip as Christians stayed home to watch important athletic events.

Can you believe that Christians way back in the days when Television was being birthed would actually think such things? Some people are just natural *'agginers'*. I'm glad that television didn't turn out to be used in any of those ways, aren't you?

"Prince of the Power of the Air ... Ruler of the Kingdom of the Air."

Here would be my *'take'* ...

Heaven obviously belongs to the Lord. (Satan has no authority there, though he at times is allowed entrance.)

The Bible tells us in Psalm 24:1 that the '**Earth**' is the Lord's

(Satan has no ultimate authority there though he is granted freedom of movement upon it – Job 1:6 ... *'I've been roaming through the earth'*)

Hell – the Lake of Fire – is his ultimate destination and judgment – Jesus said in Matthew 25:41 that it was created for and is presently being '*reserved for*' the devil and his angels. Hell is not his address yet and will not be his kingdom when he is finally '*thrown into it*'. There is no Lord in Hell ... only condemned beings.

So what's left ... "**The Air**" - the realm that surrounds the earth ... here Satan can apparently freely move and have his being – Here he exercises control over all his demonic hosts; here he dwells as the spirit being that he is.

Here he schemes and plans but there '*in the air*' there is no resting place for his feet – no real '*kingdom*' or '*splendor*'. He dwells in limbo and rules actually over nothing! But he carries a title and in this passage, Paul reveals it ...

"He is the Ruler of the Kingdom of the Air"

He actually is "**The Lord of the Nothing**"!

Now that's '**My Take**' on it.

So Satan is a RULER ... He has a KINGDOM (such as it is).

Here now is a **second insight** that arises from this passage ...

2. SATAN IS A RULER ... He has a SYSTEM

"Followed the ways of" (NIV)

"Walked according to the course of" (KJV)

From his '*Fortress in the Sky*' and from the '*Deep recesses in his Heart*' Satan has developed a System of Opposition to the Will and Ways of God.

Paul says that the Ephesians used to '*follow the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air*' ...

Satan has '**ways**' ... Satan has '**practices**' that unbelievers just naturally follow for they are designed to dovetail perfectly with what Paul calls in this very passage '*the cravings of our sinful nature*' (that's next Sunday).

Satan found an entire segment of the heavenly hosts that were willing to follow his '**ways of rebellion**' ...

Satan found **Eve** open to his suggestion that '*a better life could be found than the one that God had provided for her and Adam*'. And since sin entered into the world and into the DNA of every single human being, Satan has found it easier than ever to get mankind to '*walk in those ways of rebellion*' rather than in the '*ways of obedience*'.

Satan has a system and he has stuck to it throughout the centuries.

Paul said to the Corinthian Believers (speaking of Satan) ...

"We are not unaware of His Schemes"
(2 Corinthians 2:11)

Here are two of the most prominent of those 'schemes'.

Satan employs ...

DECEPTION: "*Blinded the **MINDS** of unbelievers*"
(2 Corinthians 4:4)

Here's the full verse:

"The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

Deception is Satan's stock in trade ...

He deceives; he misrepresents; he partially reports; he falsely promises ... And he certainly seeks the biggest bang for his buck ... Why try to personally deceive millions when you can deceive one who will in turn deceive millions.

There are many men (and women) who over the centuries have spoken or written with the very language of the devil flowing from their mouth or pen.

Topics like racial superiority, like evolutionary philosophy, like atheistic society, like materialistic prosperity ... these all have sprung from his mind and received his applause and as a result millions have been led down that broad path that Jesus said '*leads to destruction*'.

And that by the way is the other scheme he employs ...

DESTRUCTION: "Looking for someone to **DEVOUR**"
(1 Peter 5:8)

Once again here's the full verse:

*"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil
prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."*

Destruction is Satan's ultimate goal ... Destruction of a believer's faith; destruction of a believer's confidence; destruction of a believer's testimony; destruction of the believer's usefulness to Christ. He would make every believer an embarrassment to Christ, if he could.

So Satan is indeed a RULER – He has a SYSTEM (by which he operates).

Here now is the ***third*** and final **insight** that arises from this passage ...

3. SATAN IS A RULER ... He has SUBJECTS

*"All those who are disobedient" (NIV)
"The Sons of Disobedience" (KJV)*

Paul identifies the '*ruler of the kingdom of the air*' as the '*spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient*'.

Disobedience is the devil's middle name ... Disobedience is what got him thrown out of heaven in the first place. Disobedience is what he deceived Eve into practicing.

When push comes to shove – there is nothing more offensive to God than willful disobedience. Willful disobedience challenges God's authority; willful disobedience seeks to establish its own autonomy.

Paul says that those who '*practice such willful disobedience*' are under the jurisdiction of the devil – He is the spirit that they are following and by whom they are being influenced.

In their disobedient actions, they show themselves to be '*subjects of his kingdom*' – operating under His Authority!

There's no two ways around it – there's no middle ground here. Either we are living our lives under God's Authority or we are living our lives under Satan's Authority.

Now that's a sobering thought ...

You see there are no '*casual disobediences*' – there are no '*days off*' – there are no moments when what we do '*doesn't really matter*' ...

There is a real devil out there and his spirit permeates this world of ours and our lives at any given moment are susceptible to being influenced by that spirit and brought under its authority.

So let's get right to ...

Today's Key Concept ...

The only **ESCAPE** from Satanic **AUTHORITY** is **OBEDIENCE** to the **WILL** and **WAYS** of **GOD!**

'RESIST the devil and he will **FLEE** from you' (James 4:7)

That's what the Bible says and that's what I count on ...
Resist him once you recognize him ... Perhaps our lesson today will help with your recognition. Refuse to violate the clear teachings of Scripture!

'THEN the devil left him' (Matthew 4:11)

That's what Jesus did ... He placed himself under the Word of God and its authority and thus turned aside every temptation that Satan presented.

Final Thought ...

Though unbelievers are **ALWAYS** under Satan's Authority, **BELIEVERS** put themselves under His Authority every time they **DISOBEY**.

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REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Fourteen"

Sunday's Message focused upon ...

"THE TRUTH OF SATAN'S AUTHORITY"

Here was Sunday's Key Scripture ...

'As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.'

What catches your eye as you read those two verses?

Here are three 'D's' that highlighted Sunday's discussion and a **key statement** concerning each – Pick one and comment ...

* **DECEPTION**

"Deception is Satan's stock in trade ... He deceives; he misrepresents;
he partially reports; he falsely promises ..."

* **DESTRUCTION** ...

"Destruction is Satan's ultimate goal ... Destruction of a believer's faith;
destruction of a believer's confidence; destruction of a believer's testimony;
destruction of the believer's usefulness to Christ. He would make
every believer an embarrassment to Christ, if he could."

* **DISOBEDIENCE** ...

Disobedience is the devil's middle name ... Disobedience is what got him thrown out of heaven in the first place. Disobedience is what he deceived Eve into practicing.

When push comes to shove – there is nothing more offensive to God than
willful disobedience. Willful disobedience challenges God's authority;
willful disobedience seeks to establish its own autonomy.

What was your '**Response**' to Sunday's **Final Thot**?

"Though unbelievers are **ALWAYS** under Satan's Authority,
BELIEVERS put themselves under His Authority every time they **DISOBEY**."

Points To Ponder ...

Does the **ABSENCE** of Biblical teaching about Satan
reflect that he is **WINNING** or **LOSING** the Battle?

“WHEN THE ENEMY IS ‘ME!’”

‘Grace Is The Key’ Series
(Ephesians 2:3a)

Intro ... Six profound spiritual truths have grabbed our attention as we have entered into the third great section of thought in Paul’s incredible letter to the Ephesians – specifically Ephesians 2:1-10.

So far we have examined **Two** of the **Six** ...

The Truth of Spiritual Death and **The Truth of Satanic Authority**

Profound Truths both ... We need to have a clear understanding of both. Here now is ...

Today’s Focus Passage ... Ephesians 2:3a

*All of us also lived among them (the disobedient) at one time, gratifying the **CRAVINGS** of our **SINFUL NATURE** and following its **DESIRES** and **THOUGHTS**.*

In this passage is discovered ...

PROFOUND SPIRITUAL TRUTH #3 ...

*“The Truth of **FLESHLY DOMINATION**”*

WHAT is the ‘flesh’ and **HOW** does it dominate and
WHY is it so difficult to overcome?

Three incredibly important questions ...

Let’s consider the first one first and see if our answer doesn’t address the other two as well.

SO WHAT IS MY ‘SINFUL NATURE’(My Flesh)?

*** The ORIGINAL (FALLEN) ‘ME’**

To use two familiar expressions that I use frequently to express it ...

My sinful nature – the original (fallen) me is ...

‘**Me**’ with all my original **FACTORY EQUIPMENT** installed ...

‘**Me**’ with all my original Human **DEFAULT SETTINGS** operating.

Those descriptions arise from the world around us – the world with which we are most familiar ...

Every automobile (unless it is specially ordered) comes with certain 'standard - factory installed - equipment'. When you walk on the dealer's lot, generally what you see is what you get. If what the car 'came with is what you like' then you buy it. If what the car came with is unacceptable, then generally the salesman shows you another one.

Similarly when you buy a computer, it comes from the factory with certain default settings – its factory-prescribed way of operating. There's usually a default language, a default security setting, a default screen resolution, a default web browser and so on. That's why you can generally just hook it up and plug it in and start 'computing'.

The point we are making this morning is each of us came from the factory (as it were) with certain factory installed 'standard equipment' ... with certain 'default settings' already determining how we will function once we are '*taken out of the box and plugged in*'.

And so each of us can ask ...

WHAT ARE MY BASIC 'DEFAULT SETTINGS'?

(My original fallen 'Perspectives' on life)

There are two main ones, I believe, and here they are:

INDEPENDENCE and INDULGENCE

(Genesis 3:6; Romans 8:7; Ephesians 4:19)

They have characterized '*fallen man*' from the very beginning and they have continued to characterize man in his natural (fallen) state ever since ...

Check out these scriptures:

"And when the woman **saw** (formed her own independent judgment) *that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye and also desirable for gaining wisdom, **she took some and ate it*** (she indulged herself)." (Genesis 3:6)

"The sinful mind (man's natural, fallen condition) is hostile to God.
It does not submit to God's law, (it is independent)
nor can it do so (it is unwilling and even unable)." (Romans 8:7)

"They have given themselves over to sensuality so as to **indulge** (there's our word – Paul himself chose it) *in every kind of impurity ...*" (Ephesians 4:19)

So the 'flesh' – man's original fallen nature – is characterized by the **twin perspectives** of **Independence** and **Indulgence** – that's what the flesh is like.

NOW HOW DOES THE FLESH DOMINATE?

(Though powerful **CRAVINGS** created by **DESIRES** and **THOUGHTS**)

Those are the three terms that Paul himself employed in today's focus passage. Remember how he used them ...

*"All of us also lived among them (the disobedient) at one time, gratifying the **CRAVINGS** of our sinful nature and following its **DESIRES** and **THOUGHTS**."*

Let's just work our way through this verse.

Here's how I would break it down based upon our previous discussion.

I would say that the flesh seeks to dominate through the stirring up of two commanding (dictating) desires which give rise to two defining (influencing) thoughts which in turn generate one relentless (compelling) craving ...

Desires - Thoughts - Craving

First then ...

*** TWO COMMANDING DESIRES ...**
"POWER and PLEASURE"

Those are the commanding desires that are stirred up by man's fallen sinful nature and those two commanding desires give rise to these two life-defining thoughts...

*** TWO DEFINING THOUGHTS ...**

* *"I am the **ONE** in **CHARGE**" – that's the desire for **power** talking.*

"I not only desire power, I will claim power – I will declare myself to be 'the one in charge'. No one is going to tell me what to do."

Every baby comes into the world feeling that they are 'in charge' and even though they soon discover that they are not, the desire does not just go away; they simply bide their time. They do 'take charge' whenever they can. Teenagers sometimes become quite adept at this.

Here's the **second** of those two defining thoughts ...

* "I will **DEPRIVE** myself **NOTHING**" – that's the desire for **pleasure** talking.

"I will not only 'desire pleasure' I will actively seek pleasure and embrace pleasure wherever it can be found. There is no reason to deny myself anything that I determine to be in my own best interest. There is no reason to ever 'restrain' or 'restrict' myself from anything I deem desirable."

Again, it's pretty easy to identify these thoughts as part of our 'original equipment' ...

Again, every baby comes into the world with this very mentality. Satisfying needs – aggressively demanding that needs be met – comes pretty naturally to fallen man.

And so, man's 'fallen' sinful nature – the ***flesh*** – stirs up those two commanding **desires** which in turn give rise to these two defining **thoughts** which then join together in generating one demanding **craving** – one ultimately controlling purpose/passion for living and

HERE IT IS ...

* **ONE DEMANDING CRAVING – One PURPOSE for Living**
"SELF-GRATIFICATION"

'I will gain power – I will experience pleasure.'

Here is the 'Fallen Man's Version of the Purpose-Driven Life' ...

"The Ultimate Purpose Of Life Is To Gratify Yourself"

There are versions of that book on the bookshelves of every bookstore.

That's a bit different from the Christian Version of the Purpose-Driven Life that Pastor Rick Warren wrote in which he identified the Purpose of Life – the Passion that should motivate all believers to throw themselves exuberantly into life as ... **"GOD GLORIFICATION"** ...

"GOD GLORIFICATION" – living so as to ***Glorify God*** or
"SELF GRATIFICATION" – living so as to ***Gratify Self***

However, ***SELF-GRATIFICATION*** is what the Bible would indicate is fallen man's normal and natural purpose in living – the thing he craves above all.

Even those who seem to live for others are actually simply fulfilling the view of themselves that they find most satisfying. They fall into the category of those to whom the Lord said ...

*"Your righteous deeds are like filthy rags" ...
they are done to satisfy yourself not glorify me!
(Isaiah 64:6)*

And so now we come to ...

TODAY'S KEY CONCEPT ...

*Just as all **UNBELIEVERS** live their lives under the **AUTHORITY** of **SATAN**,
so also do all unbelievers live their lives under the **DOMINATION** of their
SINFUL NATURE (the 'flesh').*

They can live no other way – That's who they are!

They are 'fallen creatures' and they come from a 'different factory' than did Adam and Eve.

Their 'factory equipment' is installed at birth – their 'default settings' are locked in and they function throughout their lives as the self-serving, fallen creatures that they are. Rarely are they even aware that they are dominated by these desires, thoughts and cravings.

But what about those who are '**Born-Again**' ... don't they receive 'new settings' – don't they receive 'special options' in place of their 'factory equipment'.

Didn't Paul testify of something to that effect when he spoke of the Ephesians in this our current passage?

Let's hear it again ...

*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live
when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air,
the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.*

*All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings
of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts."*

So things had changed for the Ephesian Saints ...

Though they '*used to live in transgressions and sins*' and though they '*lived among the disobedient at one time*' ... they no longer did.

That testimony statement triggers a whole host of questions in my mind – one main one and then several follow-ups ...

TODAY'S KEY QUESTIONS ...

* Does Salvation **END** the Domination of the Sinful Nature?

(And if it does why do I still struggle with desires to
'satisfy myself' rather than to 'glorify God?')

* Does the Sinful Nature ever **YIELD** to God?

(Will the day come when my 'old nature' will give in and decide to go God's way?)

* Does God **CONVERT** the sinful nature and turn it into a **NEW** nature?

(That seems to make sense – conversion ought to affect all of me, shouldn't it?)

* Does the sinful nature then **GROW** in **GRACE** and increasingly
become a **CHRIST**-Following, **GOD**-Honoring Nature?

(Well if it's converted and if it is exposed to God's Grace, then it seems that it should.)

So does it or doesn't it ... Does Salvation end the domination of the sinful, fallen human nature or doesn't it? Does the old nature learn how to submit and surrender – Is the old nature captivated by Christ and does it start conforming to Christ from the moment of Spiritual Birth?

Well ...

Consider an **AUTOMOTIVE ANALOGY** demonstrating a Spiritual **REALITY**
(Romans 7:21)

Let me ask you (to use this automotive analogy) ...

Have you ever seen a severely under-powered, poorly designed four cylinder engine that's been installed as factory equipment (an engine in the kind of car you would take your life in your hands every time you had to merge into fast-flowing freeway traffic) miraculously turn into a super-powered, turbo-charged V-8 version of itself? Of course you haven't!

Factory Equipment is what it is, isn't it? If you want the increased power, if you want a different result when you head onto the freeway, you have to 'replace the factory installed engine with a totally different one'.

Now that's kind of what God has done for us at salvation. However he did it with a twist – a twist that keeps things most interesting and that demands from us continual awareness.

To continue our '*automotive analogy*' let me express it this way ...

At salvation, God installs a brand-new powerful V-8 engine (spiritually speaking) in the engine compartment right beside the old under-powered, poorly designed four cylinder factory installed one.

He hooks the new one up but he doesn't unhook the old one. Instead he installs a kind of '*toggle switch*' on the dashboard. Every time the driver gets into the car he can decide which engine he will use to power his ride – the old impotent one or the new powerful one.

Now the truth is, he's far more comfortable with the old one than he is with the new ... the old has a familiar feel while the new is completely unknown and maybe even a bit scary.

Here now is that ***spiritual reality*** demonstrated by this automotive analogy. It comes from Romans 7:21 ... I've amplified and '*analogized*' it:

"So I find this law (this principle) at work: When I want to do good, (fire up the V-8 and speed down the path of righteousness outrunning everything that would challenge me) evil (the old impotent 4 cylinder that doesn't have nearly enough power to get me down that righteous path) is right there with me."

Paul could agree with long-ago observation made by the cartoon character Pogo ...

"We have seen the enemy and they is us".

In contrast to the ***Devil*** who attacks from the outside and can be easily viewed as an 'outsider' the ***flesh*** attacks us from within where it has always been and will always be – ***My enemy is me*** – the old, unsaved, un-yielded, un-converted version of me – but ***me*** nonetheless.

The flesh no longer ***dominates*** but at times it can seem so familiar that I follow its lead without even knowing what I am doing.

And other times I don't seem to be able to find the toggle switch (I can't get it switched off) and still other times I don't even look for that switch (I fall back into familiar, comfortable '*fleshly living*'). It's an on-going battle!

Final Thot ...

FLESH-POWERED or SPIRIT-POWERED is a believer's CONTINUAL CHOICE!

That's why the flesh is so DIFFICULT to overcome ...

It NEVER gives up or GOES AWAY!

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REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Fifteen"

This week we have 'Profound Spiritual Truth' to reflect upon ...
"The Truth of **FLESHLY** Domination".

A (hopefully) memorable image conveyed the essential truth of this message:

The **TOGGLE SWITCH!**

What spiritual truths does this 'image' bring back to your mind?

Here are some **key statements** from those messages ... read and reflect.
(Circle or underline words or phrases in each that you strike you as important)

1. The point we are making this morning is each of us came from the factory (as it were) with certain factory installed 'standard equipment' ... with certain 'default settings' already determining how we would function once we were 'taken out of the box and plugged in'.
2. At salvation, God installs a brand-new powerful V-8 engine (spiritually speaking) in the engine compartment right beside the old under-powered, poorly designed Four Cylinder. He hooks the new one up but he doesn't unhook the old one.
Instead he installs a kind of 'toggle switch' on the dashboard.
3. Every time the driver gets into the car he can decide which engine he will use to power his ride – the old impotent one or the new powerful one.
Now the truth is, he's far more comfortable with the old one than he is with the new ... the old has a familiar feel while the new is completely unknown and maybe even a bit scary.
4. In contrast to the **Devil** who attacks from the outside and can be easily viewed as an 'outsider' the **flesh** attacks us from within where it has always been and will always be – **My enemy is me** – the old, unsaved, un-yielded, un-converted version of me – but **me** nonetheless.
5. The flesh no longer **dominates** but at times it can seem so familiar that I follow its lead without even knowing what I am doing. It's an on-going battle!

Point To Ponder ...

FLESH-Powered or **SPIRIT-Powered** is a believer's continual choice!
That's why the **flesh** is so difficult to overcome ...
It never **GIVES up** or **GOES away!**

"IS THERE A TARGET ON YOUR BACK?"

'Grace Is The Key' Series
(Ephesians 2:3b)

Intro ... The first Sunday of December always presents an interesting juxtapositioning of spiritual realities: A Communion Service focuses our attention upon the **DEATH** of Christ while the Christmas Season which we enter today focuses our attention upon the **BIRTH** of Christ.

The focus of our message today is upon one of the fundamental things that join those two spiritual realities together.

The focus of our message today zeros in on the **Fourth Profound Spiritual Truth** discovered in the third great section of thought in Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. (Ephesians 2:1-10)

In this passage is discovered ...

PROFOUND SPIRITUAL TRUTH #4 ... The Truth of God's **WRATH**

Here are the questions I raised several weeks ago when we first identified 'The Truth of God's Wrath' as one of the Six Profound Spiritual Truths contained in this section.

Is the God of the New Testament an '**ANGRY** God' or was that only in '**OLD** Testament Days'? Aren't love and anger actually incompatible emotions – doesn't the one **SQUELCH** out the other?

Here's the passage in which that **Spiritual Truth** is discovered ...

TODAY'S FOCUS PASSAGE ... Ephesians 2:3b

"Like all the rest, **WE WERE** (all) by **NATURE OBJECTS** of **WRATH** ..."

Five Key Words Unlock The Meaning Of This Passage:

* **WRATH** ...

"Like all the rest, we were (all) by nature objects of wrath"

An Outpouring Of God's Righteous **JUDGMENT**

(Revelation 6:15-17; Romans 1:18)

Consider these scriptures ...

"Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?' "
(Revelation 6:15-17)

According to the Book of Revelation, the 'Great Day of God's Wrath' will come - a Day of Judgment that the denizens of this planet will find absolutely intolerable. This Day of Judgment will be a joint effort involving both the Father and the Son.

What an image is imbedded in this passage ... a 'wrathful lamb'.

That should tell us that Jesus was and will one day be seen to be much more than just the 'Lamb of God who take away the sin of the World' ...

There is coming a day when He – the one-time sacrificial lamb – will be seen as the Enforcer of God's Righteous Judgment. Picture Him '*cleansing the temple*' and then intensify that image a thousand fold.

There is coming a day when God's Wrath will be displayed in all its awesome devastation. The time of patience will be over – the day of mercy will be ended ... The day of wrath – the outpouring of God's righteous judgment upon the earth – will arrive.

Now the Apostle Paul indicated that there's a sense in which that is already happening ...

"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven ..."
(Romans 1:18)

God does not just overlook or tolerate sinful behavior during these days of grace ... His righteous judgment finds ways to make sure that the 'wages of sin is death' ... Calm minds and peaceful hearts and confident spirits are in short supply among those who reject His Ways and spurn His Son.

More likely unsettled minds and anxious hearts and un-certain spirits characterize the lives of those who 'go *their own way*' and 'do *their own thing*'.

God's Wrath is a big part of the over-all picture – God hates sin and his wrath already falls upon those who consciously and willfully live sinful lives.

The second key word that unlocks the meaning of this passage is:

*** OBJECTS ...**

"Like all the rest, we were (all) by nature objects of wrath"

Unbelievers Are The '**TARGETS**' Of God's Wrath
(John 3:36; Hebrews 3:11; Ephesians 5:6)

Listen to these Scriptures ...

*"Whoever rejects the Son will not see life,
for God's wrath remains on him."* (John 3:36)

*"I declared an oath in my wrath,
'They shall never enter into my rest.'"* (Hebrews 3:11)

*"Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things
(as just mentioned) God's wrath comes upon the disobedient."* (Ephesians 5:6)

It can be (and should be) a terrifying thing for any human being to realize that they are themselves are a '*target*' for God's wrathful judgment. Would you think that God would ever aim at something and miss? Not a chance. God hits what he aims at and Paul says that unbelievers (all who refuse to believe in the One that God sent into the world) are literally '*in His crosshairs*'. A most chilling thought to say the least!

Now as we continue to unlock this passage, the **third key word** informs us that God doesn't have those '*crosshairs*' just lined up on the worst of men but that the weapon of his wrath is (in fact) '*lined up*' on all human beings.

* (By) **NATURE** ...

"Like all the rest, we were (all) by nature objects of wrath"

All Human Beings Are **BORN** With A 'Bull's Eye' **TATTOOED** On Their Back
(Romans 3:23; Romans 3: 10, 12)

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"
(Romans 3:23)

*"There is no one righteous, not even one ...
there is no one who does good, not even one"*
(Romans 3:10, 12)

"Destined for wrath" ... that would be an accurate description of every single human being who enters into our world. All human beings are born with a target already on their back and then they live in such a way as to demonstrate that they deserve to have it there!

They do not naturally '*seek after the things of God*' – they do not naturally live '*good and acceptable*' lives. They are sinners by nature and by deed and as a result they just '*naturally*' are objects of God's righteous wrath.

These first three **key words** are not very comforting or encouraging. These first **three key words** communicate very clearly what I have frequently called the '*Bad News of the Gospel*' ...

All men are 'By Nature Objects Of God's Wrath'

However, the **fourth** key word that we pull out of this scriptural passage brings a more '*hopeful*' tone to the discussion – it introduces 'Good News'.

* **WERE** ...

"Like all the rest, we were (all) by nature objects of wrath"

(Praise God) That 'Tattoo' Is Not **INDELIBLE** ... It can be **REMOVED!**
(John 3:3; 2 Corinthians 5:17)

*"No one can see the Kingdom of God
unless He is 'Born Again' (made new)."
(John 3:3)*

But here's the point Jesus was making ...

If a man is 'born-again' he can 'see' (enter into and experience) God's Heavenly Kingdom! There's a real 'possibility' of getting that target off my back – getting myself out of the 'crosshairs of God's Judgment'!

The Apostle Paul put it this way ...

*"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation ..."
(2 Corinthians 5:17)
(Re-created without the tattoo!)*

Our **fifth** and final **key word** takes us from possibility to testimony ...

*** WE ...**

"Like all the rest, we were (all) by nature objects of wrath"

CHRISTIANS Have Had Their Tattoo Removed.
(2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 5:8; Romans 8:1)

*"God made him who had no sin (tattoo) to be sin for us so that in him we
might become the righteousness of God (tattoo removed).
(2 Corinthians 5:21)*

*"God demonstrated His own love for us in this ...
While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.'
(Romans 5:8)*

*"Therefore, there is now no condemnation (wrath)
for those who are in Christ Jesus ..."
(Romans 8:1)*

Final Thot ...

God's **LOVE** provides the **WAY** whereby man can **ESCAPE** His **WRATH**.
Have you made **YOUR** escape?

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REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Sixteen"

This week we have another 'Profound Spiritual Truth' to reflect upon ...

"The Truth of God's WRATH".

Another (hopefully) memorable image conveyed the essential truth of this message:

The BULL'S EYE!

What spiritual truths does this 'image' bring back to your mind?

Here are some **key statements** from those messages ... read and reflect.

(Circle or underline words or phrases in each that you strike you as important)

1. God does not just overlook or tolerate sinful behavior during these Days of Grace. His righteous judgment finds ways to make sure that the 'wages of sin is death' ...
2. **God's Wrath** is a big part of the over-all picture – God hates sin and His Wrath already falls upon those who consciously and willfully live sinful lives.
3. "Destined for Wrath" ... that would be an accurate description of every single human being who enters into our world. All human beings are born with a target already on their back and then they live in such a way as to demonstrate that they deserve to have it there!
4. It can be (and should be) a terrifying thing for any human being to realize that they themselves are a 'target' for God's wrathful judgment. A chilling thot!
5. If a man is 'born-again' he can see (enter into and experience) God's Heavenly Kingdom! There's a real 'possibility' of getting that target Off my back – getting myself out of the 'crosshairs of God's Judgment'!
6. God's **Love** provides the way whereby man **can** escape His Wrath. Have you made **your** escape?

Point To Ponder ...

WRATH is as much an essential characteristic of God's nature as is LOVE.

“UP FROM THE GRAVE WE AROSE!”

*‘Grace Is The Key’ Series
(Ephesians 2:1-6)*

Intro ... Today I get to ‘declare to you’ the main thing that the Apostle Paul had on his heart when he began the 10 verse section with which the second chapter of Ephesians begins.

Let me read to you those ten verses and see if you can single out this ‘main thing’ that Paul had ‘on his heart’ to declare.

As for you, **you were dead in your transgressions and sins**, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. **But** because of his great love for us, **God**, who is rich in mercy, **made us alive with Christ** even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved.

And God **raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms** in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no-one can boast.

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Did you pick up on it?

Running through that great section of thought in this Epistle to the Ephesians is **one impressive declaration of truth** – one tremendously important **testimony**.

However, because of Paul's exuberance and his unwillingness to leave out anything that adds modifying and qualifying substance to the statement, we must track his statement through this passage like a hunter tracking his quarry through the tangled underbrush.

We will find traces of it in verses one, four, five and six ...

So sharpen your eyes and focus your mind as we enter the thicket and track down ...

TODAY'S KEY DECLARATIVE STATEMENT ... Ephesians 2:1-6

*"You were **DEAD** in your transgressions and sins (1) ... but (4) ... **GOD** (4)... made us **ALIVE** with Christ (5) ... and (6) ... **RAISED** us up with Christ and **SEATED** us with him in the heavenly realms (6) ..."*

Now that is an awesome testimony ...

Paul says that that is what has happened to all who have become linked to Jesus Christ – to all who are saved through faith in Christ.

In that testimony is contained a most profound spiritual truth ...
It's actually the **fifth** of six that are contained in this section of thought.
Do you remember the first four?

They were ...

*'The Truth of Spiritual Death' –
'The Truth of Satanic Authority'
'The Truth of Fleshly Domination' (and)
'The Truth of God's Wrath'.*

Today we come to ...

PROFOUND SPIRITUAL TRUTH #5 ...

The Truth of **HUMAN** (Spiritual) Regeneration

Here are the questions I posed some weeks ago when we first identified and listed these six profound spiritual truths ...

Does God actually provide a 'do-over' for those who come to Him?
Is there such a thing as a 'fresh start' – an actual spiritual 're-creation' of our lives? How extensive is it and how exactly is it done?

Those questions lead directly to ...

Today's Key Concept ...

Human Regeneration is absolutely **FUNDAMENTAL** to the **SALVATION** Process – God 'Quickens' – Re-Invigorates – those who were **SPIRITUALLY** dead.

Jesus told the Jewish Leader Nicodemus that a man cannot even 'see' let alone 'enter' the Kingdom of Heaven unless he is 'Born-Again' ...

Paul has made Jesus' statement even more understandable by pointing out that the reason that man cannot 'see' (or enter) the Kingdom of Heaven, the reason that man must be '*born-again*', is because man is in fact '*spiritually dead*' ...

He is under the '*authority of the Evil One*', completely '*dominated by the flesh*' and in the crosshairs of '*God's Wrathful Judgment*'.

These are the truths that have filled our focus the last few weeks. Man is desperately in need of a '*make-over*' – a '*fresh start*' or (to use Jesus' words) ... a '*new birth*'.

This Paul declares God has done for us in Christ ... He has made us alive – He has brought us back from Spiritual Death – He has given us new birth and thus new life.

Like putting a new charge in a dead battery, God has '*regenerated*' us through the process of salvation so we can function in spiritually acceptable ways – as genuine Children of God.

So then let's talk about it ... this '*New Birth*' – this '*Regeneration*' ...

How profound is it?

What all does this '*Re-Creation*' accomplish in those who experience it?

Consider with me **Six Profound ASPECTS of Human Regeneration** ...

1. A **JUDICIAL ASPECT** ... Record **EXPUNGED** – Romans 8:1

“Therefore there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus ...”

Just last week we saw that all human beings are by nature ‘objects (targets) of God’s wrath’. Their sin condemns them. However, Paul says that the condemnation has been lifted because the charges have been dropped – the record has been altered. The rap sheet that once stood against us has been officially erased.

Just a week or so ago, one of the newer members of this fellowship experienced going to court and having an ancient entry expunged from his legal record – an entry that was standing in the way of him applying for security work. The action of that judge brought great relief.

Isaiah prophesied long years before Christ came to earth that he would be ‘wounded for our sins and bruised for our iniquities and that the Lord would lay on him the iniquity of us all’. In a word Christ took our place.

We, who belong to him, are thus granted ‘forgiveness for all our wrong-doing’ – our new birth restores us to a state of innocence in the eyes of God’s Law.

New Birth restores Innocence – fantastic. Praise God for the **Judicial Aspect** of Regeneration!

2. AN **EMOTIONAL ASPECT** ... Fear **REMOVED** – Hebrews 2:14-15

“He (Jesus) shared in their humanity so that by his death he might ... free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”

At the heart of all fears is the ‘fear of death’ ... For the faithless, for the ‘natural man’, death is the last great enemy – the one that no one can overcome. Eventually like taxes it comes due.

With ‘spiritual birth’ the fear of death is removed for death now becomes merely the doorway into the fulfillment of the life that the new birth has begun.

Some weeks ago now I was privileged to pray with Gary Lassiter (Larry's brother) as he accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior and received God's forgiveness for sins.

He was born-again – He was given new life that very moment. He had just recently received the devastating news that he was terminally ill – that he had but a short time to live.

Two days before he died, he said to Larry ... *'I am no longer afraid'*.

Jesus once said (Matthew 10:28) ...

*"Do not fear them (or that) which can kill the body but cannot kill the soul ...
Fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell."*

When the One who is the judge of all declares you to be innocent in His Sight – you have nothing more to fear – you can live your life trusting in Him!

How good to live life with *'Fear Removed'*.

Praise God for this **Emotional Aspect** of Regeneration!

3. A RELATIONAL ASPECT ... Family CONNECTION – 1 John 1:7

"If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another ..."

Spiritual Birth, just like physical birth, places us in a family – in this case, a family of faith. It's intended to be a place of genuine fellowship – a place where we value the things that God values and we view one another as God views us – as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Some people receive this new birth having experienced the best of earthly family life and they just naturally understand something of the nature of the community life Jesus intends his followers to enjoy. They understand connection and commitment. They enter the fellowship positively and expectantly.

However, other people receive this new birth having experienced far less than the best of earthly family life and they enter the church fellowship cautiously though perhaps curiously as well.

They find life in the church body to be the proverbial '*breath of fresh air*'. Here (for the first time) they find people who accept them and who commit themselves to them and who believe that Christ can do wonderful things through them. For them, the **Relational Aspect** of Regeneration becomes a real cause for praise!

It's been a delight over the years to see just such a transformation take place in more than one cautious soul who has walked through our doors.

Here now is a **fourth** most profound aspect of Human Regeneration ...

4. A BEHAVIORAL ASPECT ... Lifestyle ALTERATION – 1 John 5:18

"We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin."

New Birth changes people – it puts their feet on a new path – it sensitizes them to the inappropriateness of the path that they were formerly on.

Those who are living immorally – those who are running their business unethically or even illegally – those who relate to the people around them insensitively – those who handle their financial affairs carelessly – those who (in a word) proceed through life thoughtlessly ... (these) all are powerfully impacted by the '*new birth*'.

They are captured by the thought ...

'Since I have changed – everything that I am part of should likely change as well.'

I remember how my good friend, Rex Willis, was affected when he gave his life to Jesus some 30 years ago. Rex had been raised in Texas where '*Decisions matter*' – where '*What you say you are better be what you actually are*'.

When Rex gave his life to Christ he owned and operated several Cowboy Bars in the area ... They were pretty profitable.

The Covenant of the Church that I was pastoring at the time said straight out that "*I will not engage in the sale or use of alcohol as a beverage*". That was our understanding of the expectation of Scripture.

I remember Rex coming to me and saying,

*"I want to join this church and I want to follow Christ properly ...
I've put the bars up for sale."*

Scattered through this congregation and through the past 19 years of this church's history are those who have walked through our doors as 'live-in' couples ... some with children - families in everyone's eyes but God's. It has been a blessing to participate in marriage ceremonies prompted by the new life in Christ that they have received here.

We have had two such couples over the years repeat marriage vows at the close of a morning service. Not coerced in any way but compelled by the new birth itself.

The **Behavioral Aspect** of Regeneration regularly brings cause for praise!

The **fifth aspect** of Human Regeneration is a bit more esoteric – not so tangible and understandable as the others - but one that the Apostle Paul felt necessary to mention.

It's a profound heavenly truth that can powerfully affect our earthly behavior ...

5. A POSITIONAL ASPECT ... Heavenly PERSPECTIVE – Ephesians 2:6

"(God) raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms."

When Linda and I were students at Wheaton College, Dr. Vernon Grounds, the President of the Conservative Baptist Seminary in Denver Colorado (which I subsequently attended), came to deliver a series of chapel Messages during our Fall 'Spiritual Emphasis Week'.

His message title (and the frequently repeated phrase that he employed) was simply this ... **"Become What You Are"**.

In other words ...

"Live like the Child of God that God has declared you to be".

That, I believe, is what Paul is getting at here ...

We have been raised up '*spiritually speaking*' with Christ and seated in the heavenly realms.

(By the way it's in those 'heavenly realms' where all those 'spiritual blessings' that God has blessed us with are to be found.)

Paul is saying ... 'Look at your earthly life with a heavenly perspective'.

In his letter to the Colossian Believers (Colossians 3:1-3), he put it this way ...

"Set your mind on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God ... for your life is now hidden with Christ in God."

Paul would say ...

'Allow your heavenly **position** to determine your earthly **performance**'.

And you know ... It can and will!

What a blessing is the '**Positional Aspect**' of Human Regeneration!

Now just one last most profound aspect of Human Regeneration ...

6. A VOLITIONAL ASPECT ... An Earthly DECISION - John 1:12

"To all who received him, to those who believed in His Name, He gave the right to become Children of God ..."

Only in the spiritual realm do those being born get to cooperate with the One providing for their birth.

With regard to spiritual birth ... though the Father has chosen His Children for birth before Time even began, His would-be children must desire and choose to 'be born' during their passage through time.

Human Beings communicate that desire by 'receiving Jesus Christ as their Savior'.

Final Thot ...

There is no more important **QUESTION** in all the world than this ...

*"Have you been **BORN-AGAIN** ...
Made **SPIRITUALLY ALIVE** by the **SPIRIT** of **GOD?**"*

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

-

"Lesson Seventeen"

Sunday we uncovered **PROFOUND TRUTH #5** in Ephesians 2:1-10 ...

‘The Truth of HUMAN (Spiritual) REGENERATION’

Key Scriptures: “God ... made us ALIVE with Christ ...” – Ephesians 2:4

“You must be BORN AGAIN” ... John 3:3

“He saved us through the washing of RE-BIRTH ...” – Titus 3:5

Those verses underlie the conviction expressed in Sunday’s **Key Concept** ...

*“Human Regeneration is absolutely fundamental to the Salvation Process –
God ‘Quickens’ – Re-Invigorates – those who were Spiritually Dead.”*

Is that a ‘Concept’ that you feel comfortable sharing? Why or why not?

Pastor Mark identified for us **Six Key Aspects** of REGENERATION ...

The JUDICIAL ... The EMOTIONAL ... The RELATIONAL
The BEHAVIORAL ... The POSITIONAL ... The VOLITIONAL

Pick one and reflect on why this ‘*aspect of your Born-Again Experience*’ – absolutely ‘*delights*’ you.

Is there one that more than the others somewhat ‘*puzzles*’ you?

When you were saved, which of these six ‘*aspects of regeneration*’ did you become aware of first? Which came last?

Point To Ponder ...

If you were asked by someone what it means to be ‘Born-Again’,
do you feel you could answer the question clearly and accurately?

"AMAZING GRACE"

'Grace Is The Key' Series
(Ephesians 2:1-6)

Intro ... Today we make our final excursion into the **Third** great section of thought in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians – Ephesians 2:1-10.

Six Profound Spiritual Truths are touched upon in this great passage.
So far we have examined **five**:

'The Truth of Spiritual Death'
'The Truth of Satanic Authority'
'The Truth of Fleshly Domination'
'The Truth of God's Wrath' (and last week)
'The Truth of Human (Spiritual) Regeneration'

Today we come to ...

PROFOUND SPIRITUAL TRUTH #6 ...

The Truth of God's **GRACE**!

Is Grace '*God opening the door and me deciding to walk through it*' or is grace more than that?

Does grace come alone or it is packaged with other spiritual qualities and realities?

Here the verse that will '**Exort**' us into and through today's discussion ...

Escort Verse #4 ...

"For it is by **GRACE** that you have been saved through **FAITH** – and this not of yourselves, it is the **GIFT** of God – not by works, so that no one can **BOAST**."
(Ephesians 2:8-9)

We sing of Grace ... "Amazing Grace How Sweet The Sound" ...
We name our churches Grace ... "Grace Community Church"
We name our little girls 'Grace'.

But do we really understand what it is? Do we really comprehend the tremendous impact of God's Grace in this fallen world of ours?

Today's Key Definition ...

GRACE – the **UNMERITED** favor of God which expresses itself in dramatic **LIFE**-altering and **WORLD**-influencing ways.

Three Awesome Expressions of God's Amazing Grace are found in this profound Ephesian passage ...

1. HUMAN REGENERATION IS AN EXPRESSION OF GOD'S GRACE

"It is by Grace you have been saved"
(Ephesians 2:5)

This is the expression of Grace with which we are most familiar. This is the expression of Grace that inspired the beloved Gospel Song that provides the title for Today's Message – "**Amazing Grace**".

Remember how the first verse goes?

*"Amazing Grace – how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me;
I once was lost but now am found – was blind but now I see."*

In those two simple lines John Newton encapsulated the essence of the salvation event ...

*'Lost in sin – dead in sin – I was sought out and
enlightened by the actions of a Gracious God.'*

Favor (saving, forgiving, enlightening, regenerating, life-changing, undeserved and unmerited favor) **was given to me**, (a spiritually dead, flesh- dominated, object of wrath who was faithfully following of the ways of the prince of the power of the air).

Such undeserved and unmerited favor goes by the name ... **GRACE!**

Knowing the condition that we were in, it's almost superfluous for Paul to say that this salvation is a '*gift of God not produced by human works or effort*' – that it's given in such a way that no human being can pat themselves on the back and say '*look what I have done*'.

It's a lie from the Devil himself that we can, by our own good deeds, win the favor of God.

But knowing the deceptive and persuasive abilities possessed by the Prince of the Power of the Air ... Paul goes ahead and puts it in print.

*"It is a gift of God – not of words, so that no one can boast."
(vs. 8 – Our Fourth Escort Verse)*

And so we declare this morning that ... Spiritual Regeneration – New Birth into the Family of God - is indeed a marvelous expression of God's Amazing Grace.

Note that this Expression of **Grace** is linked to (packaged with) **LOVE** and **MERCY** (vs. 4)

"Because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved."

Love desires only the best for its object ... **Mercy** would hold back pain or punishment from its object (if it could) ... **Grace** provides the way whereby both **love** and **mercy** can be expressed by substituting Christ himself for its object – all those fallen, sinful human objects of God's judgment.

God has graciously (lovingly and mercifully) intervened in our lives and as a result we have been saved – spiritually regenerated (born-again) and declared to be His Children.

Now ... how fitting at this season of the year that we should consider this **second expression** of God's Amazing Grace ...

2. CHRIST'S INCARNATION IS AN EXPRESSION OF GOD'S GRACE

*"The riches of his grace expressed ... to us in Christ Jesus"
(Ephesians 2:7)*

Here Paul uses that phrase for which Ephesians is famous: "the riches of".

"The riches of His Grace"

Just think of what all is contained and implied in such a phrase ...

In the sending of His Only Begotten Son to earth, reducing him to a single celled human being, allowing him to experience the difficulties of life in a fallen world, exposing him to misunderstanding and rejection, denying his plea for deliverance in the Garden, subjecting him to the brutality of Roman Crucifixion and ultimately turning from him as the full weight of judgment fell upon him ...

In these actions of God, the full **Riches of Grace** were expended.

Could say that God 'emptied the vault' when he chose to send his Son into this world to graciously grant us forgiveness and life!

Just as an aside ... that's why salvation is possible in no other way – that's why as Peter could say on that day when he stood before the Jewish Council (Acts 4:12) ...

"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

The Riches of God's Grace have been expended in and expressed through His Son – the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no other saving grace to be found. It has all been spent in the offering of Jesus Christ. The Father has no more Grace to give. Receive what He has provided or go forever without.

Note now how this expression of **Grace** is linked to (packaged with) **KINDNESS** (vs. 7)

"The riches of his grace expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus"

Even as Paul linked the grace that provides regeneration to Love and Mercy, here too Paul finds a companion trait – that of **KINDNESS**.

Now while Love and Mercy can be viewed somewhat objectively or even judicially, kindness cannot ... Kindness is personal.

There is a tenderness to kindness – there is a specific focus to kindness ... Kindness communicates understanding and compassion ... Kindness accommodates itself to the particular circumstance ... Kindness narrows down the beam of God's Grace to be one person wide.

God's Kindness tells me that Jesus wasn't just dying on the cross for the sins of the world generally but that he was dying for my sins specifically.

How amazing is the Grace of God that would send His One and Only Son into the world to specifically save me!

And now here is the **third and final expression** of God's Amazing Grace that we will consider this morning ...

3. PRODUCTIVE CHRISTIAN LIVING IS AN EXPRESSION OF GOD'S GRACE

"We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works"
(Ephesians 2:10)

One of my Seminary Professors, long years ago now, used to just revel in the first four words of that verse ...

"We are God's workmanship"

He always said that a better translation of that Greek phrase into English would be ...

"We are God's masterpiece".

What the **Mona Lisa** was to Leonardo De Vinci – What the **Sistine Chapel** was to Michelangelo ... **WE ARE TO GOD!**

More glorious than the creation of the world itself is the our 'Re-Creation' in Christ ...

And just as the original creation was intended to 'Declare the Glories of God's Awesome Wisdom and Might' so the 'New Creation' is to 'Declare the Riches of His Grace'.

Here's what leads into the verse we just examined (verse 6-7) ...

"And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages, he might show the incomparable 'riches of His Grace expressed in His Kindness to us in Christ Jesus.'"

You and I are now living in one of the 'coming ages' ...

We are on display as it were for all the universe to see – just as the Followers of Christ have been for the past 2,000 years ...

God plans for His Grace to empower us to live lives that are worthy of and identified with Him!

And we don't need to figure it all out on our own for notice finally this morning how ...

Grace is linked to (packaged with) **PURPOSE** (vs. 10)

*"We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus
to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*

God already has the agenda laid out ...
He has already drawn up the blueprints ...
He has already figured out the formulas ...
He has already fully funded the projects and
He has recorded it all in a superbly written, and widely distributed
'Masterpiece Manual'!

I hold one right here in my hand (Bible)...

How can those who have truly experienced the 'Riches of Grace' not faithfully follow its directives and thus bring forth the very works that the Master '*prepared in advance for them to do*' ...

Master Works produced by His Masterpieces!

Final Thot ...

God is a '**HANDS ON**' Grace-Giver ...
He **WRAPS** His Gifts of Grace with **LOVE** and
MERCY and **KINDNESS** and **PURPOSE**.

ENJOY the **WHOLE PACKAGE!**

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Eighteen"

Sunday's message was entitled: **AMAZING GRACE** ...

Take a moment and jot down at least three things that make Grace Amazing.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Is it hard as a Christian to 'remain amazed' by the Grace of God? What think ye?

Here's the '**Definition of Grace**' Pastor Mark presented to us in Sunday' Message ...

GRACE – the **UNMERITED** favor of God which expresses itself in dramatic **LIFE**-altering and **WORLD**-influencing ways.

Note the **Three Distinct Aspects** of Grace identified in that definition:

Grace is **UNMERITED** – It is a gift of God.

Grace is **LIFE-ALTERING** – It provides salvation and new birth.

Grace is **WORLD-INFLUENCING** – It produces good works.

Is this a broader definition of grace than you have heard in the past?

Can a person receive God's Grace w/o experiencing all three of these aspects?

In Ephesians 2:7 Paul links **Grace** to **KINDNESS** ...

"The riches of his grace expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus."

Reflect upon this statement from Sunday's message ...

"Now while Love and Mercy can be viewed somewhat objectively or even judicially, kindness cannot ... Kindness is personal. There is a tenderness to kindness – there is a specific focus to kindness ... Kindness communicates understanding and compassion ... Kindness accommodates itself to the particular circumstance ... Kindness narrows down the beam of God's Grace to be one person wide."

Point To Ponder ...

Imagine yourself 'Hanging in God's Gallery' as a **MASTERPIECE** of the Master Creator Himself – Uniquely displaying the '**RICHES** of His Grace'.

"GOD'S FINAL FAMILY"

'Grace Is The Key' Series
(Ephesians 2:11-3:13)

Intro ... Today we make our initial foray into the **Fourth** great section of thought in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians – Ephesians 2:11-3:13.

Let's review the '**Escort Verses**' that have guided us thus far. Each of these has escorted us into and through a significant section of the letter of the Apostle Paul to the Church in Ephesus ... a letter intended to instruct and nurture believers everywhere. Each of these is worthy of memorization.

Escort Verse #1 ... Ephesians 1:3

(Four Great Blessings to be enjoyed by every Believer in Christ)

1. *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."*

Escort Verse #2 ... Ephesians 1:17

(Three things that God would have every believer fully and completely know.)

2. *"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation ..."*

Escort Verses #3 and 4 ... Ephesians 2:4-5; Ephesians 2:8-9

(Six Profound Spiritual Truths that impact the life of every Born-Again Believer)

3. *"Because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in transgressions ..."*

4. *"For it is by grace that you have been saved through faith – and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast."*

Great stuff in these first three major sections of thought in this letter to the Ephesians – stuff that God wants every believer to know and experience.

But in a sense Paul has only been setting the table – laying the foundation – preparing the way for what he has yet to say.

In his next section of thought he brings us right to the heart of the matter ...

The identification and the celebration of what I am calling **God's Final Family** – the family of faith that God with whom God will be identified for all eternity.

Here's the verse that will escort us into this critical passage.

'ESCORT VERSE' #5 ...

"You who were **ONCE** far away have been brought **NEAR** through the **BLOOD** of Christ."

This verse will 'escort us' into and through a 25 verse section of this letter – a section beginning in Chapter two and concluding in Chapter three.

The ancient organizers of Paul's letter put the chapter break where it seemed that Paul was starting a new thought but he fooled them. We will look at that more closely in the next couple of weeks.

The thing I want us to focus on today on this first Sunday of the New Year is the 'theme' of this section of thought ...

"GOD'S FINAL FAMILY".

"God's Final Family" – this is the family of faith that will enjoy fellowship with the Father and with the Son and with the Holy Spirit for all eternity - the family of faith that will continually amaze and mystify the angelic hosts ... the family of faith that will bring honor and glory to Jesus Christ through all the coming ages ... the family of faith that will be empowered by and fully embody the fruit and gifts of the Spirit of God ... the family of faith that will reveal (what Paul calls) the '*manifest wisdom of God*' to all the intelligent beings in the universe wherever and whomever they might be.

This family of faith ... what I am calling today 'God's Final Family' - is the **focus** of this great section of Scripture.

It's to the development of that family that our 'Escort Verse' speaks and why it would be wise for us to commit it to memory ...

This verse shares the distinctive testimony of all non-Jewish believers and reveals the mechanism whereby all believers (Jewish and non-Jewish) have entered into 'God's Final Family'.

Here it is again ...

*"You who were once far away have been brought near
through the Blood of Christ."*

This was the testimony of nearly every one of the Ephesian Believers.
This is my testimony this morning – I trust it is yours as well.

Let's just analyze it phrase by phrase and thought by thought ...

'You were once far away ...'

* That's **WHERE** we **WERE** before we were **SAVED**

Now though Paul was addressing the believers in Ephesus directly, he was ultimately addressing every believer in Christ who would ever pick up this letter and read.

Let's just pretend it was written and mailed to us here in Apple Valley and see how accurately it identifies us.

This letter says that 'Before we were saved' we were '**far away**' ...

Think of all the applications of that statement:

We were far away geographically – 1000s of miles away.

We were far away temporally – 1000s of years away

We were far away genetically – none of Abraham's blood in our veins.

We were far away spiritually – we were born in sin and lived in sin.

In this passage Paul would go on to say that all those who were '**far away**' were ...

"without hope and without God in the world"
(Ephesians 2:12)

Now that was indeed a bad place to be!

But here's his amazing next statement – it's a statement of testimony ...

'You have been brought near ...'

* That's **WHERE** we **PRESENTLY** are

Notice that this is a testimony of something that has been done to us and for us – something that has drastically changed our circumstances.

The distance between us and God has been reduced – we who were once ‘far away’ have been ‘*brought near*’.

Think with me this morning about which of those distance distinctions has been altered.

Are we (were the Ephesians) geographically any closer – No.

Are we (were the Ephesians) temporally any closer – No.

Are we (were the Ephesians) genetically any closer – No.

Are we (were the Ephesians) spiritually any closer – Yes!

There’s where the distance has been closed – Spiritually they (we) have been brought near to (into fellowship with) God Himself.

Brought to a place where those Four Great Spiritual Blessings we mentioned earlier can be enjoyed;

Brought to a place where the ‘*Light can go on*’ and that Full and Complete Knowledge can truly enlighten;

Brought to a place where those Six Profound Spiritual Truths can bring us insight and perspective.

And of course, **brought** to the very place where sins are forgiven and new life is given and entrance into God’s Final Family is granted.

This is indeed a very good place to be ...

Paul, speaking for us (and for the Ephesians) says that ...

“That’s where we presently are”

Is that where we (in fact) actually are?

“Living near to God as a member of His Final Family?”

In the final phrase of this testimony statement, Paul reveals the only way that we who are by nature ‘far away’ can in fact be ‘*brought near*’.

'Through the blood of Christ ...'

* That's **HOW** we got to **WHERE** we **PRESENTLY** are

Though the '*Blood of Christ*' – through the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ on Calvary - (and only in this way) can sinful human beings be brought '*near*'.

But praise God ...

Through faith in the Blood of Christ shed on Calvary we can be brought near and kept near ... near to the heart of God and near to all those who are members of His Final Family.

It's the only way to live – it's a blessed way to live – But it's a daily challenge to live that way.

THINGS distract us –

TRUTHS fade –

FELLOWSHIP weakens –

CIRCUMSTANCES change –

CHALLENGES arise –

PEOPLE disappoint ...

Only our continual faith and confidence in the Blood of Christ and all that it has accomplished can keep us focused on '*Living Near to God*'.

And so I have adopted and suggest to you (as our ***final thot*** reveals) ...

Final Thot ...

A NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION ...

Through the **POWER** of the **BLOOD** of **CHRIST**,
I will endeavor to live **NEAR** to **GOD** all through the year!

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REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Nineteen"

Sunday's meditation was titled: "**God's Final Family**" ...

What does that title suggest to you? How many 'versions' of God's Family have there been? List as many as you can – Be creative.

Here are the ones Pastor Mark shared with us on Sunday ...

The Heavenly Family – Father, Son and Holy Spirit;

The Original Human Family – Adam and Eve in the Garden;

The Expanded Human Family – Adam's Descendants through Seth;

The Restored Human Family – Noah's Descendants after the Flood;

The Patriarchal Family – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob;

The National Family – led out of Egypt, established in the Promised Land, sent into Exile and restored to the Land – descendants of Abraham plus proselytes;

The Spirit-Generated Church Family which is **God's Final Family!**

God's Final Family is definitely a new and difference 'version', isn't it?

It's a version that not many Jews anticipated; it's a version that not many of the despised and put-down Gentiles would have ever imagined. But it has happened; God's **final family** is in the process of being created. That is the theme of this next great section of thought in Paul's letter to the Ephesians ... **Ephesians 2:11-3:13.**

Here's the verse that will 'Escort us into and through' this entire section ...

'You (Gentiles) who were once **FAR** away have been brought
NEAR Through the **BLOOD** of Christ.'" (Ephesians 2:13)

How 'far away' from all the blessings and heritage of the Jewish Nation would you say you were when you were saved? Do you feel that you have indeed been 'brought near' to all of those blessings and to all of that heritage?

What's your response to Sunday's Suggested New Year's Resolution?

'Through the **POWER** of the **BLOOD** of **CHRIST**,
I will endeavor to live **NEAR** to **GOD** all through the year!'

Point to Ponder ...

Since the Jews were already 'near' doesn't it seem logical that they would eagerly embrace Christ as their final and perfect sacrifice and be 'waiting with open arms' when God opened the door to the Gentiles? Shouldn't they have been anticipating the appearance of this 'Final Version' of God's Family?

"GOD'S FINAL FAMILY" – Part Two

'The Church of Jesus Christ'

'Grace Is The Key' Series

(Ephesians 2:11-3:13)

Intro ... If you have glanced at your note sheet this morning, you have perhaps already sensed what lies before us this morning. But whether you have or you haven't, I want you to turn to someone near you and say ...

"This is going to be epic".

'Epic' – a heroic attempt – in this case a heroic attempt to trace through the vast Scriptures the development of the central thing that God has committed himself to do. Last week we introduced ourselves to the concept and today we immerse ourselves in it.

God is involved today and has always been involved in developing a *'Family of Faith'* ... a network of relationships that show forth His Glory.

You and I live in the day when God's **'Final Family'** ... that is, when the **Final Version** of His Family has come into view. For you who enjoy using computer terminology it's **VERSION 7.0**

This morning I want us to see just how persistent and yet patient our Heavenly Father has been in the development of this **'Final Version'**...

Let's make sure we identify it biblically and convincingly.
To do that it will be most helpful to review the ...

HISTORY OF GOD'S FAMILY ... There have been **'Seven Versions'**

This will be a message that you will want to 'download' from the Website or pick up in printed form next Sunday so you will have all the Scriptures I will read this morning handy for your continued reflection.

For this morning just allow them to speak to your heart concerning the amazing way God has worked His Plan through the years.

So then ... the '**Family of God**' ... the 'Family of Faith' that we find ourselves members of ...

How did it come into being and what are the various forms that it has taken? These are things that we discussed somewhat superficially in our Cell Groups this week but I wanted us to take a more in depth approach this morning.

So then ... The 'Family of God'.
Consider with me ...

**VERSION 1.0 ... 'THE HEAVENLY FAMILY'
(FATHER – SON – HOLY SPIRIT)**

Long ages before man ever appeared on the scene there was a fellowship of being in heaven ... a perfect harmony between the three persons of the God-Family – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Man has come up with the term '**Trinity**' to describe their unique relationship together and to account for various statements in the Scripture regarding that relationship.

Theologians have formulated (and debated) precise, almost legal sounding phrases to articulate what a '**Tri-Unity**' actually is (and what orthodox believers must believe) but we today will simply delight ourselves in the reading of what God himself has written.

*"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was
with God and the Word was God (John 1:1)*

*"And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory
I had with you before the world began" (John 17:5)*

*'But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send
in my name, will teach you all things.'" (John 14:26)*

"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image ...'" (Genesis 1:26)

Version 1.0 of the Family of God was an awesome version – perfect in fellowship and in the expression of its will and ways.

And it was in the expression of itself and its desire to extend itself that led to its very first re-configuration and so we come to ...

VERSION 2.0 ... 'THE ORIGINAL HUMAN FAMILY'
(ADAM and EVE – INNOCENT IN EDEN)

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "*Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.*" (Genesis 1:27-28)

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "*You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil ...* The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame." (Genesis 2:15-16, 25)

God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – **chose** to extend the circle of fellowship and to design a living being (a human being) that would provide a kind of extended family for them to enjoy – a human being who would share many of their own family traits ... a thinking being, a creative being, a productive being, a relational being capable of enjoying fellowship in the Family of God.

And so it was done ... **Version 2.0** came into being and operated for a while just as it was intended to operate. Man and Woman were delighted with one another and God was delighted with them. How long this version of the Family of Faith was '*on the market*' we have no way of telling.

But **Version 2.0** was designed with a potential 'bug' in its operating system. The designer built into its programming the quality of 'willfulness' – the ability given to man to make choices independent of the will of His Creator.

This too was part of man being '*created in the image of God*'. To willingly and eagerly '*choose*' to obey and worship the Creator was the proper application of that programming quality but there was always the possibility that that particular quality could be mis-applied.

It could happen if man were somehow to be deceived by something or someone and then impulsively act upon that deception without asking His Creator about it first.

That as we know is exactly what happened. Man's 'willfulness' quality was misapplied – man disobeyed the directives for life that God had given and that led to the introduction of the never-desired though now necessary ...

VERSION 3.0 ... 'THE FALLEN HUMAN FAMILY'
(DISOBEDIENCE – BANISHMENT - MURDER – CORRUPTION)

"Have you eaten from the tree that I told you not to eat from? ... So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden ... (Genesis 3:11, 23)

Now Cain said to his brother Abel, 'Let's go out to the field. And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.'" (Genesis 4:8)

Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth ...
I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it.
Everything on earth will perish."
(Genesis 6:11-13, 17)

God came incredibly close to just '*taking the entire program off the market*' ... It seemed to be flawed beyond repair – '*corrupted*' is the actual term that computer programmers use and some computers and their programs can become '*corrupted beyond the hope of correction*'.

And indeed it seemed there for a moment that **Version 3.0** of the Family of God would in fact be the '*Final Version*' – the entire system was corrupted beyond repair. Surely the attitude of the Heavenly Family had to be ...

'There is no way that we can any longer have fellowship with these people – they have turned their backs upon us and upon each other as well.'

But, in one of the most serendipitous statements in the Scripture, we read ...

"NOAH FOUND GRACE IN THE EYES OF THE LORD"
(Genesis 6:8)

And that changed everything... Finding one man – one human family - that still believed, that still sought to follow after the ways of God ... that was enough to encourage God to tackle the task – to eliminate the corruption and to upgrade the system one more time.

And so on the market appeared ...

**VERSION 4.0 ... 'THE RENEWED HUMAN FAMILY'
(A FRESH START IN A DRASTICALLY CHANGED WORLD)**

The LORD then said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation. Take with you seven of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and two of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate, and also seven of every kind of bird, male and female, to keep their various kinds alive throughout the earth." (Genesis 7:1-2)

Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands. Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. (Genesis 9:1-3)

As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other ... "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth." (But) from there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth." (Genesis 11:2, 4, 9)

And so now in a drastically changed world – a world where more than ever men and women would have to fend for a living – a world in which God's marvelous animals will now be available (and necessary) for food ... into this much more hostile world of unpredictable weather and uneven climate, mankind was scattered.

In time they distinguished themselves from one another. And over time they developed variations of religion and governance and language and culture. The world become home to the various nations of men all living under the authority of their Creator though each of them developed their own methods of worshipping Him.

All of them were as susceptible as Adam and Eve had been to the Great Deceiver himself who would seek to lead them away from Fellowship with the Heavenly Family and from the expectations that were laid upon them.

And led astray they were ... false religions proliferated ... fellowship with the One True God once again nearly evaporated as the centuries passed.

It was time to 'narrow down the focus' and 'reactivate the fellowship'.
Time for ...

VERSION 5.0 ... 'THE PATRIARCHAL FAMILY'
(ABRAHAM – ISAAC – JACOB)

Here's the beginning of the Patriarchal Family ...

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Genesis: 12:1-3)

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers ... your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him". (Genesis 17:1-2, 19)

Here now is the next generation of the Patriarchal Family ...

That night the LORD appeared to (Isaac) and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham." Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD. (Genesis 26:24-25)

And then it was time for Generation Three ...

"So **Isaac** called for **Jacob** and blessed him (saying) May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples. May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien, the land God gave to Abraham." (Genesis 28:1-4 selected)

So Israel (Jacob) set out with all that was his, and when he reached Beersheba, he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. And God spoke to Israel in a vision at night and said, "Jacob! Jacob!" "Here I am," he replied. "I am God, the God of your father," he said. "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. (Genesis 46:1-4)

And into Egypt to avoid the famine they went – Secure by the Prominence of Joseph and the Assurances of the Pharaoh himself they went and there they remained for 430 years and grew into a community some two million strong.

It was time for ...

**VERSION 6.0 – THE NATIONAL FAMILY
(FROM THE EXODUS TO THE DAY OF PENTECOST)**

Now Moses ... led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

And Moses said, "Here I am." "Do not come any closer," God said ...
"Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground."

Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob ... I have indeed seen the misery of **my people** in Egypt.

I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey ..."

So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the **Israelites** out of Egypt." (Exodus 3:1-10 selected) ...

"These are the decrees, the laws and the regulations that the Lord established on Mount Sinai between himself and the Israelites through Moses." (Leviticus 26:46)

Playing on a line from the Book of Hebrews let me simply say at this point that ...

'Time would fail me to tell of Joshua and the Conquest of the Land; of Samuel and Saul and David and Solomon; of the Israelites fall into sin and their Exile into Babylon; of their return from Captivity and their subsequent re-establishment in the Land; of their prophets and the Prophecies concerning the Coming of a Messiah who would usher in the fulfillment of the wondrous promises given long years before to Abraham.'

Suffice it to say that from the Return to the Land from that Babylonian Captivity, the Israelites did their best to remain true to God ... They were never again ensnared by the religions of the people around them. They watched and they waited – they prayed and sought to practice their religion accurately and faithfully.

They even enjoyed a 100 year period of renewed independence following the Maccabean Rebellion that they still remember today in the celebration of Hanukkah.

But that independence was taken away and they were once again living under Roman Rule by the time one member of the Heavenly Family chose to humbled himself and join the Human Family.

It was the Highlight Moment of the National Family's Life. The Son of God had been born as one of them – He had bridged the gap between God's Family in Heaven and God's Family on earth.

It was to the **National Family of Israel** that Jesus spoke these words ...

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

*Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."
(Luke 4:18-21)*

Little did they know that his intention was to 'preach good news to **all** the poor – to proclaim freedom for **every** prisoner locked in the prison of ignorance and sin – to bring sight to **all** who are blinded by the god of this world – to proclaim that the Lord's favor was available to **all**.

There was a **new identity** coming ... **Version 7.0** of God's Family was being crafted ... God's Family was enlarging and moving toward its **final version**.

Here are specific directives Jesus gave to his Apostles before he ascended back into the Father's Presence ...

*"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."
(Matthew 28:18-20)*

He also said to them ...

*"Do not leave Jerusalem but wait for the gift my Father promised (for) you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."
(Acts 1:4 and 8)*

The stage was perfectly and completely set for ...

**VERSION 7.0 – THE BORN-AGAIN FAMILY
(FROM THE DAY OF PENTECOST ONWARD)**

*“When the day of Pentecost came ... there were staying in Jerusalem
God-Fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.*

*Peter stood up with the Eleven raised his voice and addressed the crowd.
This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people ... and everyone who calls
upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’*

*Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ
for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
The promise is for you and your children and for those who are far off –
for all whom the Lord our God will call.’
(Acts 2 selected)*

I doubt that Peter really understood the full implications of those words that tumbled forth from his mouth. But he was willing to be taught how this new system – this new version of the Family of God - would work.

Later on God would dramatically convince him that he should personally go share the Gospel with a family of Gentiles (Acts 10).

Then he would participate significantly in that early Church Counsel (Acts 15) where the whole Jew/Gentile thing was discussed and settled.

Here are some of his most memorable words from that setting:

*“After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them:
“Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that
the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe.*

*God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the
Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between
us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.*

*Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks
of the disciples a yoke (a national identity and national law) that
neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear?*

No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that **we** are saved, just as they are.”
(We have no special privilege – no special advantage.)
(Acts 15:7-11)

In a nutshell, Peter was saying ...

'The National Identity is over as far as the Family of God is concerned.'

God has enlarged the membership of His Family ...

All who trust in Christ are now included.

*'We Jews (Peter would say) need to
'upgrade' our operating system!'*

This is exactly what Paul was expressing to the Ephesian Believers in the verse we focused on last week ...

*"You who were once far away have been brought near
(as near as anyone else) through the Blood of Christ."
(Ephesians 2:13)*

The final version of God's Family is the '**BORN-AGAIN**' Family ...

It is drawn from every tribe and nation – from every time and location.

Its members are no longer identified by any earthly distinction
(more of that next week).

Suffice it to say today as does our **Final Thot** that ...

Final Thot ...

Version 7.0 of God's Family – God's **FINAL** Family - was released on the Day of Pentecost ... Have you **UPGRADED** ?

Are you operating in light of God's most current realities?

Do you understand that all men – Jews and Gentiles alike – can only enter the Family of God – God's Final Family – through Faith in Jesus Christ –

That only by '**Spiritual Birth**' can it be entered?

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Twenty"

Sunday we took a 'tour' through the Scripture noting how God's '**Family**' has been developing over the years ... What impressed you most?

Here are some statements from the message. Pick one (or two) and reflect ...

Version 2.0 was designed with a potential 'bug' in its operating system.
The designer built into its programing the quality of 'willfulness' – the ability given
to man to make choices independent of the Will of His Creator.

* * * * *

God came incredibly close to just '*taking the entire program* (Version 3.0) *off the market*' ...
It seemed to be flawed beyond repair – '*corrupted*' is the actual term that computer
programmers use and some computers and their programs can
become '*corrupted beyond the hope of correction*'.

* * * * *

Finding one man – one human family - that still believed, that still sought to follow after the
ways of God ... that was enough to encourage God to tackle the task – to eliminate
the corruption and to upgrade the system one more time (Version 4.0).

* * * * *

Into this much more hostile world of unpredictable weather and uneven climate, mankind was
scattered. In time they distinguished themselves from one another. And over time they developed
variations of religion and governance and language and culture. All of them were as susceptible as
Adam and Eve had been to the Great Deceiver himself who would seek to lead them away from
Fellowship with the Heavenly Family and from the expectations that were laid upon them.

* * * * *

And into Egypt to avoid the famine they went – Secured by the Prominence of Joseph
and the Assurances of the Pharaoh himself they went and there they remained
for 430 years and grew into a community two million strong.

* * * * *

Suffice it to say that from the Return to the Land from that Babylonian Captivity,
the Israelites did their best to remain true to God ... They were never again ensnared by
the religions of the people around them. They watched and they waited – they
prayed and they sought to practice their religion accurately and faithfully.

* * * * *

Little did they know that his intention was to 'preach good news to all the poor – to proclaim
freedom for every prisoner locked in the prison of ignorance and sin – to bring sight to all who
are blinded by the god of this world – to proclaim that the Lord's favor was available to all.

* * * * *

In a nutshell, Peter was saying ... 'We need to upgrade ourselves. *The National Identity*
is over as far as the Family of God is concerned. God has enlarged the membership
of His Family ... **All** who trust in Christ are now included.'

* * * * *

Point To Ponder:

Is there a '**Version 8.0**' yet to come – What do you think?

“GOD’S BRAND NEW HUMANITY”

‘Grace Is The Key’ Series
(Ephesians 2:11-3:13)

Intro ... Last week we participated in an ‘epic’ journey through the Scriptures ... We traveled through some 5,000 years of Biblical Record seeing the way God has been developing His ‘*Family of Fellowship and Faith*’ from the earliest days until now.

Six versions of that ‘Family’ have preceded the one we belong to today.

First there was the ‘Heavenly Family’ composed of Father, Son and Holy Spirit; **then** there was the ‘Original Human Family’ composed of Adam and Eve living in the Garden of Eden; **then** there was the ‘Fallen Human Family’ banished from the Garden and increasingly susceptible to the sinful impulses of the flesh; **then** there was the ‘Renewed Human Family’ as God started over following the Great Flood; **then** there was the ‘Patriarchal Family’ as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob each in turn responded to the Call of God upon their lives; **then** there was the ‘National Family’ as God summoned ‘His People – the Israelites’ out of Egypt and led them into the Promised Land.

It’s that ‘*National Family*’ that would become known as ‘*The Jews*’ and that would provide an identity for the Son of God as he entered into the Human Race. That ‘*National Family*’ was defined by the Laws of God given through Moses. That ‘*National Family*’ was expected to ‘*stand apart from the other nations of the earth*’ and to show forth the Glory and the Goodness of God as they obediently followed after Him.

That ‘*National Family*’ reached its zenith in the Glorious Kingdom of David and Solomon, his son. Kings and Queens traveled to Jerusalem to bask in the glory of that incredible Godly Kingdom – that ‘*Family of God*’ on earth.

In those days and in the days that followed it was easy to divide the entire human population into Jews and non-Jews ... or more popularly into ‘*Jews and Gentiles*’. Israel was one nation among many – the one nation among all the nations on earth that was truly ‘*Under God*’.

It was a good and privileged thing to be a ‘Jew’ ... to be one of God’s Chosen People.

And even though they had fallen on '*hard times*' by the time Jesus was born, they were not looking for any '*upgraded version*' of the God's '*Family of Fellowship and Faith*'. They were looking for someone (a Messiah) to restore the 'National' version of God's Family to its former glory.

But they were looking for the wrong thing ... they were looking backwards not forwards. They didn't know that their '*National Family*' was **not** the final version of God's '*Family of Fellowship and Faith*' ...

So it is not surprising that they were by and large caught completely off-guard when God announced His '*Final Version*' of His '*Family of Fellowship and Faith*' to them.

That announcement came on the Day of Pentecost ... God, the master programmer, had designed and released through the Holy Spirit Himself **Version 7.0** ... 'The Born-Again Family.' This is the designation that has identified God's '*Family of Fellowship and Faith*' ever since that day!

Now something that I didn't specifically point out last week but something that surely needs to be recognized is that each new '*version*' of the family pre-empts and replaces all previous ones. Only one 'version' of the family of God exists at any one time.

Now the reason that I took the time to engage us in that historic (epic) review and the reason that I point out the fact this morning that each new version of the '*Family*' pre-empts and replaces all the versions that preceded it is so that we would be ready for this message today ...

It's a message that the Apostle Paul first declared to the Ephesian Believers nearly 2,000 years ago.

Paul considered what I will share this morning – what he shared with the Ephesian Believers in that ancient letter – to be one of the Greatest Mysteries of all time ...

In Ephesians 3:3, Paul refers to the ...

'mystery made known to me by revelation'

In the very next verse, he talks about his insight ...

*'into the mystery of Christ which was not made known
to men of other (earlier) generations ...'*

Then in verse 9, Paul testifies that Grace was given to him to ...

*'make plain the administration of this mystery which
for ages past was kept hidden in God.'*

You see, it hasn't ever been a **mystery** to God; God has had this plan in mind all along but God has kept this final aspect of His Plan – the Final Version of his 'Family of Fellowship and Faith' - a secret until the time was right.

And when the time **was** 'right', the Apostle Paul was given the privilege and the responsibility to reveal that '**mystery**'.

The **mystery** that God had kept to himself through all those long years – through all those previous versions of His 'Family of Fellowship and Faith' – is revealed in **Today's Key Verse** ...

TODAY'S KEY VERSE ...

'This **MYSTERY** is that though the **GOSPEL** the Gentiles are heirs **TOGETHER** with Israel, members **TOGETHER** of one body and sharers **TOGETHER** in the **PROMISE** in Christ Jesus."
(Ephesians 3:6)

Who would have thought it?

After all those centuries of making sure that His People kept themselves free of 'Gentile-Influence' ...

After all those times when God even used His People as Agents of Judgment against the Gentile nations around them ...

After distinguishing His People from the Gentile nations by giving His People the Sign of Circumcision and the Law of Moses and the Annual Calendar of Celebrations ...

After all of that, God now reveals that these despised Gentiles are going to 'partner up' with them and share together with them in the Promise of Eternal Life that Christ has provided for them? Really?

That's a lot to take in ...

It's one thing to say (as Peter did on the Day of Pentecost) that God has made '*this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ*' ...

It's one thing to accept that Jesus is the ultimate Lamb of God and even that he is the ultimate High Priest who has offered his own shed blood upon the altar in heaven in payment for His People's sins ...

But it's an entirely other thing to say that the door of salvation has been opened to the Gentiles and that they now share equally with Born-Again Jews in this '*Final Version*' of God's '*Family of Fellowship and Faith*'.

That's certainly a lot to take it ...

Peter had a hard time taking it in.

The other leaders in the Jerusalem Church had trouble taking it in.

Imagine how hard it would be for life-long Jews ... life-long followers of the Ten Commandments ... life-long critics of the sinful Gentile population around them ...

Imagine how hard it would be for them to even consider the idea that any of 'those people' would become '*partners with them*' in the promises of Christ.

There was a lot of animosity to overcome; there was a wide chasm that would need to be bridged.

That's why God waited so long to reveal this mystery.

Only a 'Born-Again' Jew, only a Jew in whom the Spirit of God was residing would be capable of even entertaining let alone embracing such a thought.

But by the Grace of God and by the work of the Spirit of God they did ...

Born-Again Jews came to recognize Born-Again Gentiles as 'fellow heirs' in the promise ... saved by faith in Christ just as they were.

Acts chapter 15 details the discussion among the leaders of the Jerusalem Church when that position was officially adopted.

And then God had Paul drop the **next** bombshell ...

You see there was even more to this '**mystery**' ...

There was more that needed to be revealed concerning this 'Final Version' – the 7.0 Version – of God's '*Family of Fellowship and Faith*'.

This '**mystery**' that God had Paul reveal involves more than just the salvation story – it goes beyond the fact that Gentiles can be saved and join the born-again family of God just like Jews can.

It's bigger than that and it's more mind-blowing than that ...

Here's the next installment of the story – found in Ephesians 2:15

THE NEXT INSTALLMENT ...

"His **PURPOSE** was to create in himself **ONE NEW MAN** out of the two and in this **ONE BODY** to **RECONCILE** both of them to God."
(Ephesians 2:15)

Do you hear what that is saying?

Can you draw the inevitable conclusion toward which that verse leads?

JEW AND GENTILE DISTINCTIONS ARE A THING OF THE PAST!

The 'final family' is something radically and completely different.

Listen again to what God had Paul say concerning the Work of Christ ...

"His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two and in this one body (the church) to reconcile both of them to God."

Feel now the full impact of ...

Today's Key Concept ...

GOD'S Final Family **FEATURES** a brand new **HUMANITY!**

'Like **NOTHING** ever **SEEN** before'

Jesus came into the world to demonstrate and then (through the Holy Spirit) to generate a 'kind of humanity' that had never existed before.

Time this morning for just the **First** of **Three Key Observations** that arise from that **Key Concept ...**

TODAY'S KEY OBSERVATION ...

In This Brand-New Humanity
Former **DISTINCTIONS** Have Been **ELIMINATED!**

Four Examples of that **First Key Observation**:

* In This Brand-New Humanity **RELIGIOUS** Distinctions Are Gone
(Jew and Gentile distinction is a thing of the past – Ephesians 2:13-15)

"But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far away have been brought near through the Blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both to God."

There's a new body – a new identity that did not exist before.
The former identities religiously speaking are irrelevant – they belong to a former age – a former version of the family of God.

The current version of the family of God pre-empts the old one ...
It's not just a newfangled version of the previous one.

The **Jews** who **did not** accept Christ recognized that reality before the **born-again** Jews did ...

In the Book of Acts we find those **unbelieving** Jews searching for some designation to distinguish themselves from these 'former Jews'.

In Acts chapter 9, we see Saul, the Jewish vigilante, tracking down what he called '*The Followers of the Way*'. In his eyes they were no longer Jews. They had become something else. He was right!

The **Gentiles** in Antioch who **did not** accept Christ also felt the need to distinguish themselves from these 'born-again' former worshippers of the Greek Gods ...

They came up with a designation that actually stuck ...
They called these former idol worshippers '*Little Christs*' or '*Christians*'.
And that's what we have been called ever since.

The point is these born-again 'former' Jews and these born-again 'former' Gentiles were now one and the same thing ...

They had become 'one' in Christ – they were equal members of the '**Final Version**' of God's '*Family of Fellowship and Faith*'.

And so it is still today ... Those who come to Christ from Islam cease to be Muslim; those who come to Christ from Buddhism cease to be Buddhist; those who come to Christ from Atheism cease to be atheists.

Through Christ they join God's Family and they become Children of God ... Fellow Citizens in the Kingdom!

Whatever characterized them **religiously** before characterizes them no longer and (I would say) the sooner they drop their former identity the better, for in this brand-new Humanity, Religious Distinctions are gone!

And they are never to return.

Three more examples of today's **Key Observation** are provided by the Apostle Paul in one powerfully significant statement in his letter to the Galatian Believers.

Look at that statement with me ...

"You are all sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."
(Galatians 3:26-28)

Did you zero in on those **three examples** of the brand-new humanity?

* In This Brand-New Humanity **RACIAL** Distinctions Are Gone
(Jew and Greek distinction is a thing of the past – Galatians 3:26-28a)

*"There is neither Jew nor Greek ...
for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*

Here I take the term '**Greek**' to refer to culture rather than to religion. Different races, different cultures are blended into one as the Spirit of God creates the Life of Christ in each of them. This '*one new man*' is above cultural and racial identities.

The Church of Jesus Christ is the ultimate melting pot ...
All the old passes away and something wonderfully new comes into being.
It's beautiful to see when it happens!

* In This Brand-New Humanity **SOCIETAL** Distinctions Are Gone
(Class distinction is a thing of the past – Galatians 3:26-28b)

*"There is neither slave nor free ...
for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*

Though the members of any particular congregation may come from various levels of society; though some of them might even be employed by others of them during the week; though there may be distinctions in education and occupation, though they may root for different ball teams, their identity in Christ is what really matters – what really identifies them.

Inside the House of God they are equally valuable in God's eyes and in each other's eyes as well for societal distinctions are gone in this '**Final Version**' of God's '*Family of Fellowship and Faith*'.

Good Riddance!

* In This Brand-New Humanity **GENDER** Distinctions Are Gone
(Male and Female distinction is a thing of the past – Galatians 3:26-28c)

*"There is neither male nor female...
for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*

Here too there is a rising above standard stereotypes.

Who we are in Christ spiritually is much more important than
what we are in the flesh hormonally.

Time for just one mind-blowing challenge ...

Check out Jesus ...

If you carefully follow the life of Jesus through the Gospels you will discover that he displayed every positive feminine quality as well as every positive masculine one.

He was a complete human being and he calls us to become complete in him. No longer are we to be limited by nor are we to limit our fellow believers by earthly gender distinctions. In Christ we are becoming more than we ever were before!

This brand-new humanity is some pretty amazing stuff ...
God would have us enjoy it and express it fully and completely.

But it's not always easy to do ...

Old habits and old ways of looking at things (and people) die hard so consider the insight tucked away in today's **Final Thot ...**

Final Thot ...

The **LESS** we keep track of our former **DIFFERENCES**
the **MORE** we will be able to enjoy our current **SIMILARITIES!**

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

-

"Lesson Twenty-One"

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians he reveals the content of a '**MYSTERY**' that had been long hidden from the peoples on earth – even from His Chosen People.

Here was '**Mystery – Part One**' ...

"This mystery is that though the Gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 3:6)

Read and reflect upon this 'commentary' on that verse ...

"Imagine how hard it would be for life-long Jews ... life-long followers of the Ten Commandments ... life-long critics of the sinful Gentile population around them ... to even consider the idea that any of 'those people' would become 'partners with them' in the promises of Christ. There was a lot of animosity to overcome; there was a wide chasm that would need to be bridged.

That's why God waited so long to reveal this mystery. Only a 'Born-Again' Jew, only a Jew in whom the Spirit of God was residing would be capable of even entertaining let alone embracing such a thought.

But by the Grace of God and by the work of the Spirit of God they did ... 'Born-Again' Jews came to recognize 'Born-Again' Gentiles as 'fellow heirs' in the promise ... saved by faith in Christ just as they were."

Then God had Paul share '**Mystery – Part Two**' ...

"His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God."

Read and reflect upon this 'commentary' on that verse ...

"Jesus came into the world to demonstrate and then (through the Holy Spirit) to generate a 'kind of humanity' that had never existed before ... A kind of brand-new humanity in which former distinctions no longer matter."

Remember the four 'Distinctions' mentioned Sunday that have 'passed away'?

RELIGIOUS – RACIAL – SOCIETAL – GENDER

Points To Ponder ...

How 'successful' would you say Jesus has been in 'generating' this 'new kind of humanity' in our world? What has been your experience? Why is it so hard?

“GOD’S DWELLING PLACE ON EARTH”

‘Grace Is The Key’ Series
(Ephesians 2:11-3:13)

Intro ... This morning we continue our look into the **fourth** great section of thought in Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians.

It’s a section that begins with the 11th verse of chapter two, continues through the Chapter break and concludes with verse 13 of chapter three.

It’s a section of Scripture that highlights that fact that in these last days, God is bringing into being on earth what we have called “*His Final Family*” ... It’s actually His Seventh Version!

Out of that extended passage of Scripture arose ...

LAST SUNDAY’S KEY CONCEPT ...

GOD’S Final Family **FEATURES** A Brand-New **HUMANITY!**

‘Like **NOTHING** ever **SEEN** before’

Jesus came into the world to demonstrate and then (through the Holy Spirit) to generate a ‘kind of humanity’ that had never existed before.

It’s an incredibly exciting and challenging concept.

This morning I want us to consider the **Second** of **Three Key Observations** that arise from that **Key Concept** ...

Last week I shared with you the **First** of those **Three Observations** – a potential mind-blowing reality for the First Century Church ...

THE FIRST KEY OBSERVATION ...

In This Brand-New Humanity, Former **DISTINCTIONS**
Have Been **ELIMINATED!**

That’s a reality that God would have us embrace.

In Christ, Paul tells us that Religious, Racial, Societal and even Gender distinctions are no longer what matter. In Christ we are all one and the same and we are to relate to one another as equal participants in this Family of Fellowship and Faith.

However, only through the 'New Birth' and the maturing influence of the Holy Spirit can such easily differentiated beings as ourselves rise above and go beyond our normal tendencies.

But (Praise God) by the Spirit's help we indeed can and when we do the world around is forced to '*sit up and take notice*'. Indeed, it was a great truth that we focused ourselves upon last week.

Today I would share the **Second** of those three **Observations** that arise from that **Key Concept** ...

TODAY'S KEY OBSERVATION ...

In This Brand-New Humanity A **DWELLING PLACE** For God
Is Being **CONSTRUCTED!**

*"You too (two) are being built together to become
a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit."
(Ephesians 2:22)*

Now if you think about that observation for just for a moment, it's as mind-blowing as the First was - both for the born-again Jew and for the born-again Gentile.

Both Jew and Gentile reveled in the Glory of Their Temples.

Remember the way the Disciples spoke of the Grandeur of the Temple during that last week of Jesus' life? Remember their stunned silence when Jesus said that there was coming a day when '*not one of those magnificent stones would be left upon another*'? It was unthinkable to them that God would allow that to happen again.

The pagan temples stirred equal awe in the hearts of their worshippers. Right there in Ephesus was one of the most impressive of all the pagan temples – the magnificent Temple to the goddess, Artemis, which was listed as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World!

Both Jew and Gentile were accustomed to 'Going to the Temple' in the practice of their faith. Our neighbors just to the north of us are doing that very thing even today. Any committed Jew would if he could but in 70 AD the Roman Legions fulfilled Jesus' prophecy by burning Herod's Great Temple to the ground, leaving not one stone upon another.

A temple is where men seek to make connection with their Deity. Usually a priest is the go-between and frequently only He is allowed to enter the place where the Presence of God is believed to dwell.

In the Jewish Faith, only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies and then only once a year on the Day of Atonement. Their temple was their link with heaven and brought them the hope of forgiveness.

Paul was throwing the door open to unimaginable things when he said that God is in the process of constructing a Brand New Temple in this world.

And it would be not only '*brand new*' – it would be totally different. Rather than silver and gold and cedar and fabric this temple (Paul says to the Ephesians) is being constructed out of human beings.

No longer will it be limited geographically – it will be found wherever His People are found. It will eventually encompass the entire earth.

And its Holy Places will no longer be reserved for just a few. All who know him will be declared worthy to enter right on in.

In this letter to the Ephesians – particularly in today's passage – Paul unrolls the Blueprints (as it were) and reveals the Specs of the Building.

Here then is **Today's Key Text**.

See if your mind can envision what this blueprint contains ...

TODAY'S KEY TEXT ...

*"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow-citizens with God's people and **MEMBERS** of God's household, built on the **FOUNDATION** of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief **CORNERSTONE**.*

*In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy **TEMPLE** in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a **DWELLING** in which God **LIVES** by his Spirit."*

(Ephesians 2:19-22)

***NOTE THE FOUNDATION MATERIALS**

"The Apostles and the Prophets"

What Paul is saying here is that this 'Temple' will be built upon the Truths of God as revealed through His Chosen Apostles and Prophets – the Word of God is the Foundation upon which this Temple will stand. This temple will not be built upon any interpretations of men or upon any fanciful notions of men. Though the Devil will seek to re-design it, men of faith will preserve it.

Notice the order Paul gives these materials ...

First the **Apostles** and then the **Prophets**.

The Apostles were the ones who had seen Jesus in the Flesh – they had walked with him and talked with him. They had heard his words with their own ears and seen his deeds with their own eyes. They had been chosen by him and had His Own Spirit breathed out upon them. They had been among the first to see him in his resurrected state.

Three of them (Peter, James and John) had stood with him on the Mount of Transfiguration and (as John would later record in his gospel) '*beheld His Glory*'.

They were unique men on the face of the earth and would forever take a unique place in this newly formed 'Temple of God'. They were part of the ground floor – their eye-witness accounts would forever undergird everything else that would be said.

And there would be much else said ... God would raise up **prophets** to whom and through whom He would reveal essential truths concerning this new family of faith – this final version.

Think of the incredible truths found in the Book of **Hebrews** – the number one transition text for anyone seeking to understand the movement from version six of the family of God (The National Family) to Version Seven (The Born-Again Family).

Think of the tremendous insights shared in the Book of **James** and how principles of Godly Living long espoused by the Jews are to be equally valued by Born Again followers of Jesus Christ.

Think of all the understanding of the implications of the Life and Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ that God revealed through the writings of the Apostle Paul himself (the only Apostle with an asterisk in front of his name).

Indeed this New Temple – this Holy temple – has a firm and stable foundation. There is nothing that can shake it – This temple is built upon the unchanging Word of God as given through the **Apostles** and **Prophets**.

And now Paul draws our attention to a key component of the foundation.

*** NOTE THE CORNERSTONE**

“Jesus Christ Himself”

The cornerstone is laid first ... all the other stones in the foundation are oriented according to it. The cornerstone is the key to the structure.

All that the Apostles and Prophets say and record has meaning only as their speaking and writing accurately convey truths concerning the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. Only those who confess Christ as Savior and Lord can be said to be *‘standing upon the foundation’*.

Peter identified the essential role of Jesus Christ in the new work that God was launching in the world when he announced on the Day of Pentecost.

“God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”
(Acts 2:36)

Lord and Christ ... there's no higher position than that. There's no more determining position than that. Everything that the Apostles report, everything that the Prophets declare will be – must be – lined up with the Person of Jesus Christ. He is the Cornerstone.

As Paul would say to the Colossian Believers ...

"In him (Christ) are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"
(Colossians 2:3)

Through the Inspiration and Illumination of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles and Prophets were enabled to align themselves and their declarations perfectly with the Person and Work of Jesus Christ – their Cornerstone.

So far Paul's Blueprint for the New Temple of God has revealed the **Foundation** and the **Cornerstone** ... It has a solid and stable base. Its footings run deep into the eternal plans and purposes of God. But what will it be built of ... what type of material will God employ?

*** NOTE THE CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS**

"All Born-Again Redeemed Members of the Human Race"
"Christ's Brand-New Humanity"

This New Temple of God on earth will be a 'Living Temple' constructed of living people ... All born-again people on earth make up its superstructure.

Listen to this Scripture that we mention almost every Sunday morning –
1 Peter 2:4 ...

"As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to Him – you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house ..."

Ultimately, this 'spiritual house' – this 'holy temple' is world-wide and centuries old ... Its scope dwarfs anything that man has ever built.

Only the eye of God can actually take it all in.
It is the ultimate act of God's Creative Genius ...

It's what Jesus was picturing when he said ...

"I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it"
And I would add ... 'will not be able to come close to matching it.'

This final version of God's 'Holy Temple' is an awesome thing. It is a miraculously produced thing ... It is a most unbelievable and mostly unexpected thing.

God through the miracle of New Birth has raised human beings above and beyond their normal distinctions and has blended them together into one incredibly glorious body.

He has united them in a structure of Grace and Beauty that should be recognized as the 'Main Wonder' of this current world!

And now note the final thing that Paul (our prophetic writer) reveals ...

*** NOTE THE FINISHED PRODUCT**

"A Dwelling Place For The Spirit of God"

This is what God has sought all these years ... To return to the fellowship that He once enjoyed with the Original Human Family in the Garden ... To enjoy them and have them enjoy him.

This is what Jesus desired to do during his earthly ministry. He said one time that he longed to ...

*'gather the people together, as a mother hen
gathers her chicks under her wings'
(Matthew 23:37)*

but it was not to be.

A New Birth and A New Identity would be needed before that moment could come.

But, praise God, through the Blood of Jesus Christ, that New Birth and that New Identity now **has come** making genuine 'Divine/Human Fellowship' once again possible.

God desires to once again have a place on this earth where He can fellowship with man ... Where He can actually '*settle down*' with man. This Paul says God has made possible.

Here's the ultimate expression of that 'Fellowship' – the fellowship for which the Father yearns and toward which His Spirit's Work in our world today points ... (Revelation 21:1-5)

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,
“Now the dwelling of God is with men, (sound familiar?)
and He will live with them.*

They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes.

*There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain,
for the old order of things has passed away.”*

*He who was seated on the throne said,
“I am making everything new!”*

*Then he said,
“Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”*

That's the ultimate expression of the Church that Jesus Christ is even now building and though that is the 'ultimate' expression the present church is the 'immediate'.

So then here's the bottom line ...

God finds fellowship in the Church of Jesus Christ. He inhabits its people and thus permeates its gatherings with His Presence.

They form a temple built upon His Word both Written and Living ...
He enters in and makes Himself known.

And in that Divine/Human Fellowship, things profound take place.

Final Thot ...

There is really only one answer to the question ...
“**WHERE** today can I **MEET** with God?”

We meet with God ...

“IN THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST”

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

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"Lesson Twenty-Two"

In Sunday's message Pastor Mark continued to delve into the **Observations** that arise from this **Key Concept** discovered in Paul's letter to the Ephesians ...

"GOD'S Final Family FEATURES a brand new HUMANITY!"

Last Sunday we 'observed' that:

"In this brand new humanity former DISTINCTIONS no longer matter."

How did that observation strike you? How 'significant' a statement does it seem?
Is it good when Christians can no longer even 'remember' what used to distinguish them
one from the other? What do you think?

This past Sunday we 'observed' that:

"In this brand new humanity a DWELLING PLACE for God is being constructed."

Why would God want a 'dwelling place' on earth? Has He ever had one before?
What is the nature of the one that He is currently building?

Check out this **key text** which Pastor Mark said contains the 'blueprints' ...

"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow-citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become A Holy Temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit." (Ephesians 2:19-22)

What about those 'blueprints' catch your eye? What seem to be the essential elements?
What strikes you as the 'sequence' in the construction?

Reflect upon this statement from Sunday's message:

***"So then here's the bottom line ... God finds fellowship in the Church of Jesus Christ.
He inhabits its people and thus permeates its gatherings with His Presence. They form a temple
built upon His Word both Written and Living – He enters in and makes Himself known.
And in that Divine/Human Fellowship, things profound take place."***

Point To Ponder ...

There is no higher **PURPOSE** in life than being used to
"PROVIDE A Dwelling Place For God Upon The Earth."

“TO INFINITY AND BEYOND!”

‘Grace Is The Key’ Series
(Ephesians 2:11-3:13)

Intro ... What a day this is – what a thing we have just done.
We have just given birth to a Worship-Centered, Cell-Based, Overseer-Led,
FirstFruits-Funded, Annually-Renewed Congregation of Christ’s Church!

What we have done has far-reaching implications.

Our **Key Text** this morning reveals just how far.

TODAY’S KEY TEXT ... Ephesians 3:10

*“His intent was that now, through the **CHURCH**,
the manifold **WISDOM** of God should be made **KNOWN**
to the rulers and authorities in the **HEAVENLY** Realms ...”*

Now before we jump into that text, let me remind you where we have been.
Here is the concept that we are dealing with currently ...

OUR CURRENT KEY CONCEPT ...

GOD’S Final Family **FEATURES** A Brand-New **HUMANITY!**
‘Like **NOTHING** ever **SEEN** before’

This brand new humanity is what we have labeled the ‘Born-Again Family’
which is the **seventh** and **final** version of God’s ‘Family of Fellowship and Faith’.

Three key observations arise from this **Key Concept** ...

THE FIRST KEY OBSERVATION (Two Weeks Ago) ...

In This Brand-New Humanity
Former **DISTINCTIONS** Have Been **ELIMINATED!**

Could say that God is taking the human race to an entirely new level – far more significant now are the things that define and bind those who are born-again than the things that used to distinguish and divide them.

SECOND KEY OBSERVATION (Last Week)...

In This Brand-New Humanity
A **DWELLING PLACE** For God Is Being **CONSTRUCTED!**

In temples made of born-again human beings God now takes up residence on the earth. Here He dwells whenever they assemble themselves together.

Today we come to the **third** and **final observation** to arise from that tremendously important **Key Concept** ...

TODAY'S KEY OBSERVATION ...

In This Brand-New Humanity
The **WISDOM** Of God Is To Be **DEMONSTRATED!**

Consider our **Key Text** again ...

"His intent was that now, through the Church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the Heavenly Realms ..."

To use the very words God gave Paul in Ephesians 2:10 ...

"The Church is God's Masterpiece – His finest work!"

The Church of Jesus Christ – the New Born-Again Family of God – the New Humanity that is coming into being through that new birth is a living demonstration of God's 'manifold wisdom'!

Could say ...

"Only God could have come up with such a plan to redeem and give rebirth to man and only God would have the tools at His disposal to pull it off".

This we know and this we can already say and this we have already seen but in this passage there is something to be seen that we have not seen before ...

There is something in this passage that God had not chosen to reveal before – a further unfolding of the ‘mystery’ that Paul has been referring to in this third chapter.

Here’s the thing – the single thing – that I want us to see in this passage and that I want us to meditate upon as we have just formulated this brand new congregation and as we prepare to celebrate its first Service of Communion.

HERE’S TODAY’S KEY THING ...

“The Church of Jesus Christ (*Sonlife* Community Church) is **INTENDED** to Demonstrate The Manifold Wisdom of God to the **HEAVENLY HOSTS**.”

God wants all **SPIRITUAL BEINGS** everywhere to recognize His **WISE WORKINGS** in the **CHURCH** of **JESUS CHRIST!**

Listen to **Today’s Key Text** one more time ...

“His intent was that now, through the Church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the Heavenly Realms ...”

That verse could well serve as inspiration for an additional ‘Twilight Zone’ episode. Who are these ‘rulers and authorities’? ... Where do they reside? How extensive are the ‘heavenly realms’?

And how impressive should it be to us that these ‘rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms’ who obviously have firsthand knowledge of the workings of the vast universe would be awed by the ‘wisdom of God’ displayed in the development of the Church of Jesus Christ – in the creation of God’s Born-Again Family of Fellowship and Faith.

Can we not assume that they (much better than we) understand just how ugly and repulsive sin is ...

Can we not assume that forgiveness does not naturally stir in their hearts ...

Can we not assume that they who have been '*confirmed in righteousness*' ever since the Great Rebellion led by Lucifer himself cannot (in and of themselves) even conceive of a way that sin can be overcome and its affects cleansed ...

And can we not assume that they who worship and adore the Heavenly Family would be actually appalled to think that the Son of God would descend into that earthly place of sin and rebellion and take upon himself human flesh?

But would it not strike them as a stroke of God's Genius when they observe how and what that unthinkable action of the Son of God has accomplished - the generating of a Brand New Kind of Humanity altogether!

This God wants them to know.

God would have the **knowledge** of His Ultimate Act of Wisdom – the generating of that Brand New Humanity through the work of His Son, Jesus – to extend (as a famous movie star once said) "*To Infinity and Beyond*"!

And so on this **20th Birthday** of *Sonlife* Community Church, consider this ***final thot*** ...

Final Thot ...

We **BELIEVERS** are the **FOCUS** of an incredible **AUDIENCE!**

Let's put on an **INCREDIBLE SHOW!**

Let's demonstrate the **BRILLIANCE** of our **CREATOR!**

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

-

"Lesson Twenty-Three"

Sunday we concluded the **Fourth Major Section of Thought** in Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. Let's review all four of them ...

SECTION ONE: Ephesians 1:1-14 ... **KEY WORD** - "**BLESSING**"
(Blessings of Selection/Redemption/Comprehension/Identification)

Key Verse: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." (Ephesians 1:3)

SECTION TWO: Ephesians 1:15-23 ... **KEY WORD** - "**KNOWLEDGE**"
(Know the Father/Know the Hope/ Know the Power)

Key Verse: "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Glorious Father, may give you a spirit of wisdom and understanding ... (Ephesians 1:17)

SECTION THREE: Ephesians 2:1-10 ... **KEY WORD** - "**TRUTH**"
(Truth of Spiritual Death/Truth of Satanic Authority/Truth of Fleshly Domination/
Truth of God's Wrath/Truth of Human Regeneration/ Truth of God's Grace)

Key Verses: "Because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in transgressions ..." (Ephesians 2:4-5)

"For it is by grace that you have been saved through faith – and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

SECTION FOUR: Ephesians 2:11-3:13 ... **KEY WORD** – "**MYSTERY**"
(In Christ a Brand New Humanity is being formed - Former Distinctions Eliminated/
God's New Dwelling Place Constructed/God's Wisdom Demonstrated)

Key Verse: "You who were once far away have been brought near through the Blood of Christ." (Ephesians 2:13)

Choose one of these three '**Key Words**' or "**Key Verses**" or "**Underlying Concepts**" and reflect upon what kind of impact it has had upon you ...

Point To Ponder ...

Can you imagine yourself being a 'demonstration of the Wisdom of God' to 'spiritual beings in heavenly realms' – What kinds of questions would you imagine they might have? Why do you think the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to identify 'wisdom' as the quality uniquely displayed in man's salvation?

"PAUL'S PRAYER FOR CAPACITY"

'Grace Is The Key' Series
(Ephesians 3:14-21)

Intro ... Today we enter into the **Fifth Key Section of Thought** in Paul's letter to the Ephesian Believers (Ephesians 3:14-21) ...

It's a **transition** section – It transitions us from 'Doctrine' to 'Discipleship' – from 'Knowing' to 'Doing' – from 'Learning' to 'Applying'.

This past week in our Cell Groups we reviewed those **Four Great Doctrinal Sections**:

SECTION ONE: Ephesians 1:1-14 ... **KEY WORD** - "**BLESSING**"

SECTION TWO: Ephesians 1:15-23 ... **KEY WORD** - "**KNOWLEDGE**"

SECTION THREE: Ephesians 2:1-10 ... **KEY WORD** - "**TRUTH**"

SECTION FOUR: Ephesians 2:11-3:13 ... **KEY WORD** – "**MYSTERY**"

It has taken 23 messages to work our way through the marvelous insights into the Will and Ways of God that they contain. Those insights (joined together) form the foundation that our Christian Life stands upon. They provide the context in which our life for Christ is to be lived. Each of those 23 messages is available in written and video form at our church website.

Now if Paul had been merely writing a theological treatise – he would at this point be done but he was called by God and inspired by the Spirit of God to do far more than that.

Doctrine is intended to inspire Discipleship ... The more we know of Christ and the more we understand of His Great Sacrifice the more we should desire to serve Him and demonstrate our commitment to Him.

And so Paul fills this transitional section with a wonderful prayer ... a plea to the Father that those who **are** His will receive all they need to show themselves to truly **be** His.

This section of thought makes clear that triumphant Christian Living does not come automatically for us new-born children of God.

Without the intervention of God in our lives we would never have been saved in the first place and so also without the renovation of God we would not have the capacity to live for Christ in the second place.

God doesn't want just a family of saved human beings ...
He wants a family of fully functioning Followers of Christ!

To this end Paul drops to his knees on behalf of the Ephesians Believers.

Listen to what he says ...

Ephesians 3:14-21

*For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom His whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being,
so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.*

*And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge —
that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,
to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout
all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

Now that is an incredible prayer, is it not?

That's a prayer that Paul could have prayed (and probably did) for every one of the churches to which he ministered. That is a prayer that any pastor anywhere at any time could pray for the congregation to whom he ministers. That is a prayer that any believer could pray for any other believer. That is a prayer that every one of us could (and should) pray for ourselves.

I'm calling it this morning ... **"A PRAYER FOR CAPACITY"**.

Paul is praying that the Father in Heaven would make these Ephesian Believers capable of functioning as genuine Followers of Christ – as genuine Born-Again Children of God. And for them to become 'capable', they will have to have their 'capacity' increased. God needs to do a 'renovation' in their inner being; He needs to strengthen them to contain the things that pertain to their new life.

Becoming a Christian is a lot like Russia (seven years ago) being granted the privilege of hosting this year's Winter Olympic Games ...

Just being declared by the International Committee to be the 'Host Country' didn't magically make Russia ready to perform those duties as host country. It took seven years of work and several billion dollars of expense to live up to the title.

So it is with this new life of ours ...

We have been declared to be Children of God and even 'Hosts of the Holy Spirit' – but there is much to be done if we are to 'live up to' that declaration.

In this incredible prayer, the Apostle Paul is asking the Father to spare no expense to create in us all that is necessary for us to function as bone fide Representatives of His in this fallen world.

Notice how Paul phrases that appeal ...

TODAY'S KEY TEXT ... Ephesians 3:16

*"I pray that out of His glorious **RICHES** He (the Father) may strengthen you with **POWER** through His **SPIRIT** in your **INNER** being ..."*

Let's look at it step by step ...

STEP ONE ...

*"I pray that out of His glorious **RICHES**,
He (the Father) may strengthen you with **POWER** ..."*

Paul is counting on the fact that the Father's bank account can never be exhausted. There are more than enough resources for this renovation, this transformation - this creation of genuine, fully functional, impressive Children of God in the midst of this fallen, sin-filled world.

The Father possesses a '**glorious**' (an inexhaustible) amount of riches.

Now, counting upon those inexhaustible riches, Paul's petition is that the Father will '*strengthen us with power*' – the very kind of power that God has used for important projects in the past.

The Greek word Paul uses here is the word 'dunamis' (spiritual dynamite) ... the same explosive power that Paul previously reported God used to raise Jesus from '*physical death*' and us from '*spiritual death*' (Ephesians 1:19).

What Paul is asking here is that God would now put some of that '*power*' at our disposal because (as we shall see in the coming weeks) we are heading into some pretty challenging territory.

Power is going to be needed if (as Paul will say in chapter four verse one) we are to '*live a life that is worthy of our calling*'.

You see ... that is what we are getting ready to do ... To live a life worthy of being called '*Christian*' – to live the kind of life that will identify us as true '*Children of God*' – the kind of life that will please the Father immensely.

And to live that life we are going to first of all need to be ...

'Strengthened with God's Own Dynamic Explosive Power'

Now let's look at **STEP TWO** ...

*"I pray that out of His glorious riches, He (the Father)
may strengthen you with power **THROUGH** His **SPIRIT** ..."*

All that God does in this world, He does '*Through His Spirit*' ...

The Holy Spirit is God's Agent of Power and Grace in this Fallen World of Men.

It was the Holy Spirit who '*overshadowed Mary*' and caused her to conceive.

It was the Holy Spirit who '*filled John the Baptist*' from birth.

It was the Holy Spirit who '*drove Jesus into the wilderness*' and who '*filled him to overflowing*' when he began his earthly ministry.

It was the Holy Spirit who was '*poured out upon the Apostles*' on the Day of Pentecost and it was the Holy Spirit who gave '*evidence of new birth*' whenever and wherever it happened in the days of the Early Church.

It was the Holy Spirit who had come upon Saul when Ananias placed hands upon him following his conversion on the Damascus Road.

It was the Holy Spirit who subsequently guided Paul's steps and encouraged his heart.

And, of course, it was the Holy Spirit who '*inspired the writers of the New Testament Scriptures*'.

This is the Holy Spirit's time ... We live in the '*Age of the Spirit*'.

Is it any wonder that Paul petitions the Father for a fresh working of the Holy Spirit to prepare us believers for Triumphant Living!

Is it also any wonder that later in this great Epistle Paul will urge the Ephesian Believers not to '*Grieve the Holy Spirit*' (Ephesians 4:30) but rather to be '*filled with the Spirit*' (Ephesians 5:18).

Finally, consider with me **STEP THREE** ...

*"I pray that out of His glorious riches, He (the Father)
may strengthen you with power through His Spirit
in your **INNER BEING** ..."*

Here Paul zeroes in on where this renovation needs to take place.
It's in our '*inner being*' - our '*inner man*' the King James calls it.

The '*inner man*' – our '*inner being*' is that place where the real 'me' resides - the place only I and God know about - the place where nothing can be hidden – the place where pretense is not needed – the place where who I am and what I am is clearly seen.

It's my place of refuge and repair.

This '*inner place*' for a believer is where the '*new man*' – the '*born-again man*' is coming into being.

It's a place that is only ever large enough for my present reality ...
thus the continual need for enlargement.

You see, every time I would '*grow in grace*' my inner man needs to increase in size to accommodate the increased dimensions of my spiritual self.

In the next few weeks we are going to consider the three **Calls for Increased Capacity** that Paul includes in this prayer.

Today let's simply recognize that the 'inner man' is a 'work in progress' and that the Father through his Spirit is the only ONE who can provide for that progress.

The Father must 'strengthen us' to handle the increased stress demands of 'spiritual growth' and 'spiritual ministry' ...

More than one believer, who failing to recognize the need for increased superstructure, has failed to hold up under the strain of Christian Living and either come crashing down or just retreated into the shadows.

'Whatever happened to so and so?' we question.

The point I would make today is that the 'inner man' is where the real decisions are made ...

It's in the 'inner man' where we make the choices that determine our lives – that determine the progress that God can make in us and the blessings that He can bring through us.

Read carefully and reflect thoughtfully upon the three **Calls for Capacity** that we will identify in the coming weeks.

These are three **Critical Components of Triumphant Christian Living**.

We continually need more and more of each of them and we can only receive more as our capacity to contain them increases.

So Paul would have us join him in this great Prayer ...

*"That the Father in Heaven from whom his whole family
in heaven and earth derives its name will strengthen us
through His Spirit in our inner man."*

Final Thot ...

Those who **RECEIVE** increased capacity for spiritual things are those who **DESIRE** it and **REQUEST** it.

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"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Twenty-Four"

Pastor Mark mentioned that the 'Fifth Section of Thought' (Eph. 3:14-21) in Paul's letter to the Ephesian Believers is actually a **TRANSITION** Section ...

What did he mean by that?
What is it a transition from and what is it a transition to?

Check out the text ... **Compare** chapters 1-3 to chapters 4-6.
What 'differences' jump out at you?

One suggestion made Sunday is that Section Five transitions us ...

"FROM **DOCTRINE** TO **DISCIPLESHIP**"

Can you see that? How would you distinguish doctrine from discipleship?

Do you agree with this statement from Sunday's message?

"Doctrine is intended to inspire Discipleship."

Here was Sunday's **Key Text** (Ephesians 3:16) ...

*"I pray that out of His glorious riches, He (the Father) may
strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being ..."*

Why do you think that Paul would make such a request of the Father?
What about that request catches your attention?

Reflect upon this concept shared Sunday ...

*"This 'inner place' for a believer is where the 'new man' – the 'born-again man'
is coming into being. It's a place that is only ever large enough for my
present reality thus the continual need for enlargement.*

You see, every time I would 'grow in grace' my inner man needs to increase
in size to accommodate the increased dimensions of my spiritual self.
Holy Spirit Powered Renovation is an on-going need."

Point To Ponder ...

Those who **RECEIVE** increased capacity for spiritual
things are those who **DESIRE** it and **REQUEST** it.

“MY HEART CHRIST’S HOME”

‘Grace Is The Key’ Series
(Ephesians 3:14-21)

Intro ... Last Sunday we entered into the **Fifth Key Section of Thought** in Paul’s letter to the Ephesian Believers (Ephesians 3:14-21) ...

Ephesians 3:14-21

*For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom
His whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.*

*I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you
with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that
Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.*

*And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,
may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how
wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and
to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may
be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we
ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,
to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout
all generations, for ever and ever!
Amen.*

In this midst of that section of thought is found what last week we called:

‘Paul’s Prayer For Capacity’

Here’s how it goes ...

*“I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you
with power through His Spirit in your inner being ...*

Last week we focused upon the three-step process by which our capacity for spiritual living can be increased so that we can in fact live lives that are ‘worthy of the calling we have received’ as Paul will urge us in the very first verse of Chapter Four.

Those ‘three steps’ are listed right at the beginning of Paul’s Prayer and

here they are:

"I pray that out of His glorious riches He (the Father) may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your Inner Being ..."

Step One: We need the Father Himself to 'strengthen us with power'

Step Two: We need Him to strengthen us 'through His Holy Spirit' and

Step Three: We need Him to strengthen us 'in our inner being'.

These are three incredibly important steps of preparation – these are three incredibly transformative steps ... Paul was beseeching the Father to take these three steps on behalf of the Ephesian Believers.

Think about it ... There's not a single desirable thing that can happen in the Christian Life that is not linked to the Father strengthening us out of His Glorious Riches through His Spirit in our Inner Being so that we can accommodate it.

Is it any wonder that Paul would pray ...

"Father, increase their capacity!"

He could have stopped right there and it would have been a great prayer – but he didn't. This petition for capacity anticipates the possibility of something coming that the ordinary born-again person just can't handle – can't contain.

You see though God might seem to be in the business of just 'saving spiritual weaklings', He's actually in the business of 'building spiritual champions' for only 'spiritual champions' can actually live the lives that Christians are called upon to live.

And so Paul prays (and I paraphrase) ...

*"Father, turn these people into 'Spiritual Champions' ...
Out of Your Glorious Riches strengthen them with Divine Power
through Your Holy Spirit in their Innermost Being."*

Now the **next two words** in Paul's prayer reveal that there's a **Purpose** behind

this **Petition** ...

*"I pray that out of His glorious riches He (the Father) may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your Inner Being **SO THAT** ..."*

Paul has a **very specific purpose** in mind here ...

A Three-Fold Purpose in fact ...

The **first part** of which we will discover this morning in ...

TODAY'S KEY TEXT ...

*"I pray that out of His glorious riches He (the Father) may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your Inner Being **so that** ..."*

CHRIST may **DWELL** in your **HEARTS** through **FAITH**."

Obviously this is a big deal ...

This is not something to simply browse over and push past. It's not something that just automatically or routinely happens. And though this is something that requires careful and proper preparation, it is something that can make a tremendous difference in our lives as followers of Christ and as members of the Father's Born-Again Family of Fellowship and Faith. This is something that we should desire for ourselves as strongly as Paul desires it for us.

Let's take it apart and then put it back together ...

First of All ...

CONSIDER WHO'S DOING THE DWELLING ... CHRIST HIMSELF

Note that Paul does not use the name 'Jesus' here though we commonly speak of 'asking Jesus to come into our hearts' ... Paul purposefully used the designation 'Christ' ... A title that is so much broader than the earthly name 'Jesus'.

In his letter to the Philippians Paul would explain how the Father has ...

*'given to Jesus a name (a title) that is above every name – that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth and even under the earth and every tongue shall confess that Jesus is '**LORD**' to the glory of God the Father'.
(Philippians 2:9-11)*

On the day of Pentecost Peter declared in a moment of inspiration that ...
"God has made 'this Jesus' whom you crucified to be both **LORD** and **CHRIST**.
(Acts 2:36)

This is the one who would come to dwell in the strengthened and prepared believer.

Christ Himself ...

Christ - The Sovereign One ...
The Messiah ...
The Word of God ...

Christ - The Only Begotten Son of the Father ...
The Eternal One ...
The Agent of Creation ...
The Sustainer of All Things ...

This is the ONE who will be doing the dwelling! What a thing to Consider.

Second of All ...

CONSIDER WHAT IT MEANS TO 'DWELL' ... 'TAKE UP RESIDENCE'

When we read that word '**Dwell**' doesn't your mind immediately think of the passage we examined several weeks ago in Ephesians chapter two where the Father Himself uses this same imagery to describe His relationship to the Gathered Community of Believers?

"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow-citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

*In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a **dwelling** in which God lives by his Spirit."* (Ephesians 2:19-22)

Our God is a fellowship-seeking God – He has always been that way.

He (as Heavenly Father) would dwell in the midst of His Born-Again Church Family whenever and wherever it assembles itself together. And His Son would do the same in the heart of every believer that has been prepared for him.

Christ Himself would '**dwell**' – '*take up residence*' with us personally and individually. Allow these alternate phrases to express his intention and expand your thinking.

Christ Himself would '*comfortably settle*' – would '*make himself at home*' – would '*take possession*' – would '*establish and demonstrate ownership*' ...

He does not come as our **warden** to '*keep an eye on us*' – He does not come as a **reporter** to just objectively '*note everything that we do*' – He comes and settles in as our **LORD** – as the rightful owner of the place. He would take charge and turn the place into something really extraordinary.

Christ Himself desires to settle down and **DWELL** with us! What a thing to consider.

Third of All ...

CONSIDER WHERE CHRIST WILL BE DWELLING – 'IN THE HEART'

This is really just another designation for my '*inner being*' – my '*inner man*'.

Biblically speaking, my heart is my 'control center'. It is the place where decisions are made – where emotions arise – where actions are generated. Where else but here would Christ want to dwell – to settle in and establish control?

I would amend the old prophet Jeremiah's observation that '*The heart of man is desperately wicked*' and his question '*Who can know it?*' with this observation and question ...

*'The heart indwelt by Christ Himself is amazingly righteous!' –
'Who is not impressed by it?'*

When Christ Himself settles down to dwell with us, he '**takes up residence**' (as it were) at the very center of our being – What a thing to consider!

Fourth of All now this morning ...

CONSIDER HOW THIS DWELLING WILL HAPPEN – ‘THROUGH FAITH’

(‘Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see’ – Heb. 11:1)

Hear again **Today’s Key Text** ...

*“I pray that out of His glorious riches He (the Father) may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your Inner Being **so that** ...*

CHRIST may **DWELL** in your **HEARTS** through **FAITH**.”

Here are some key ‘**Faith Questions**’ for you (and me) to consider ...

*“Do I truly believe that Christ Himself **can** in fact dwell in my heart?”*

*“Do I truly believe that Christ **desires** to dwell in my heart?”*

*“Do I truly believe that my heart is a **suitable** dwelling place for Christ?”*

*“Do I believe that Christ has in fact **begun** to dwell in my heart?”*

Paul says that this ‘Dwelling Within’ can only happen through faith – Only as I believe that Christ can and will and has ‘*taken up residence*’ and has ‘*begun to exercise control*’ within me will it be so. You might say that our ‘*capacity for faith*’ needs to be increased right along with these other things.

Sometimes we need to simply ‘*believe by faith that we have enough faith to believe*’ and then we will discover (as the writer of Hebrews has told us) that the presence of such faith becomes the evidence that the thing we are believing is in fact so.

It is by faith and by faith alone that this ‘Dwelling of Christ within our hearts’ becomes possible – Our faith proves it so. What a thing to consider!

Fifth of All ...

CONSIDER WHAT IT WOULD MEAN FOR YOUR HEART TO BECOME CHRIST’S HOME – EXCEPTIONAL LIFE!

Exceptional life indeed ... Jesus said one time (John 10:10)

*“I have come that they might have life
and have it abundantly”.*

Think of it ...

With Christ Himself dwelling in our hearts through faith, we enjoy continual communion with Christ Himself; we receive competent counsel from the Word of God Himself; we engage in confident conduct as we 'follow in His Steps'.

What a thing to consider!

Now (as I promised we would) let's put it all back together.

Consider with me (what I'm calling today) ...

THE CONFESSION OF ONE IN WHOM CHRIST DWELLS ...

And so by **FAITH** I understand, I acknowledge and declare to be true, that the Spirit of Christ Himself, the Eternal Son of God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, has taken up permanent **RESIDENCE** at the very core of my being and that He would exercise **CONTROL** over all of my decisions and emotions and actions.

The life that I now live in this fallen world
I **CHOOSE** to live **SUSTAINED** by His indwelling presence.

And that my friend, my fellow-follower of Christ, my sibling in God's Born-Again Family of Fellowship and Faith is a confession that thrills the heart of God - a confession that truly takes full advantage of the powerful work of preparation that He has done in our innermost being!

So consider now **Today's Final Thot** ...

Final Thot ...

'My **HEART** Christ's Home' –
May it forever be our **TESTIMONY!**

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"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Twenty-Five"

Sunday we began to uncover the **PURPOSE** behind Paul's impassioned **PETITION** in Ephesians Chapter Three ...

*"I pray that out of His glorious riches He (Our Heavenly Father)
may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being
SO THAT ..."*

*"**CHRIST** may **DWELL** in your **HEARTS** through **FAITH**"
(Ephesians 3:17)*

Choose one of the four **Highlighted Words** in that purpose statement and reflect upon what it communicates to you ...

Reflect upon these statements from Sunday's message ...

*"Note that Paul does not use the name 'Jesus' here though we commonly speak of
'Asking Jesus to come into our hearts' ... Paul purposefully used the designation
'Christ' ... A title that is so much broader than the earthly name 'Jesus'."*

*"Christ does not come as our **warden** to 'keep an eye on us' – He does not come
as a **reporter** to just objectively 'note everything that we do' – He comes and
settles in as our **LORD** – as the rightful owner of the place. He would take
charge and turn the place into something really extraordinary."*

*"I would amend the old prophet Jeremiah's observation that 'The heart of man is desperately
wicked' and his question 'Who can know it?' with this observation and question ...*

*'The heart indwelt by Christ Himself is amazingly righteous!'
'Who is not impressed by it?'*

*"Paul says that this 'Dwelling Within' can only happen through faith –
Only as I **believe** that Christ **can** and **will** and **has** 'taken up residence' and
'begun to exercise control' within me will it be so."*

Point To Ponder ...

CONFESSION OF ONE IN WHOM CHRIST DWELLS

*And so by **FAITH** I understand, I acknowledge and declare to be true, that the
Spirit of Christ Himself, the Eternal Son of God, the Creator and sustainer of the universe,
has taken up permanent **RESIDENCE** at the very core of my being and that He would
exercise **CONTROL** over all of my decisions and emotions and actions.*

*The life that I now live in this fallen world I **CHOOSE** to live
SUSTAINED by His indwelling presence.*

"MIND-BLOWING/LIFE-ALTERING LOVE"

'Grace Is The Key' Series
(Ephesians 3:16-19)

Intro ... Last Sunday we began to examine the **Three-Fold Purpose** behind Paul's **Passionate Petition for Capacity** recorded in Ephesians chapter three.

Last week we discovered ...

PETITION PURPOSE ONE – Ephesians 3:16-17

*I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, **so that** ...*

"CHRIST may DWELL in your HEARTS through FAITH."

What a use of God's incredible equipping power ... That we would be made capable of containing the very Person of Christ – that the Eternal Son of God might 'take up residence' (spiritually speaking) in our innermost being!

This is the incredibly important **first** step -
for from the **Presence of Christ within** all else flows ...

Paul put it this way in his letter to the Colossian Believers (Colossians 1:27) ...

"God has chosen to make known ... the glorious riches of this mystery which is 'Christ in you, the Hope of Glory.'"

Consider these alternate expressions ...

*"Christ in you ... Christ dwelling in you ... Christ taking up residence within you ...
Christ renovating you at the very core of your being ... Christ, like the
ultimate personal trainer, building you up into a formidable
spiritual presence in this fallen, sin-filled world."*

From this inner relationship – this indwelling Christ – comes the **desire** and the **ability** to turn our 'hope' of glory into tangible 'reality'!

And is it any longer any wonder why Paul would so passionately petition the Heavenly Father to '*strengthen us with power through His Spirit in our inner being*' and to draw on all his '*glorious riches*' (if need be) to do so?

Nothing can be more important than us being made ready to '*Contain the Indwelling Christ*'. So Paul pleads with the Father to '*make us ready*' ...

However, as important, as awesome, as it is for Christ Himself to ' *dwell in our hearts through faith*', Paul goes on to point out that Christ's dwelling sets the stage for two even more incredible things that are to follow.

Today we discover ...

PETITION PURPOSE TWO - Ephesians 3:16-18

*I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, **so that** ...*

*You, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to **grasp** how **wide** and **long** and **high** and **deep** is the **love** of Christ, and to **know** this love that surpasses knowledge ..."*

Here's a shortened version ...

So that ... 'You may **EMBRACE** and **EXPRESS** the **AWESOMENESS** of Christ's **LOVE**.

To embrace and express the awesomeness of Christ's Love!

Just think about that for a moment ... What a life calling – What a privilege - What a phenomenal miracle ... That God could rework us in such a way that we would be able first of all to comprehend the full scope of Christ's Love and then be able to actually live out the implications of Christ's Love in the midst of this fallen, sin-filled world!

Of course, the necessary first step to this miraculous work of God is that He send the Spirit of Christ to actually '*take up residence in our hearts*' for, He knows Christ just naturally brings His Love with him wherever he goes.

You see, we simply cannot have Christ dwelling in our hearts without us becoming more and more familiar with His Love ...

In fact, Paul is assuming that to be the case, for you notice that in the actual Scripture passage we read Paul refers to us being 'rooted and established in love' already.

*I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, **so that** ...*

You, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp (take ahold of and embrace) how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know (immerse yourselves in and give expression to) this love that surpasses knowledge ..."

Christ's Presence in our Hearts brings Christ's Love into our Lives and Christ's Love in our Lives produces Loving Actions in our World ...

And here's one more thing in this chain of cause and effect ...

Consistent loving actions in our world '*blows people's minds*'. They just can't figure out what makes us tick! The love we show 'surpasses their knowledge'.

Now that's what God wants His Born-Again Children to be doing ...
Blowing people's minds by their '*Love-Filled Living*'.

That's one big reason why He commits Himself (and His glorious riches) to '*strengthening us with power in our inner being*' ...

so that we can embrace and express the awesome love
first demonstrated by Jesus Christ Himself!

So Today's Key Question is ...

Are we **READY** to do it – To live those **MIND-BLOWING**,
LOVE-FILLED kinds of lives in this fallen **SIN-FILLED** World?

The **very best** answer to that question is ...

"I CAN'T HELP DOING IT!"

This is, of course, where Christ would ultimately have us be – to be so filled with His Love that loving deeds just naturally flow from us just as they did from him. This is mature Christian Living at its best. I would pray that we might each experience some moments like that – when love-filled action just naturally arises from within us.

The **second best** answer to that question ...

"I'M WORKING ON IT."

This response acknowledges that the love-filled life is our preferred life and that our desire is to be known as such a person – a person in whom the Love of Christ dwells and from whom the Love of Christ flows – a person who creates blessing and causes amazement in the world around him.

Now I'm assuming that most of us are in that second category of question answerer and so for us who are 'working on it' I would share ...

TODAY'S KEY STRATEGY FOR BECOMING A MORE LOVE-FILLED PERSON

Don't **WORK** On Becoming More **LOVING**
WORK On Becoming More **KNOWING**.

This strategy arises right out of **Today's Key Scripture** ...

*I pray that ... You may have power, to grasp (take ahold of and embrace)
how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ ..."*

Today I would challenge us all to make it our task to **KNOW** - 'to grasp ahold of' – to 'embrace' to 'wrap ourselves around' - the full scope of Christ's Love ...

ALL FOUR DIMENSIONS of HIS LOVE!

Let's give it a shot this morning ...

Consider with me the **FOUR DIMENSIONS OF CHRIST'S LOVE** ...

1. CONSIDER ITS WIDTH ... It knows no BOUNDARIES.

"Go and make disciples of all nations"

(Matthew 28:19)

Christ's love knows no boundaries – though Jesus was born of the Jewish Race and was a Son of Abraham, he consistently reached out to those who were outside the fold.

He intentionally sought out the Samaritan Woman and then ministered for three days in her Samaritan Village – **He** healed the servant of a normally despised Roman Soldier – **He** invited himself into the home of an equally despised tax collector. **He** explained to his disciples that he had 'sheep that were not of this fold' (this nation) and then just prior to His Ascension to Heaven **he** commissioned those same men to 'make disciples (not Jews) of all nations'.

Jesus' life gave glorious testimony to the truth John expressed in the 16th verse of the 3rd Chapter of the Gospel that bears his name ...

"For God so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son that whosoever Believes in Him shall not perish But have everlasting life."

Ask yourself ...

"How far outside the boundary was I when Christ's Love found me?"

"How far outside my normal boundaries might Christ's Love take me?"

Allow those questions to impress you with the 'Width' of Christ's Love.

Now **secondly** this morning as we continue to become more 'knowing' concerning the Love of Christ ...

2. CONSIDER ITS LENGTH ... It reaches to the END of LIFE.

"I am convinced that ('nothing') shall be able to separate us from the Love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

(Romans 8:38-39)

I've said on numerous occasions that the ultimate goal of a pastor is to see the members of his congregation come to their last breath with 'their faith intact' – in fact, for their faith in Christ to be as strong in that final moment as it had been at any time of their life - to see the testimony the Apostle Paul gave in 2 Corinthians 4:16 play out in their lives ...

"Therefore we do not lose heart."

Though outwardly we are wasting away ... Inwardly we are being renewed day by day."

The reason that such a thing is even conceivable let alone possible is because the Love of Christ accompanies us right to the end of life.

There is nothing that can separate us from His Love once He has set His Love upon us. There is nothing that we can do – there is nothing that can be done to us that can break that bond.

Earthly friends may forsake us; family might even turn from us; but Christ will never leave us – His Love will continually be upon us and the knowledge of His Love should fill us and thrill us through every unfolding chapter of this earthly life.

We will never arrive at the ‘end of Christ’s Love’ – Its **Length** should amaze and challenge us.

Ask yourself ...

Do I put ‘limits’ on my love?

Do I stop loving when people stop behaving in the way I desire?

If I took Jesus as my example, how long would I continue to treat those around me lovingly?

Surely the **width** and the **length** of Christ’s Love are impressive and it’s mind-boggling to consider how knowing and experiencing just those two dimensions of that love could affect our lives.

But there’s still two to go ...

3. CONSIDER ITS DEPTH ... It descends into **DARKNESS** with us.

*“If I make my bed in the depths,
You are there ... your right hand will hold me fast.”
(Psalm 139:8-10)*

For a testimony statement regarding this dimension of Christ’s love, I would draw our attention to the Old Testament Psalmist and by doing so we recognize once again the greater breadth involved in the title “Christ” than in the earthly name ‘Jesus’ ...

The Love of the Father has always been shared by and expressed through His Eternal Son ... thus it is not out of line to say that we find Christ’s Love demonstrated in this great Psalm ...

I chose it because of its graphic image and the all too frequent reality it depicts.

The old King James says ...

*'If I make my bed in hell, you are there ...
Your right hand will hold me'*

David was no stranger to troubled times – some of his own making and some that were thrust upon him ... *'Hell on earth'* those times can be called. It's hard to live in this fallen, broken world and not encounter some.

But here's the point ... Life can never get so bad – We can never fall into a spot so low that it takes us beyond the reach of Christ's Love.

The passage we looked at earlier in Romans 8 includes in its list things like *'trouble'* and *'hardship'* and *'persecution'* and *'poverty'* and *'dangers'* – hard things all – life threatening things - but **never** love-threatening things.

Seek to wrap your mind around the **Depth** of Christ's Love; we can never *'sink'* beyond its reach.

Ask yourself ...

How quickly do I despair over the messes people make of their lives?

How soon do I just *'let them go'* and allow them to *'suffer the consequences'*.

How often do I just get tired of standing by and helping out?

How hard is it for me to engage in some distasteful though necessary task?

Would *'imagining myself to be Jesus'* – remembering the **depth** of His Love – make it easier?

And now, intentionally saved for last ...

4. CONSIDER ITS HEIGHT ... It lifts us to the **THRONE** of **GOD**.

"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given to me because you loved me before the foundation of the world ... I have made you known to them and will continue to make you known to them so that the love you have for me may be in them and I myself may be in them."

(John 17:24, 26)

Why it's almost like the Apostles Paul and John received their inspiration, their message, from the same source!

Both of them were focused upon Christ and His Love dwelling deep within each believer. And the final outcome and expression of this Love is at the very Throne of God Himself.

Ultimately Christ's Love is intended to lift us and leave us in the Presence of God! And from the Presence of God a '*Love-Filled Life*' pretty naturally flows.

The end result of such a '*Love-Filled Life*' is that those who benefit from it should themselves feel somewhat '*lifted into God's Presence*' for they will be in the "*presence of one who is has experienced and is expressing Christ's Love*".

Ask yourself ...

Do I picture the Love of Christ lifting me into God's Heavenly Presence?

Do I find myself '*caught up*' in the Glory of Christ?

Do I sense more fully the nature of the One who has begun to dwell within my heart?

Can I imagine myself '*lifting others into God's Presence*' by my '*love-filled actions*' the way that Christ's '*love-filled actions*' have lifted me?

And now as we close **ask yourself this ...**

Can I wrap my mind around – can I grasp –

The **BREADTH** and

The **LENGTH** and

The **DEPTH** and

The **HEIGHT**

OF CHRIST'S LOVE?

This is no casual question for as our **final thot** explains ...

Final Thot ...

KNOWING Christ's Love is the first step toward **LIVING** Christ's Love –
Let's keep our **MINDS** and **HEARTS** focused upon it!

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Twenty-Six"

Here's the composite passage that we were working on Sunday. Read it and reflect upon what it says to you – take note of the parenthetical additions ...

*I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you
with power through His Spirit in your inner being, **so that** ...*

*You, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with
all the saints, to **GRASP** (take ahold of and embrace) how wide and long and high
and deep is the love of Christ, and to **KNOW** (immerse yourselves in and
give expression to) this love that surpasses knowledge ..."*

Here's how Pastor Mark summarized the purpose contained of this passage ...

'So that ...

You may **EMBRACE** and **EXPRESS** the awesomeness of Christ's **LOVE**.'

Do you think much about the awesomeness of Christ's love ...

What would you say are some of the things that make it 'awesome' in your eyes?

The Apostle Paul wanted the Ephesians to know how **WIDE** and **LONG** and **HIGH** and **DEEP** Christ's Love is ... What do each of these 'dimensions of love' suggest to you? Jot down a thought or two for each ...

WIDTH...

LENGTH ...

HEIGHT ...

DEPTH ...

Point to Ponder ...

*"Can I imagine myself **LIFTING** others into God's Presence by my
love-filled actions the way Christ's love-filled actions have **LIFTED** me?"*

“FILLED UP WITH GOODNESS”

‘Grace Is The Key’ Series
(Ephesians 3:16-19)

Intro ... Two Sundays ago we began to examine the **Three-Fold Purpose** behind Paul’s **Passionate Petition for Capacity** recorded in Ephesians chapter three. On that Sunday we discovered ...

PETITION PURPOSE ONE – Ephesians 3:16-17

*I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, **so that** ...*

“CHRIST may DWELL in your HEARTS through FAITH.”

Last Sunday we discovered ...

PETITION PURPOSE TWO - Ephesians 3:16-19a

*I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, **so that** ...*

*“You, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to **GRASP** how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to **KNOW** this love that surpasses knowledge ...”*

Condensed Version:

SO THAT ...

*‘You may **EMBRACE** and **EXPRESS** the **AWESOMENESS** of Christ’s **LOVE**.’*

This Sunday I would draw your attention to ...

PETITION PURPOSE THREE – Ephesians 3:16-19b

*I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, **so that** ...*

“You may be FILLED to the MEASURE of all the FULLNESS of GOD!”

TWO KEY QUESTIONS JUMP RIGHT OUT OF THAT TEXT ...

1. WHAT IN THE WORLD DOES THAT MEAN?

What does it mean to be '**FILLED**' to the measure
of the fullness of God'?

2. HOW IN THE WORLD CAN IT HAPPEN?

How can we be so '**FILLED**'?

So first of all then ...

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

IT MEANS: To become '**GOD-LIKE**' in some way ...

To become truly '**GODLY**' ... To become truly '**GOOD**' ...

To be **CAPTIVATED** and **CHARACTERIZED** by **GOODNESS!**
(Acts 10:38; 2 Peter 1:3; 2 Peter 1:5)

Consider these Scriptures ...

In a kind of summary statement regarding Jesus' earthly life given to Cornelius and his household (recorded in Acts 10:38), the Apostle Peter said ...

*"You know ... how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit
and power, and how he went around doing good ..."*
(Acts 10:38)

He went about 'doing good' ...

Jesus was characterized by this quality – doing the excellent, the noble, the 'Godly' thing in all circumstances of life.

Building upon that understanding of Jesus' own life and example, Peter then expressed these thoughts in his Second Letter to the Churches.

First a statement of confidence ...

*"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness
through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness."*
(2 Peter 1:3)

There they are ... 'godliness' and 'goodness' together in the same verse.
Godliness is to be our **aspiration** and Christ's Goodness is to be our **inspiration**.

Peter then quickly follows that statement of confidence with one of command. Two verses later in that passage he directs ...

"Make every effort to add to your faith goodness ..."
(2 Peter 1:5)

To aspiration and inspiration Peter would now tell us to add some perspiration – spiritually speaking, of course ...

Goodness is to be part of our daily Christian Living but Goodness does not come easy to us earth-bound Children of God – We are not born with it naturally imprinted on our hearts and minds like Jesus' was. We are much more familiar with sinfulness and ungodliness. There is little true 'goodness' available for us to observe in this fallen, sin-filled world.

Is it any wonder Peter says we must 'Make every effort' to add this quality to our lives. **Goodness** obviously does not come easily or come automatically with our salvation experience. That why Peter said what he said in that 'statement of confidence' we looked a moment ago ...

"His Divine Power has given us everything we need for life and godliness"

So if we put both of Peter's statements together, here's what we understand ...

Salvation ties us into God's Power and God's Power provides us with all we need to live this Christian Life successfully but we must find a way to bring that power into our lives.

We must make the effort to 'add this goodness to the faith which was given to us as a gift' ... It's actually our first great task.

And that understanding brings us to the **second question** we identified earlier ...

HOW CAN IT HAPPEN?

*"How can **Goodness** be added to my **Faith**"*
What kind of **effort** must I make?
What should I be **focused** upon?

Well, anyone who has spent the time in Ephesians that we have spent should definitely know the answer.

And here it is ...

Here is the thing that we **must** do - the thing that we **know** we must do but the thing that nevertheless takes concerted and continual effort **to** do ...

*“Allow **CHRIST** to **DWELL** in Your **HEART!**”*

That was Paul's **Petition Purpose One** ...

*Father, I pray that out of Your Glorious Riches you might strengthen them with power through your Spirit in their inner being **so that** Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith ...*

And here is the reality behind that required action – it builds upon what we discovered just last week – the link between Paul's **Petition Purpose One** and His **Petition Purpose Two** which was (you remember, of course) that we might ...

‘Embrace and Express the Awesomeness of Christ's Love’ ...

Last week we observed that “Christ cannot come and dwell in our hearts without bringing His Love with Him” – He simply cannot do it. If He is dwelling there, then His Love dwells there as well and we become increasingly immersed in it and characterized by it.

Today let's add the finishing touch to that observation ...

*“If it's **TRUE** that Christ cannot come and dwell in our hearts without bringing His **LOVE**, then it's also **TRUE** that He cannot come and dwell in our hearts without bringing His **GOODNESS!**”*

‘Allowing Christ to Dwell (take up residence) in our hearts’ is **our** task – Producing a life of Goodness in us and through us is **His**.

And it will happen as He increasingly makes ‘Our Heart His Home’ and fills us with ‘all the measure of the fullness of God’.

We will become **captivated** and **characterized** by genuine ‘**Goodness**’ as His life flows through us and the world around will be positively impacted by us.

Final Thot ...

True **GOODNESS** (Godliness) is the **HOLY GRAIL** of the Church of Jesus Christ.

It's the **ARTIFACT** that links us to First Century **POWER!**

It's the **PRIMARY** thing that will **LINK** the world around us to **HIM!**

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Twenty-Seven"

In Sunday's message we focused upon the third '**Purpose**' that lay beyond Paul's Passionate Petition in Ephesians Chapter Three ...

PETITION PURPOSE THREE – Ephesians 3:16-17

*I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you
with power through His Spirit in your inner being, **so that** ...*

*"You may be **FILLED** to the **MEASURE** of all the **FULLNESS** of **GOD!**"*

Remember how Pastor Mark 'walked us through' a possible meaning of that provocative statement?

IT MEANS: To become '**GOD-LIKE**' in some way ...

To become truly '**GODLY**' ... To become truly '**GOOD**' ...

To be **CAPTIVATED** and **CHARACTERIZED** by **GOODNESS!**

What would you say it means to be '*captivated and characterized by Goodness*'?

List **5** things that would automatically be eliminated from the life of one who has become 'captivated and characterized by goodness' ...

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

List **5** things that would probably be seen in the life of one who has become so 'captivated and characterized' ...

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Point To Ponder ...

Would you go so far as to say that '**GOODNESS**' is the 'Holy Grail'
of Christ's Church – the thing that would link us to all the rest?

“OUR PRAYER-ANSWERING GOD”

‘Grace Is The Key’ Series
(Ephesians 3:20-21)

Intro ... Last Sunday we completed our examination of one of the most extraordinary prayers ever prayed. It was the prayer that the Apostle Paul prayed for the Ephesian Believers – a prayer that can well be prayed for all believers of all time - a prayer that we have spent four weeks seeking to understand. It's recorded in Ephesians 3: 14-19.

It began with ...

‘PAUL’S PASSIONATE PETITION’ ... Ephesians 3:16

“I **PRAY** that out of His Glorious Riches, He (the Father in Heaven) may strengthen you with **POWER** through His Spirit in your inner being ...”

It was a ‘Petition for Greater Capacity’ – a recognition that you and I must be ‘*strengthened internally*’ if we are to live the Christian Life successfully.

Now that ‘**Petition**’ laid the groundwork for **three** very specific spiritual outcomes ...

“So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith”

Christ actually ‘*establishing residency*’ at the very core of our being!

That’s step one!

Then Paul went on to say (and here we paraphrase just a little) ...

“So that you may be able to grasp just how long and wide and high and deep is the love of Christ and that you may (actually come to) know (experience personally) this love (of His) that surpasses (normal human) knowledge.”

First hand exposure to the incredible love of Christ – embracing and expressing that love in the midst of this fallen, sin-filled world.

That’s step two!

Just last week we looked at the third of those three outcomes – the three-fold purpose that lay behind Paul's Passionate Petition ...

"So (that) you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

Filled to the brim with Godliness - with Goodness.

That's step three!

Paul was praying that those Ephesian believers (and all believers everywhere) would have such spiritual realities working in them that their lives would be exceeded in quality by only one in the entire history of mankind – the life lived by Jesus Christ, the Son of God Himself!

Now that's a truly outrageous prayer!

Here's another way he could have put it ...

'I am praying that you will live awesome lives in the midst of this fallen world –

I am praying that God Himself will enable you to live such lives.

I am envisioning you making an incredible impact upon all those who surround you –

I am believing that all who come to know you will recognize that Christ dwells in you and expresses his Life and His Love through you!'

Now what Christian would not want to live such a life? What Christian could not imagine praying such a prayer? What pastor could not and would not pray such a prayer for each member of his congregation?

Such a life would bring such delight and satisfaction and contentment and sense of well-being in this world that we would probably feel like we had 'died and gone to heaven'.

But honestly (and here allow me to 'play Devil's Advocate' for a moment) ...

How frequently is such a prayer ever prayed and how likely is it that such a prayer (if prayed) would be answered? It seems a bit like entering your prayer in kind of spiritually lottery – What are the chances really of such a prayer being answered in your life or mine?

Isn't it much more likely that we will just 'struggle on' focused mostly upon the mundane things of life – fighting and frequently losing out to the urges of the flesh – thinking much less often about the things of the Lord than we ought to and relying mostly upon that fact that our salvation is a gift and knowing that if we had to demonstrate by our life that we were truly saved that most all of us would appear suspect?

Isn't that pretty much the way that our daily lives get lived out in this fallen world?

In fact, if you take the time to think about it ...

Why would the Almighty God intervene and answer such a prayer on our behalf even if we prayed it? Why would God allow us to buy the winning ticket in this '*spiritual lottery*'? Why would He enable us to rise above the world and the flesh and the Devil and actually '*live this Christian Life*' successfully?

Why indeed? (Can't you just imagine the Devil putting such thots in your mind?)

So let's take that up as **today's key question** ...

TODAY'S KEY QUESTION ...

WHY WOULD GOD EVER ANSWER SUCH AN OUTRAGEOUS PRAYER?

(Why would God **INTERVENE** in my life to make me gloriously successful?)

A **three-part answer** to that question is found tucked away in ...

TODAY'S KEY TEXT ... Ephesians 3:20-21

*"Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably **MORE** than all we ask or imagine, according to His **POWER** that is at work within us, to Him be **GLORY** in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all **GENERATIONS**, for ever and ever! Amen."*

In that sublime ***Doxology*** with which this section concludes (a doxology that most consider all by itself as though it did not come at the conclusion of a very particular section of thought) ...

In this sublime doxology, which does come at the conclusion of this particular section of thought and therefore must be considered in that very special context, Paul tucked away **three key answers** to that question – three answers intended to build our confidence in the fact that this prayer not only can be answered but that it will be answered for all who sincerely and consistently offer it.

Discover with me then those **THREE KEY ANSWERS** to the question:

"WHY WOULD GOD EVER ANSWER SUCH AN OUTRAGEOUS PRAYER?"

Why would God intervene in my life to make me gloriously successful?

ANSWER PART ONE ...

BECAUSE HE CAN – HE IS MORE THAN ABLE TO ANSWER IT!

*“Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more
than all we ask or imagine”*

I cannot read that phrase without the old King James rendition ringing in my ears ...

*“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly
above all that we might ask or think ...”*

The key truth declared here is that '**God Is Able**' ... He is **more than capable!**

His ability to answer even such an outrageous prayer is not even in question.

He is in fact 'more than able' to 'strengthen us with power through His Spirit in our inner being so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith'.

And He is 'more than able' to make us able to 'grasp the fullest dimensions of the love of Christ' and He is also 'more than able' to 'fill us to the full measure of all the fullness of God'.

In fact, Paul says that God is 'able' to fulfill this prayer in ways that go beyond what He would consider the 'limitations' of what we consider to be an 'outrageous' request.

He is not limited by our ability to imagine an outcome.

His understanding goes way beyond what we consider to be the impact of 'Christ dwelling in us' or us 'embracing the full scope of Christ's love' or even our feeble attempt to picture ourselves being 'filled to the measure of all the fullness of God'.

Why would God choose to answer such an 'outrageous' (our term) prayer?

Because He can ... He is God ... There is nothing too hard for Him!

In fact, there is nothing that is even 'hard' for Him.
Answering this prayer (for God) is a piece of cake.

Okay, so God is able to answer it if He chooses to do so but what makes us think that He will make that choice?

What makes me think – what might encourage me to believe – that He will answer this prayer if I sincerely and consistently pray it?

In **ANSWER PART TWO** ... Paul says that we can be encouraged to believe that God will answer this prayer if we pray it ...

BECAUSE HE HAS ALREADY SET THE STAGE TO ANSWER IT!

"According to His power that is at work within us ..."

God has already begun putting the infrastructure in place for the answering of this prayer ... His Holy Spirit Construction team has been on the job for some time. His power has been at work in us from the moment of our salvation ...

Remember what Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:13-14 ...

'And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation (and) having believed you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance ...'

And what he wrote in Ephesians 1:18-19 ...

"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know ... his incomparably great power for us who believe."

And in Ephesians 2:4-5 ...

"God made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions."

And in Ephesians 2:10 ...

"We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do."

God has indeed been '*setting the stage*' for the answering of this prayer for some time ...

New life with new desires has been birthed within us;
The Holy Spirit of God, possessing all the explosive power of God, has been provided for us; the purposes of God have been revealed to us.

This seemingly 'outrageous prayer' is perfectly consistent with all that God has been doing in us and to us since the moment we were born-again and became members of His Family of Fellowship and Faith.

And since it is 'consistent' with the work that God is already doing within us, why would we doubt His willingness to answer it, if we were to actually 'pray it'?

But in case we need even more assurance as to why God would answer this wonderfully 'outrageous prayer' consider ...

ANSWER PART THREE ...

BECAUSE ANSWERING IT WILL BENEFIT HIM AS WELL AS US!

"To Him be glory in the church and in Jesus Christ throughout all generations, for ever and ever."

"To him be glory in the church" ...

The Church of Jesus Christ is one very special place where the Heavenly Father can receive glory.

When the Church is being the Church, when the Church is becoming what God intends it to be – His visible family in this fallen world – it is to the Father's Glory.

When I think of that, I think of the opening line of Jesus' Great High Priestly Prayer offered in John chapter 17 ...

*"Father (Jesus prayed), the time has come ...
Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you."*

To put it in a rather common way ...

It is in God's best interest for him to 'make His Children look good' ...

Our success in this life gives credibility to His entire Plan of Salvation and it brings glory to Him who is the architect of that Plan.

Our Heavenly Father is highly motivated to answer this '*outrageous prayer*' ...

He's motivated to answer it in a way that '*goes beyond*' what we could even ask or imagine.

Our '*glory*' – our success as Children of God in this fallen world – becomes His Glory.

Now lest we fall prey to one last gasp effort from the Devil to deceive us into thinking that all these wonderful truths were only for those privileged First Century Saints ...

Consider the ***duration*** of this Glory Dynamic ...

"Throughout all generations" ...

Every generation of fallen human beings needs to see God's Glory revealed in Christ's Church ...

In the lives of those who truly have Christ '*dwelling in their hearts through faith*'
And who have securely grasped the true Dimensions of His Love and
Who are filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

And that includes you and me ...

In our Church today, here in this place, God would desire to find Glory and so we conclude with this encouraging ***final thot*** ...

Final Thot ...

God **DELIGHTS** in answering our **PRAYERS** for **CAPACITY** ...

PRAY them **CONTINUALLY!**

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Twenty-Eight"

Pastor Mark called '**outrageous**' Paul's Prayer that the Ephesian Believers would be:

'strengthened with power through God's Spirit in their innermost being so that Christ might dwell in their hearts through faith and so that they might be able to grasp the full scope of Christ's Love and actually experience that Love flowing through their lives and that they might be filled to the brim with all the fullness of God's own glorious nature.'

Later he summarized that '**outrageous**' prayer this way ...

Paul was praying that those Ephesian believers (and all believers everywhere) would have such spiritual realities working in them that their lives would be exceeded in quality by only one in the entire history of mankind – the life lived by Jesus Christ, the Son of God Himself!

Why do you suppose he considered this 'prayer' to be '**outrageous**'?
Would you agree or disagree and why?

Now here's the next big thing that Pastor Mark raised in the message Sunday:

*"What are the chances of getting such an 'outrageous prayer' answered?
What are the chances that such a prayer is actually very often prayed?
What would your experience indicate?"*

What do you find in the passage of the week Ephesians 3:10-21 that would encourage you to believe that such an 'outrageous prayer' would be answered if it were sincerely and consistently prayed by a born-again believer?

1. Well God is certainly **ABLE** to answer it!
"He can do immeasurably **MORE** than all we could **ASK** or **IMAGINE**"
2. God has already set the **PROCESS** in **MOTION**!
"According to His **POWER** that is at **WORK** within us"
3. God Himself will receive **GLORY** when this **PRAYER** is **ANSWERED**.
"To Him be **GLORY** in the **CHURCH** and in Jesus Christ through all generations."

Point To Ponder ...

If you knew for sure that this prayer would be answered
how **FREQUENTLY** would you **PRAY** it?

“LIVING HARMONIOUSLY”

‘Grace Is The Key’ Series
(Ephesians 4:1-6)

Intro ... Last Sunday we completed the **Fifth Key Section of Thought** in Paul’s letter to the Ephesian Believers (Ephesians 3:14-21).

As I pointed out when we entered it, it’s a **transition** section ...

It transitions us from ‘*Doctrine*’ to ‘*Discipleship*’ –
from ‘*Knowing*’ to ‘*Doing*’ – from ‘*Learning*’ to ‘*Applying*’.

It introduced us to one of the most awesome prayers recorded in the Scripture – last week I referred to it as an ‘outrageous’ prayer.

It’s a prayer that will transform the life of any believer who prays it; it’s a prayer that God is eager and able to answer; it’s a prayer that every believer is encouraged to pray (for themselves and all the believers they know).

It’s a prayer that I would like us to pray together often.

Here’s the way that we here at **Sonlife** Community Church are going to pray it from now on ...

OUR SONLIFE PRAYER ...

We pray, Heavenly Father, that out of Your glorious riches, You may strengthen us with power through Your Spirit in our inner being, so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith.

And we pray that we, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — so that we may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now unto You, who are able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to Your power that is at work within us, to You be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever!

Amen.

That is a '**Prayer For Capacity**' – a plea to God to enlarge our hearts so that we can contain the spiritual 'stuff' necessary for us to live the life that He desires us to live – the life that will bring maximum glory to Him!

We need to 'write those words' (as God told His People long centuries ago) 'on the tablets of our hearts' ... We need to 'impress them upon our minds' ... We need to 'talk about them whenever we get together' ... We need to make them 'central to our daily living' ... We need to pray them regularly for you see ...

It's the answering of that very prayer that will enable us to make the transition from 'Doctrine' to 'Discipleship' – from mere 'Knowing' to actual 'Doing' – from 'Learning' to 'Applying'.

And so ... confident that the Ephesians would actually 'pray that prayer' and confident as well that the Heavenly Father not only desires to answer this prayer but that He has already begun the required work within us **to answer** that prayer, Paul now gives what I'm calling ...

TODAY'S KEY EXHORTATION – Ephesians 4:1

"LIVE A LIFE WORTHY OF THE CALLING YOU HAVE RECEIVED!"

Do you remember the "**Calling**" that Paul identified earlier in this letter – the only other place in this letter (outside of this immediate passage) where Paul uses that term?

*"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the Hope to which he has **called** you – the riches of His Glorious Inheritance in the Saints."
(Ephesians 1:18)*

Remember how we put it back when we looked at that passage ...

"The Father's Inheritance is calculated not in Dollars but in Saints."

We born-again believers are His Inheritance! He has invested heavily in us and He anticipates a wondrous return on His Investment.

Paul identifies it as a '*Glorious Inheritance*' ...

We saints can add to the Father's already incredible glory.

Now that's exactly how Paul expressed it in the doxology with which he ended our now most familiar 'Prayer for Capacity' ...

*'To Him be Glory in the Church (the saints) and in Christ Jesus
throughout all generations'.*

So here's ...

TODAY'S KEY CONCEPT ...

God **CALLS** us to live a **GLORIOUS** life –
A life that will **BRING** Him Glory.

Thus the exhortation from the Apostle ...

'Do it' he says ... 'As a prisoner for the Lord, I urge you to do it ...'
*"I urge you to live a life **WORTHY** of the **CALLING** you have **RECEIVED**."*

That "Exhortation" will **ESCORT** us through the rest of this book and hopefully through the rest of our lives. Paul is basically saying:

*"The ball is in your court so ...
Pick it up and do something with it."*

God has called you and God has revealed to you what is necessary for you to fulfill His Calling ... so do what is necessary (pray the prayer) and then jump into the fray and "Live out the Life".

And Paul has not left us in the dark regarding the manner in which that life is to be lived ...

In the rest of his letter he touches on just about every aspect of our lives. He spells out in specific detail just how this 'Worthy Life' plays itself out in this fallen, sin-filled world.

There will be more than a few challenges – more than a few times when we will find ourselves 'repeating our prayer' ...

*'O Father in heaven, out of your glorious riches,
strengthen me with power in my innermost being so that ...
'I can obey Your Word in this situation I'm in!'*

But first we must 'Know His Word' ...

We must 'Know what God expects of us' ... 'How God expects us to behave'

The rest of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians can be organized around
Nine Key Directives for Living – all under the **Key Word: 'WORTHY'**.

Today we look at the **first** of the nine ...

TODAY'S KEY DIRECTIVE – Ephesians 4:3

"LIVE HARMONIOUSLY"...

"Make every effort to keep the **UNITY** of the **SPIRIT**
through the **BOND** of **PEACE**."

THREE KEY OBSERVATIONS arise from that **Specific Directive** ...

1. UNITY IS IMPORTANT TO GOD

Spiritual Unity is a fundamental family trait of our Tri-Personed God ...

Consider these Scriptural statements ...

"I and the **FATHER** are **ONE**"
(John 10:30)

Surely not a oneness of person but a oneness of purpose and passion –
Jesus was saying that He and the Father desire the same things and
pursue the same ends and possess the same powers.

"I will ask the **FATHER** and He will give you **ANOTHER** counselor ..."
(John 14:16)

A third part of the Eternal God Family is identified ...
Jesus is saying that this 'other counselor/comforter' will be one 'just like him' ...
and since He already said that He and the Father are one then this
'Other One' just like him must be One with the Father as well.
An Eternal Three-Personed Trinity oversees our lives!

*"Let us make man in **OUR** image."
(Genesis 1:26)*

Here at the very beginning there is the revelation that more than a solitary eternal being stands behind the creation of man ...

The fact that man is a relational being capable of living in harmony with others like himself speaks to the relational capacities within the God Head, that Eternal God Family.

*"Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the **LORD** is **ONE**."
(Deuteronomy 6:4)*

And now here is the sum of the matter ...

The Tri-Personed God revealed in the Scripture exists in perfect unity and harmony – there is a beautiful and perfect oneness in fellowship and function of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The point is ... God desires His Earthly Family to function with the same type of unity and harmony as does the Heavenly Family. This unity is extremely important to Him. That's the first and immediate observation that arises from this **Key Directive** ...

Here now is the **second** and it's really a no-brainer – It declares a truth that I'm sure all of us have realized on more than one occasion ...

2. UNITY AMONG US IS DIFFICULT TO MAINTAIN

"Make every effort ..."

Unity doesn't come automatically with our salvation – saved human beings can be a most varied bunch.

We are different genders and (according to the title of a popular best seller a few years ago) we are possibly even from different planets – notably Mars (the home planet of men) and Venus (the home planet of women)!

We come from different socio-economic and/or ethnic backgrounds.

And now (after some 2000 years of church life) we come from different Denominational backgrounds as well. There are many things that can divide us into various camps.

And of course there is always the reality that (as the title of a youth devotional text once put it) ...

*"Whenever two or three are gathered together
in my name, someone spills his milk" ...*

We make mistakes; we mess up; we disappoint people; we make ourselves targets for criticism and division.

Is it any wonder that Paul says 'Make every effort' to keep (maintain) the unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace.

And then, Paul being Paul ... He tells us exactly what it will take to do that.

First of all he says that ...

* It Takes **HUMILITY** and **GENTLENESS**

"Be completely humble and gentle" he counsels us. (vs. 2a)

Can't be critical and judgmental when we possess a humble heart – when we are genuinely '*poor in spirit*' as Jesus instructed us in the Sermon on the Mount.

A humble heart causes us to treat one another gently not harshly for we are well aware of our own human weakness.

A humble heart recognizes that we are all at times in need of help; we all need to regularly pray that '*prayer for capacity*' and thus a humble heart will easily place us all in the same human boat and by doing so help '*maintain the unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace*'.

Secondly in this passage, Paul points out that ...

* It Takes **PATIENCE** and **LOVE**

"Be patient bearing with one another in love" (vs. 2b)

Situations don't always resolve themselves quickly – Growth in Grace takes time and thus patience is needed if we are to maintain the connection that the Spirit has created between us.

A genuine love for one another will generate the patience necessary to stick by one another – to ‘*hang in there with one another*’ until situations resolve and true oneness is restored.

But the truth is that Unity among Believers is difficult to maintain – Even when we know how important such unity is to our God.

It takes continual effort – an effort that is greatly assisted by the qualities of humility, gentleness, patience and love.

The **Third Observation** that arises from **Today’s Key Directive** indicates another focus for the ‘effort’ that we would expend in seeking to ‘*keep/maintain the unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace*’.

Paul could have said ‘Make the effort - force yourselves - to remember that’

3. UNITY IN REALITY IS BASED UPON UNITY IN THEOLOGY (vs. 4-6)

Remember it is a ‘Unity of the Spirit’ - a ‘Spiritual Unity’ ... that is the focus here.

Our faith is full of ‘Oneness’ Realities –
Focus on these things and let them bind us!

There is but One **BODY** of which we are members ...

There is but One **SPIRIT** by whom we are indwelt ...

There is but One **HOPE** to which we are called ...

There is but One **LORD** for whom we live ...

There is but One **FAITH** through which we are saved ...

There is but One **BAPTISM** in which we were buried ...

There is but One **GOD** and **FATHER** from whom we have received birth.

One **Body** – One **Spirit** – One **Hope** – One **Lord** –
One **Faith** – One **Baptism** – One **God/Father**

Final Thot ...

We are not **LIVING** a life ‘Worthy of our Calling’ if we are not living a life in **HARMONY** with our **FELLOW BELIEVERS**.

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

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"Lesson Twenty-Nine"

Sunday we entered into the Second Half of Paul's great Letter to the Ephesians – chapters 4-6. Pastor Mark pointed out the '**Exhortation**' which reveals Paul's passion as he pens these final three chapters:

*"As a prisoner of the Lord, then,
I urge you to live a life WORTHY of the CALLING you have received."*

If Paul's letter had ended with those words – If that had been verse 22 of chapter three – and he had not written chapters 4-6 ... What would you have understood those words to mean? How would you have explained them to your people if you had been the Pastor of the Ephesian congregation?

What 'calling' had the Ephesian Believers received? (See Ephesians 1:18)
What would a life 'worthy' of that calling look like? What would you tell them?

Pastor Mark said Sunday that the rest of this Letter could be organized around '**Eight Directives For Worthy Living**' ...

Sunday we looked at the **First** such **Directive** – Ephesians 4:2-6

'LIVE HARMONIOUSLY' – Key Word: UNITY

"Make every effort to keep the Unity of the Spirit through the Bond of Peace"

In Sunday's message, Pastor Mark shared this 'Observation' based on the text:

"Unity in REALITY is Based upon Unity in THEOLOGY"

Another way of putting that is ...

"Oneness in HEART is based upon Oneness in MIND"

Paul listed seven theological 'Onenesses' that (once embraced mentally and experientially) should create a sense of Oneness among all believers. (vs. 4-6)

One BODY – One SPIRIT – One HOPE – One LORD

One FAITH - One BAPTISM – One GOD and FATHER

Are there any other 'ONES' that you can think of?

ONE _____

Point To Ponder ...

Do I identify members of other churches as being LIKE me or UNLIKE me?

"LIVING MATURELY"

'Grace Is The Key' Series
(Ephesians 4:11-16)

Intro ... Last week, as we took our initial step into the second half of Paul's great Letter to the Ephesians, we reminded ourselves that we are stepping out of the **Doctrinal** Part of the Letter and into the **Discipleship** Part of the Letter.

We are moving from the part of the letter that deals with '**Knowing**' and are moving into the part of the letter that deals with '**Doing**' ... moving from the part that focuses on '**Learning**' to the part that focuses on '**Applying**' what we have learned.

Last Sunday we pointed out that all the rest of the Letter (chapters four thru six) is energized by the **Great Exhortation** with which Paul began Chapter Four.

Here it is again ...

PAUL'S GREAT EXHORTATION – Ephesians 4:1

**"LIVE A LIFE WORTHY OF THE CALLING
YOU HAVE RECEIVED!"**

What a task ... What a life-energizing passion ... To seek to live a life that is worthy of the God-Given Calling to Salvation and Eternal Life that we have received ... To live in such a way that there will be no doubt in anyone's mind that we are indeed members of God's Brand New '*Born-Again Family of Fellowship and Faith*' – **God's Final Family!**

But what does such a life look like – How will we know if we are making progress toward achieving it – Is there some set of instructions that we can follow as we seek to embrace it?

Well, indeed there is ... In fact, since those are the very questions that the Ephesian Believers were no doubt asking as they got to this point in Paul's letter, Paul filled the next three chapters of his letter with a very detailed Set of Instructions ...

‘Directives for Worthy Living’, I’ve called them. There will be **nine** in all ... Last week we discussed the **First** of the **Nine** ...

“LIVE HARMONIOUSLY”...

*“Make every effort to keep the **UNITY** of the **SPIRIT** through the **BOND** of **PEACE**.”*

A diverse group of human beings living harmoniously, unified around a set of truths and experiences that they hold dear, is a noteworthy thing – it’s a type of life that is ‘worthy’ of the Calling that we Christians have received.

Paul is saying that if we would desire to have the Father declare our lives to be ‘Worthy’ of His Commendation then we must live in harmony with one another.

Right at the top of His list is that His Children ‘*get along with one another*’. However, as we saw last week ... It’s easier said than done!

“Make every effort” Paul directs us, *“to keep the unity of the Spirit through the Bond of Peace”*.

Here now is ...

TODAY’S KEY DIRECTIVE – Ephesians 4:13
(Paul’s Second Directive for Worthy Living)

“LIVE MATURELY”...

“Become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

Let’s check out the larger passage upon which that directive is based beginning with verse 7 and then verses 11-16 ...

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it ...

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

Three **KEY CONSIDERATIONS** grow out of that '**Key Concept**' ...

1. CONSIDER THE GOAL CHRIST HAS FOR HIS CHURCH

"MATURITY" - *"the whole measure of the fullness of Christ"* (vs. 13)

'Become like Christ' – that's what Paul is directing us to do.

In his First letter to the Church, the Apostle Peter said that in Christ's sufferings He *'left us an example, that we should follow in His steps'* – in other words that we should *'live like He lived'* (1 Peter 2:21).

Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, that we recently studied, instructed His Followers to ... *'Be perfect (Telios) as your Heavenly Father is perfect'*.

Here the Apostle Paul uses that same Greek Word ... *'telios'* – perfect in the sense of being *'complete'*, *'a finished product'*, *'mature'* ...

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul expressed this same idea when he said that (right along with Christ) He desires to *'present every man perfect (telios) in Christ'*. (Colossians 1:28)

It's a consistent theme ... It's the goal that Christ has for His Church. He wants to see His Church (as a whole) arrive at maturity or completeness – to be so *'full of him'* that they can accurately represent him in this world.

Is it any wonder that Paul was continually praying that ...

*'Out of His glorious riches, the Heavenly Father would strengthen them with power through His Spirit in their innermost being so ...
'Christ could dwell in their hearts through faith'?*

Surely if the members of Christ's Church have Christ truly *'dwelling in their hearts'* individually, they are well on their way to having *the life of Christ produced in them* collectively!

And that is Christ's own great desire – **His Goal** - for His Church ... that we be filled with the whole measure of His Fullness ... that we together arrive at a point of maturity - of Completeness in Him.

Now that should be the goal of every individual congregation of believers on the face of the earth – that surely is the goal of *Sonlife* Community Church ... to see every member (and thus the congregation as a whole) arrive at this place of maturity (completeness) in Christ.

But how does that happen – how do born-again believers – how does a congregation of believers – become mature? How do we move beyond 'infancy in the faith' to 'maturity in the faith'?

Well, secondly this morning as we further explore this passage ...

2. CONSIDER THE MEANS CHRIST HAS PROVIDED TO REACH THAT GOAL

"MINISTRY" - *"to prepare God's people for works of service"* (vs. 12)

It's by the **ministry** of the members of the church to one another that maturity is obtained ...

Here again is the fuller passage ...

*But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it ... It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, **so that** the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

Here's the starting point ...

"To each of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it" (vs. 7)

Now let me say that this is not 'saving grace' Paul is talking about here. Saving Grace is a gift from the Father that brings us back from spiritual death and grants to us eternal life – that 'grace' is exactly the same to all who receive it ...

What Paul is talking about here is 'enabling grace' which can be defined as 'spiritual ability to do spiritual things' ...

This is the kind of Grace that Christ distributes to those who are members of His Church. To each person comes *the 'portion of grace'* necessary to carry out the particular ministry that will fall to them as they share in bringing the whole body to maturity.

Now in the administering of this '*enabling grace*' Christ's uses people.

Paul names a sequence of people in this passage – Gifts to the Church they have been called ...

First there are the **Apostles** – Those who were eyewitnesses of Christ's Ministry and who were sent out to share His Life and Teachings with the World ... There were a total of 13.

There were the original 12 that Jesus called to be with him minus Judas of course (that's 11) and then there was the one (Matthias) that the Remaining Eleven chose to replace Judas (back to 12) and then there was the Apostle Paul to whom Jesus dramatically appeared on the Road to Damascus and designated His '*Apostle to the Gentiles*' (that's 13).

These men served a unique role in the establishment of the Church of Jesus Christ throughout the First Century World.

Secondly Paul identifies the **Prophets** – those who were uniquely chosen to be spokesmen for God in the Early Church. These were the men whom Peter said were '*moved by the Holy Spirit*' in the writing of the Scripture itself. Matthew, John, Peter and Paul did double duty as both.

These are the men upon whose ministry the Body of Christ is built – They have become (as Paul said in Ephesians 2:20) the foundation upon which the Church of Jesus Christ rises with Christ Himself as the Cornerstone. The foundation has been laid – the work of the Apostles and the Prophets has ceased.

Paul then says that Christ has given to the church those who are called '**Evangelists**' ... Praise God for them.

They are the ones who have been '*graced by Christ*' to share the Gospel in unusually effective ways.

They are called to declare the Gospel – the Good News of Christ – and they are especially used of the Holy Spirit to communicate that message.

The history of the Christian Church is filled with powerful proclaimers of the Gospel ... men and women who have been used by the Lord to touch the lives of hundreds of thousands.

I thank God for the gifted Evangelist who brought the message the night that I was saved some 58 years ago. Those of us who are over 60 have lived through the ministry years of one of the greatest Evangelists the world has perhaps ever known – Billy Graham. His ministry began the year I was born. At the age of 95, he is still calling upon men to seek Christ.

And then following on the heels of the Evangelist and standing upon the Foundation of the Apostles and the Prophets come **Pastor/Teachers** ...

These are those who take their place in the midst of a congregation of born-again believers and seek to function as Christ's 'Under-Shepherd' to the flock.

They are called upon to '**pastor**' – to stand as it were in Christ's place and lead the flock with which they have been entrusted to 'green pastures' and 'still waters' ...

They seek to 'restore the souls' of those who are in distress and to 'guide them all in paths of righteousness' for His Name's sake.

They would 'walk with their congregation' even through the 'valley of the shadow of death' and help them 'fear no evil'.

They are called upon as well to '**teach**' ... to provide instruction and to bring clarification to the Teachings of Christ so that the people will know that the things that they are 'hanging on to' are 'truly true' ... so that their faith will be strong and unyielding.

Now notice the **end result** of this centuries-long tag-team ministry ...

"to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

The bottom line is that **maturity** is achieved as each and every member of the body of Christ is prepared for and participating in 'works of service' - providing for one another everything that could possibly be needed to function successfully in a fallen, sin-filled world ... living with one another in such a way that no one ever feels alone or neglected and that the body as a whole becomes stronger and stronger in their commitment to Christ and to His Call upon their lives. That's a mature, Christ-Honoring Church!

That's the Church we desire to be and the church that we strive to be and the Church that I hope you have all found us to be.

Now last of all this morning as we draw this message to a close ...

3. CONSIDER THE EVIDENCE THAT THE GOAL HAS BEEN ATTAINED

Three such 'evidences' I find tucked away in this passage

First of all such a mature church will be characterized by ...

"STABILITY" - *"no more tossed about"* (vs. 14)

The mature church knows what it believes and sticks to it – they are not forever changing their minds about what the Bible says.

They will not be seduced by the winsome speech of someone who 'picks and choses' the portion of God's Word that seems acceptable to the current culture.

They will not be taken in by new notions of things even though attractively presented. They clearly understand the composition of the Body of Christ and they consistently stand upon the foundation of truth laid down by the Apostles and the Prophets.

Now here's **another characteristic** suggested by the text ...

"SYNERGY" - *"joined and held together as each part does its work"* (vs. 16c)

The mature church is like a busy beehive ... every member has been given grace and is regularly presented with opportunities to engage in 'works of service'.

These 'works of service' don't need to be organized or scheduled or '*programed*'. They pop up as the members of the Body of Christ brush shoulders together.

There is always someone in need of help or comfort or instruction or friendship.

Because they have been faithfully '*taught the Word of God*' and are genuine worshippers of the '*God of the Word*' and have the very Son of God dwelling in their hearts through faith, the members of a mature congregation, like the members of a great orchestra, blend their talents in a wonderful life of service to one another and to all that the Lord sends their way.

Now here's the ***final characteristic*** suggested by our text ...

"CHEMISTRY" - "*builds itself up in love*" (vs.16b)

A body of genuine born-again, well-instructed and well-worshipping believers working together for the Benefit of Christ's Church, develop a chemistry – a bond, a oneness, yes, a genuine love for one another.

This Jesus once said would be the ultimate evidence to the world around that we are truly His Disciples – the ultimate expression of a mature Church.

And so we arrive at our ***final thot*** of the morning ...

Final Thot ...

A fully functioning **CHURCH** is the **RETURN** Christ **SEEKS**
for the **INVESTMENT** He has made.

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Thirty"

Sunday's message focused upon the **Second Directive** that helps clarify the **Great Exhortation** with which Ephesians Chapter Four begins ...

"Live MATURELY" ... Ephesians 4:11-16

"... become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ"

What would you list as characteristics of a 'mature Christian'? List several ...

In this passage Paul reveals Christ's Strategy for bringing His Church to such maturity ...

*"Prepare God's People for **WORKS** of **SERVICE** so that
the Body of Christ might be **BUILT** up."*

In other words ...

*"Believers become mature (attain to the whole measure of the
fullness of Christ) as other believers minister to them."*

Does that sound right? Don't we usually think "Believers become mature as they minister to others?"

What might some of these 'maturity-producing works of service' be?

How do we help people mature by 'ministering to them'? Can you think of any of those 'works of service' that God has used to help you mature in your faith?

In this passage Paul reveals Christ's Strategy for getting His People prepared to do these 'works of service' that can bring other believers to maturity. He provides people to do the 'preparing' ... Apostles/Prophets/Evangelists/Pastor-Teachers.

What role have these played in your life?

Point To Ponder ...

When the Body of Christ gets **BUILT** up – Does it get **BIGGER** or **BETTER**?

“LIVING PURELY”

‘Grace Is The Key’ Series
(Ephesians 4:17-24)

Intro ... Today we continue our foray into the second half of the Apostle Paul's great Letter to the Ephesian Church – a letter that applies to us today as much as it did to them so long ago. I use the word ‘foray’ because we are in a sense on a search ...

We are seeking an answer to the question:

*“How can I live a life that is truly ‘**Worthy**’ of the Calling that I have received as a Child of God?”*

We are seeking that answer because (in the very first verse of Chapter Four in this great letter) the Holy Spirit (through Paul) has exhorted – challenged – urged – directed even – us to (in fact) live just that kind of life.

“Live a life worthy of the Calling you have received!”

In other words ... *‘Show yourselves to be true Sons and Daughters of God!’*

That's a noble task – a challenging task – some (who are new to the faith) would certainly say that it's a puzzling task ... How do we go about living such a life – How in fact to we *‘Show ourselves to be genuine Sons and Daughters of God in this fallen, sin-filled world?’* What sets us apart?

In a sense Paul has said ... *‘I’m glad you asked that’* for he filled three chapters with inspired directives telling us just how to do it.

“Live this way” and *“This way”* He will direct us ...
There will be nine such directives in all.

So far we have discussed two:

‘Live Harmoniously’ and **‘Live Maturely’**

Here now is ...

TODAY'S KEY DIRECTIVE – Ephesians 4:24

(Paul's Third Directive for Worthy Living)

"LIVE PURELY" ...

"Be like God in true righteousness and holiness"

Here's the fuller passage out of which that directive arises ...

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.

Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

TWO COMMANDS book-end this passage:

"I tell you this and I insist on it in the Lord" – vs. 17

Those are some of the most forceful words that Paul has yet used in this letter. He is saying that this is not negotiable. The two commands that he gives in this passage are to be obeyed – they are not options for life, they are essential elements.

Here is the first ...

1. DO NOT LIVE LIKE THE GENTILES (the unbelievers around you) ...

(They engage in 'every kind of impurity' – vs. 19)

Of course, if we are not to be like those who engage in 'every kind of impurity' then we are to be those who engage in 'no kind of impurity'. We are to be characterized in fact by living purely not impurely.

Paul could have left it right there but he didn't. He goes on to explain just what he means.

For instance he first points out that ...

* **THEY** (The Gentiles) **EXPERIENCE IMPURITY IN THEIR THINKING** ... vs. 17-18

"So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts."

Here Paul identifies **three characteristics** of the impure thinking of the Unbeliever ...

The Unbeliever fills his mind with:

FUTILE Thoughts – Without any eternal purpose – ‘wasted’

DARKENED Thoughts – Without any eternal understanding – ‘foolish’

GODLESS Thoughts – Without any eternal connection – ‘separated’

Not a very inspiring or inviting place is the mind of the Gentile – the true unbeliever – Paul says to us ... ‘*Don't let your mind become like that*’.

Now the other thing that Paul wants to be sure that we know is that ...

* **THEY** (The Gentiles) **DEMONSTRATE IMPURITY IN THEIR BEHAVING** ... vs. 19

"Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more."

Behaving inevitably follows thinking ...

What we think and the way we think sooner or later will determine the way we behave.

Notice the **two categories of impure behavior** Paul says the unbelievers engage in:

INSENSITIVE Behavior – Without any human feeling (vs. 19a)

"Having lost all sensitivity" ...

What a horrible condition to be in but minds that are wasted and foolish and separated from God tend to become separated from people as well.

Impure (sinful) thinking seldom takes others into account – the more impure the mind the more insensitive the person to the people around them. Genuine human feeling has nothing to stir it or direct it.

Here's the second category ...

SENSUAL Behavior – Without any human limitation (vs. 19b)

'given over to sensuality (fleshly urges) so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more'

Satisfying bodily appetites with no concern for anyone but yourself is what Paul is talking about here.

These are behaviors that use and abuse those around us; these are behaviors that become increasingly addictive and of course destructive.

Living to satisfy the needs of the body is a most ungodly way to live. Is it any wonder that Paul's words almost *'thunder off the page'* ...

*"I tell you this and I insist on it in the Lord ...
Do not live like the Gentiles (the pagan unbelievers around you). "*

Here now is his ***Follow-Up Command*** ...

2. LIVE LIKE YOU WERE TAUGHT ... *'You did not come to know Christ that way' – vs. 20)*

*You, however, did not come to know Christ that way.
Surely you heard of him and were taught in him
in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.*

In a word Paul is saying that they were taught to *'Live like Jesus'* – to think purely and behave purely just like he did.

Implied in this statement is the understanding that Christ, their risen yet indwelling Lord, has given them the ability to do just that!

Remember our prayer ...

*We pray, Heavenly Father, that out of YOUR glorious riches,
YOU may strengthen us with power through YOUR Spirit in our inner being,
so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith.*

Now, understanding the potential contained in that prayer and the power provided by the indwelling Christ, Paul commands the Ephesian Believers to:

*** PUT OFF YOUR OLD SELF ... vs. 22**

"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires..."

Here's the deal ...

We must 'Put off the Old Self' because:
It's Still Being **CORRUPTED** – It can get even worse.

(Like a serial killer who starts out torturing small animal and then advances to torturing and killing human beings, so the cravings of the flesh continually escalate from lesser expressions to greater.)

We must 'Put off the Old Self' because:
It Still Possesses **EVIL DESIRES** – It will never be converted.

(The old nature is 'by nature' opposed to the things of God – that is its orientation; the old nature is no more open to conversion than is the Devil Himself.)

So here's how we do it.

We put off the '**Old Self**' as we ...

*** PUT ON THE NEW SELF ... vs. 24**

"You were taught, to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

It brings a whole new **MINDSET** – A brand new attitude

(It's like the indwelling Christ presents us with our 'wardrobe selection' each and every day ... He says, 'Here put this on' – *It belongs to you- Look at life today this way'.)*

It's actually another **INCARNATION** – A genuine representation

(*'The life of Jesus being lived out in flesh once more' ...*
It's a vastly different kind of life – It's pure in thought and deed!)

Final Thot ...

PURITY is a **CHOICE** ... Choose to live **PURELY!**

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

-

"Lesson Thirty-One"

Sunday's message focused upon the **Third Directive** that helps clarify the **Great Exhortation** with which Ephesians Chapter Four begins ...

"Live PURELY" ... Ephesians 4:17-24

In this passage Paul shares a two-step process for living a pure life ...

1. "PUT OFF YOUR OLD SELF" (and) 2. "PUT ON THE NEW SELF"

Notice what Paul says about the '**OLD SELF**' ...

It's (still) *"being corrupted by evil desires."*

What does that description suggest to you? Do we ever reach the place where our 'Old Self' is as bad as it is going to get? Does our 'Old Self' kind of 'go into hibernation' when we get saved? Can our 'Old Self' be reformed or managed?

Here's how Pastor Mark described the 'Old Self – the Sin Nature' ... What say you?

*"The old self is 'by nature' opposed to the things of God – that is its orientation;
the old self is no more open to conversion than is the Devil himself."*

How would you respond to someone who said that sometimes they need to 'get into the flesh' i.e. use the passions of the 'Old Self' to function in this fallen world?

Is that a temptation for believers ... to keep that old 'suit' in the closet just in case it's needed? When might Christians be tempted to 'take it out'?

Notice what Paul says about the '**NEW SELF**' ...

It's *"created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness"*.

The 'New Self' by nature 'embraces' the things of God – It desires to live so as to please God and to demonstrate its connection to God. Here's how Pastor Mark expressed it Sunday ... Can you picture this happening?

*"It's like the indwelling Christ presents us with our 'wardrobe selection'
each and every day ... He says, 'Here put this on' – It belongs to you."
'Look at life today this way'."*

Point To Ponder ...

What parts of our **Sonlife** Prayer are especially crucial
as we seek to 'Live Purely' in this fallen, sin-filled world?

“LIVING HONESTLY”

‘Grace Is The Key’ Series
(Ephesians 4:25-28)

Intro ... Six weeks ago we introduced ourselves to the ‘**Great Exhortation**’ with which the Apostle Paul began the second half of his ‘*Epistle to the Ephesians*’ ...

This is the exhortation with which Paul bridges the gap between the first three chapters and the second three – it’s the transition statement that takes us from the **doctrinal** section of Ephesians to the **behavioral** section. It signifies a change of focus from ‘**knowing things**’ to ‘**doing things**’ – from **learning** about things to **applying** what we have learned.

And here it is ...

PAUL’S GREAT EXHORTATION – Ephesians 4:1

**“Live A Life WORTHY Of The CALLING
You Have RECEIVED!”**

What a task ... What a life-energizing passion ... To seek to live a life that is worthy of the God-Given Calling to Salvation and Eternal Life that we have received ... To live in such a way that there will be no doubt in anyone’s mind that we are indeed members of God’s Brand New ‘*Born-Again Family of Fellowship and Faith*’ – **God’s Final Family!**

In the Second Half of this Letter to the Ephesians, Paul spells out in quite some detail what that life looks like. **Nine Directives** for living a life worthy of our Calling are given – nine directives for living a life that will truly bring Glory to our Heavenly Father.

Continually keep in mind that all of them have as their primary focus ‘Life in the Body of Christ’ – they detail the way that life is to be lived in the Family of God by those who have become Children of God. Unbelievers could not live this way if they tried ... And believers can only live this way as they truly yield themselves to the ‘Power of God’ that is at work within them.

But as they **do** yield themselves to that 'Power' these directives can be successfully followed and this 'Worthy Life' can indeed be attained and great glory to God can be generated.

So far we have discovered and discussed **three** of the **Nine**.
So far we have been directed to:

"Live HARMONIOUSLY"

('Maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace'- vs. 3)

"Live MATURELY"

('Attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ'- vs.13)

"Live PURELY"

('Be like God in true righteousness and holiness'- vs. 24)

This morning we identify the **Fourth** of the **Nine** ...

TODAY'S KEY DIRECTIVE – Ephesians 4:25
(Paul's Fourth Directive for Worthy Living)

"LIVE HONESTLY"...

*"Put off **FALSEHOOD** and speak **TRUTHFULLY**."*

Here's the full passage in which that Directive is found ...

Ephesians 4:25-28 ...

"Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

'In your anger do not sin'

*Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,
and do not give the devil a foothold.*

*He who has been stealing must steal no longer,
but must work, doing something useful with his own hands,
that he *may have something to share with those in need.*"*

Again keep in mind that Paul is directing how life should be lived within the Body of Christ – within the Church Fellowship – within the Born-Again Family of God. Everything we say this morning is in light of that recognition.

Though these principles certainly do have application in the world in general, they best apply where believers are found on both sides of the relationship and where Christian Concepts are agreed to by all parties involved.

With that clarification having been given, let's consider what '**Speaking Truthfully**' means ...

What '*direction*' does it provide our Fellowship?

How should it work out in this congregation, in our families, in our friendships?

SPEAKING TRUTHFULLY MEANS:

*** NO DECEIVING ...** It undermines **HARMONY**.

(No denying, no pretending, no embellishing, no sugar-coating, no misleading)

"Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body."

Christians are just as prone as anyone else to feel uncomfortable with truth, especially when it is truth about ourselves.

The truth at times can seem so inadequate, so uninteresting, so humbling perhaps even embarrassing, so unattractive, so uninviting.

And so members of the Body of Christ can find themselves engaging in behaviors that are actually deceptive.

We **deny** how things really are; we **pretend** that things are better than they are; we **overstate** our accomplishments; we '**put the best spin possible**' on any difficulties we might be facing and as a result we **mislead** and as a result of that the person the people around us think we are is not the person we are at all and as a result of that there is anything but harmony in the body because we are not really one body at all. We wind up being a bunch of actors merely playing our church roles.

Paul would say that that is not a good thing ... that's the way things are conducted in the world around us.

There is no **room** for and there should be no **need** for such deception in the Church of Jesus Christ.

Each of us should be willing and able to 'speak truthfully to our church neighbors' because they truly are our neighbors. They are in this thing with us and they are striving to live honestly just like we are.

We should be able to trust them to know the real us – sinners saved by grace who are striving to attain the fullness of the measure of Christ in our lives.

Everyone in the church needs to find someone or several 'someones' with whom they truly have this '*neighbor connection*'.

Here at *Sonlife* Community Church we plan for Cell groups to provide a framework where that '*neighbor connection*' can happen. Sometimes simply sitting in the same seat each Sunday can do the same!

The **bottom line** of the matter is ...

The Church should be one place where people really **KNOW**
(and where we are comfortable with them knowing) **WHO** we are.

SPEAKING TRUTHFULLY MEANS:

* **NO STEWING** ... It gives the Devil **OPPORTUNITY**.
(Honestly speak of and deal with the thing that has upset you.)
The Devil is an accuser of the brethren/He seeks to destroy fellowship.

*"In your anger do not sin ...
Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,
and do not give the devil a foothold."*

Here's the deal ... When we really get to know people, we will occasionally learn something that upsets us about them. When people live truthfully with us they might at times reveal things that even anger us.

Truth is ... just living in close proximity with anyone will eventually give us reason to get 'all stirred up'. So what should we do when we do?

In this passage Paul definitely eliminates one option from the table – '**No Stewing**' ... no dwelling on the thing and allowing it to fester. No attacking them and accusing them in our mind. Find a way to wipe the slate clean.

If it's really 'no big deal' and it just caught you at a vulnerable moment, then simply 'deal with it inside your own head and heart and let it go'.

Speak truthfully to yourself 'about your neighbor' and admit that it is, in fact, 'No Big Deal' and that it would be foolish and probably harmful to your fellowship to even 'Bring it up'.

Wash your mind clean of it – don't think about it again.
Chalk your feelings of initial anger up to a failure on your part.

However, if it **is** a 'big deal' ... at least a 'real deal' – a 'real deal that is big enough to stir you to anger' then Paul would say '**Deal With It**' ...

Lovingly confront the person with the situation that has come to your attention. Speak truthfully to your neighbor about it. And when you have done that then consider yourself to have done what you can and place the matter in your neighbor's hands and God's. Sleep in peace.

You see, Paul says that any other approach allows the Devil to establish a foothold in our lives. When we chose '**To Stew**' we remain angry and when we remain angry we become more and more accusatory (we join the Devil's team without even knowing it) and frequently our accusations can turn into open attacks. Much damage is done in our lives that truthful confrontation would have allowed us to avoid.

The **bottom line** of this matter is ...

The Church should be one place where loving **CONFRONTATION** can take place and where **RESOLUTION** can be achieved.

SPEAKING TRUTHFULLY MEANS:

* **NO STEALING** ... It ignores **RESPONSIBILITY** and thwarts **GENEROSITY**
(Provide for your own needs and for those around you.)

*"He who has been stealing must steal no longer,
but must work, doing something useful with his own hands,
that he may have something to share with those in need."*

Seems like odd advice for a Pastor to be giving to his people, doesn't it?

But if we were a bunch of recently released felons who had come to Christ through 'Prison Fellowship Ministries, perhaps not so much.

For some people, stealing is all they know ... Stealing is what they do best.

Taking something that is not theirs ... Benefiting by the deeds of others.

Taking credit for the ideas of others ... Riding on the coattails of others.

Making a deal that takes advantage of others – perhaps ruins them.

There are lots of ways to steal ... not all of them
involve '*breaking and entering*'.

A lot of the Ephesian saints were converted slaves – they were the '*low men on the totem pole*'. For them stealing might simply be '*not working diligently when the Master was away*' – stealing time that belonged to someone else.

And then again there are those who enhance their lives by directly taking things that belong to someone else.

Paul says that such a practice must cease ...
It's a lazy and a dishonest way to live.

Perhaps they might even have been '*stealing from one another*'.
In that case the very harmony of the body of Christ would be threatened.

Believers, Paul says, must find a way to earn their own living and seek to become a benefactor to those in need.

The truth of it is, when the Church of Jesus Christ becomes the place that it should be there will be no need or temptation to steal ... Each member will be watched over and basic needs will be met as those who are '*able-bodied*' responsibly work and those who are not are lovingly cared for.

The **bottom line** of this matter is ...

The Church should be one place where **THIEVERY** is unheard of ...

Where needs are met through **DILIGENCE** and **COMPASSION**.

Final Thot ...

Honesty is not only the **BEST POLICY** ...
It's **REQUIRED POLICY** in Christ's Church!

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Thirty-Two"

Sunday we shifted our attention back to the book of **Ephesians** and more specifically back to the **Great Exhortation** which began Chapter Four ...

"I **URGE** you to live a life **WORTHY** of the **CALLING**
you have **RECEIVED**."

In the second half of the Book of Ephesians, Paul gives **nine** directives to follow that will result in us living such a life ... So far we have discussed **three** of them ... In order to live a life that is truly 'worthy' in God's eyes, Paul says:

"Live HARMONIOUSLY"

('Maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace'- vs. 3)

"Live MATURELY"

('Attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ'- vs.13)

"Live PURELY"

('Be like God in true righteousness and holiness'- vs. 24)

In Sunday's message we looked at the **fourth** of the **nine** ...

"Live HONESTLY"

('Put off falsehood and speak truthfully' – vs. 25)

Pastor Mark took that to mean:

"NO DECEIVING – NO STEWING – NO STEALING"

Find the verse or phrase that leads to each of these sub-directives (25-28)

Here are three '**Bottom Line Truths**' that emerged from Sunday's message:
Pick one and reflect upon how it grows out of this passage ...

- 1.** The Church should be one place where people really **KNOW** (and where we are comfortable with them knowing) **WHO** we are.
- 2.** The Church should be one place where loving **CONFRONTATION** can take place when necessary and where **RESOLUTION** can be achieved.
- 3.** The Church should be one place where **THIEVERY** is unheard of ... where needs are met through **DILIGENCE** (working) and **COMPASSION** (sharing).

Point To Ponder ...

How big of a deal is it to say:
"These people live absolutely **HONESTLY** with one another"?

"A SWEET-SMELLING SACRIFICE"

'Grace Is The Key' Series
(Ephesians 5:1-2)

Intro ... This morning in preparation for our time of communion as a congregation, I would have us focus our attention upon a two verse passage – the stand-alone-verses (as it were) with which Paul begins the Fifth Chapter of his Epistle to the Ephesians.

Here's how it reads ...

Today's Key Verse ... Ephesians 5:1-2

*"Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as **CHRIST** loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant **OFFERING** and **SACRIFICE** to God."*

Here's the part I want us to focus upon this morning ...

Today's Key Focus ... Ephesians 5:2

*"**CHRIST** loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant **OFFERING** and **SACRIFICE** to God."*

We've just come through the Easter Season and once again been reminded of the horrors of the death of Jesus Christ on Calvary – the ugliness of it, the pain of it, the seemingly tragic nature of it.

We've identified ourselves with those who loved him and whose hearts broke for him. We've mourned; we've fasted and then we've rejoiced with the angel's triumphant announcement ...

"He is not here; He is risen as He said!"

This morning I would have us adopt a different perspective.

Using today's verse as our guide, I want us to see what Jesus was doing on the cross not from the perspective of those who surrounded him on earth but from the perspective of his Father who was watching him from Heaven.

On that cross that day (as the Father watched from His Heavenly Throne)...

1. JESUS WAS DEMONSTRATING AN INCREDIBLE LOVE FOR MAN

'Christ loved us and gave himself up for us ...'

*"Greater love has no man than this that he lay down his life for his friends."
(John 15:13)*

*"The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord."
(John 10:17-18)*

This love matched up with the Father's own love for man (see John 3:16) and had to bless His Heart.

Hear Him say ...

"This is my Son in whom I am well-pleased!"

On that cross that day (as the Father watched from His Heavenly Throne)...

2. JESUS WAS MAKING AN INCREDIBLE SACRIFICE TO GOD

"Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a ... sacrifice to God."

A **sacrifice** ... Provision made for man's sin.

*'The wages of sin is death' ... yours or your substitute's.
(Romans 6:23)*

*"All we like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord (The Father) laid on him (the Son) the iniquity of us all."
(Isaiah 53:6)*

*"Then I said, 'Here I am – it is written about me in the scroll –
I have come to do your will, O God.'
(Hebrews 10:7)*

*"By one sacrifice, he has made perfect forever
those who are being made holy."
(Hebrews 10:14)*

Christ was sacrificing his own life for the sins of the world – He willingly accommodated himself to the Father's Plan and that action had to bless the Father's Heart.

Hear Him say ...

"This is my Son in whom I am well-pleased!"

On that cross that day (as the Father watched from His Heavenly Throne)...

3. JESUS WAS PRESENTING AN INCREDIBLE OFFERING BEFORE GOD'S THRONE

"Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering ... to God."

Here Paul speaks of a 'fragrant offering' - a 'pleasing aroma' ... something that generates genuine delight – that truly blesses our Father's Heart!

- * What was being offered to God was 'PAYMENT for SINS' and that has a pleasing aroma – the aroma of CLEANSING and FORGIVENESS.
- * What was being offered to God was an 'ACTION of LOVE' and that has a pleasing aroma – the aroma of SELFLESSNESS and WILLINGNESS.
- * What was being offered to God was the 'FULFILLMENT of GOD'S ETERNAL PLAN' and that has a pleasing aroma – the aroma of ACCOMPLISHMENT and JOY.

There was indeed a 'sweet smell' in the air that day - an aroma that surely blessed the Father's Heart. Once again hear Him say ...

"This is my Son in whom I am well-pleased!"

Here's the point today ...

Even as the actual sacrifice of Christ on Calvary produced a fragrant offering (a pleasing aroma) before the Throne of God so the commemoration of that sacrifice should do the same and so we come to **Today's Final Thot ...**

Final Thot ...

COMMUNION should produce a FRAGRANT aroma in the HOUSE of God among the PEOPLE of God. Breathe DEEPLY!

And so as we approach the Lord's Table this morning, there's a sweet savor in the air ...

It's an aroma of Cleansing and Forgiveness – Breathe it in deeply!

It's an aroma of Selflessness and Willingness – Breathe it in deeply!

It's an aroma of Accomplishment and Joy – Breathe it in deeply!

And as you breathe in deeply the aroma of Christ's Work for you on Calvary, say to yourself ...

"This is my Savior in whom I am well-pleased!"

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Thirty-Three"

Sunday's Communion Meditation focused upon one half of one verse.
Ephesians 5:1b ...

"**CHRIST** loved us and **GAVE** himself up for us
as a fragrant **OFFERING** and **SACRIFICE** to God."

Respond to this introductory statement from Sunday's meditation:

*"Using today's verse as our guide, I want us to see what Jesus was doing on
the cross not from the perspective of those who surrounded him on earth but
from the perspective of his Father who was watching him from Heaven."*

Have you ever adopted that 'perspective' before? How would you say that 'heavenly' perspective is different from the 'earthly' one? Do you think it was possible for the disciples to have that 'heavenly' perspective? Why or why not? Is it important for us to have? What do you think?

Paul says that there was a fragrant (sweet) aroma that was arising from the 'offering' Christ was making to the Father from the cross. Here's how Pastor Mark described it ...

- * What was being offered to God was '**PAYMENT** for **SINS**' and that has a pleasing aroma – the aroma of **CLEANSING** and **FORGIVENESS**.
- * What was being offered to God was an '**ACTION** of **LOVE**' and that has a pleasing aroma – the aroma of **SELFLESSNESS** and **WILLINGNESS**.
- * What was being offered to God was the '**FULFILLMENT** of **GOD'S ETERNAL PLAN**' and that has a pleasing aroma – the aroma of **ACCOMPLISHMENT** and **JOY**.

Which of these 'aromas' is particularly pleasing to you?

Reflect upon this statement made Sunday ...

"And so as we approach the Lord's Table this morning, there is a sweet savor in the air ...

It's an aroma of Cleansing and Forgiveness – Breathe it in deeply!

It's an aroma of Selflessness and Willingness – Breathe it in deeply!

It's an aroma of Accomplishment and Joy – Breathe it in deeply!

*And as you breathe in deeply the aroma of Christ's Work for you on Calvary,
say to yourself ... 'This is my Savior in whom I am well-pleased!'"*

Point To Ponder ...

Did I do that ... Did I find **PLEASURE** in my **SAVIOR**?

"IMITATORS OF GOD"

'Grace Is The Key' Series
(Ephesians 5:1-2)

Intro ... Today we take a second look at the two verse stand-alone passage with which the Apostle Paul began the fifth Chapter of his letter to the Ephesians. Here's how it reads ...

Today's Key Passage ... Ephesians 5:1-2

"Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

Last week in our Communion Meditation we focused our attention upon the second part of that two-verse passage – the part that identifies not only the terrible sacrifice but also the sweet-smelling offering given on Calvary.

Here's the part I want us to focus our attention upon this morning on this Mother's Day ...

Today's Key Focus ... Ephesians 5:1

*"Be **IMITATORS** of God, as dearly loved children, and **LIVE** a life of **LOVE** ..."*

And though it, of course, was written to all believers, I would like all you 'moms' here today to especially take it to heart ... Consider it to be God's message to you this morning – a message of direction and commendation.

Let's look at it phrase by phrase:

1. BE IMITATORS OF GOD

Greek Word: 'Mimeetees' ... (mimic)

What an incredible thing to say to anyone ...

"I want you to be an imitator of God ... I want you to mimic His actions in your daily life! Look at things the way that He does; respond to situations as He would; Feel about things the way that He feels. Imitate him in every circumstance you encounter – in a word ... 'Be Godly'."

Now here's the thing ...

* It Used To Come **NATURALLY**

(Human beings were made in the very image of God – Would naturally imitate Him.)

Adam and Eve were created as 'God-Like Beings'. They were thinking, feeling, creative human beings – uniquely designed to bring God's own perspective and passion to the new world God had created.

They never had to put on a bracelet with the initials **WWGD** to remind themselves to continually ask ... "*What would God Do?*"

They just did what came naturally to them and it was exactly what God would have done Himself ... They were 'imitators of God' and didn't even know it. That's the way it used to be.

* Now It Can Only Come **SUPERNATURALLY**

(Sin corrupted the process – New Birth necessary to create a new process.)

Sin corrupted the process ... Sin introduced new elements into the process – things like 'independent investigation of life' (What if God hasn't told me everything) ... things like 'independent evaluation of life' (What if I disagree with God about the things of life?).

Sin ultimately introduced the understanding that the key question in life is not "What would God do?" but "What do I think is best to do?"

And the more man depended upon his own independent investigation of things, the less man '*imitated God*' – in fact, in time, man's actions and attitudes ceased to resemble God's at all.

Man became so distinct from God that Paul could accurately describe man to the Ephesians as being '*Dead in Sin*' and '*Separated from God*' altogether!

A new creation would be required – a '*spiritual one*'. And so Paul would write that we must be '*made alive in Christ*' and that we must be ...

*"Strengthened with power through God's Spirit in our inner being
so that Christ might dwell in our hearts through faith ..."*

But praise God ... that New Creation has been made possible and now all who receive that new life through faith in Jesus Christ become (to use Paul's term) ...

"Members of God's Household"

Members of God's Household ... Sons and Daughters of God ... Human Beings newly re-created in the Image of Christ Himself ... Human beings who are once again not only capable of '*Imitating God*' but human beings who once again want to.

And so now we are ready to take a look at the next phrase in **Today's Key Instruction.**

BE IMITATORS OF GOD ...

2. AS DEARLY LOVED CHILDREN

Here's the perspective that allows born-again human beings – members of God's Final Family of Fellowship and Faith – to step into this fallen, still sin-filled world and thrive.

They enter the world (and they know that they enter the world) as '*Dearly Loved Children of God*'.

That means that they '*enter the world*' ...

* **SURE** of the Father's Love – '*I have no doubt about it!*'

"Here is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and gave His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." (1 John 4:10)

* **SECURE** in the Father's Love – '*Nothing can separate me from it!*'

"I am convinced that (nothing in all the world) can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39)

* **SUSTAINED** by the Father's Love – '*I'll never quit as long as I've got it!*'

"In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us" (Romans 8:37)

Run those phrases through your mind – Do they feel right and true to you?

"I have no doubt about the Father's Love for me."

"Nothing in all the world can separate me from the Father's Love."

"I'll never quit (or give up) as long as I've got the Father's Love."

That's how those who are sure that they are '*Dearly-Loved Children of God*' face life in this fallen world.

And so as a result of the Ephesian Believers (and us) knowing and feeling that they are indeed '*Dearly Loved Children of God*' and as a result of them (and us) having been brought back to 'spiritual life' and having been re-created in the very image of God and thus capable of once again being '*Imitators of God*', Paul now instructs them (and us) to ...

3. LIVE A LIFE OF LOVE

Now what could be more natural?

Paul is basically saying ...

*'Give expression to the life that your Loving Heavenly Father
has placed within you.'*

Here's how I would seek to develop that thought.

Living A Life Of Love Means Living ...

* A Life **SENSITIZED** To God's Love

'See it, feel it; almost taste and smell it.'

Sensitize your heart and mind to the presence of God's Love.

If I could paraphrase Paul's words to the Greek philosophers in Athens (Acts 17:28) ...

"In God's love we live and move and have our being."

Find ways to sensitize yourself to God's unfailing love all day, every day!

Living A Life Of Love Means Living ...

* A Life **MOTIVATED** By God's Love
"Love as I have loved you" – "The Love of Christ compels me"

"Love one another as I have love you" – that what Jesus said to his disciples the night before he gave his life for them (and us) on Calvary (John 13:34)

The Apostle Paul explained to the Believers in Corinth that ...

"The love of Christ compels me (and us)"
(2 Corinthians 5:14)

How glorious it would be if every action that we take had Love as its primary motive!

No actions motivated by selfishness or pride or anger or greed or guild but merely in response to the Love of God in our lives.

And now lastly on this Mother's Day morning ...

Living A Life Of Love Means Living ...

* A Life **IDENTIFIED** Because Of Its Love
"All men will know that you are my disciples,
if you love one another."
(John 13:35)

There is no greater recognition that can be given to a group of believers than to have someone say ...

*"I've been watching you for some time; I've been observing how
gently and lovingly you treat each other;
I've seen how you care for one another ...
You must be followers of Christ."*

Final Thot ...

NOTHING says "I **BELONG** to God' better than
LIVING a **LIFE** of **LOVE!**

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

-

"Lesson Thirty-Four"

The Title of Sunday's Mother's Day message was '**IMITATORS OF GOD**' ...

How does that title strike your ear? Can we do that? Can we actually become 'imitators' of God? What will it take? What characteristics of God would you say are able to be 'imitated'? Share what you think ...

Here was Sunday's **Key Scriptural Focus** – Ephesians 5:1 ...

"Be imitators of God, as dearly loved children,
and live a life of love ..."

Pick out one of those underlined phrases and reflect upon what it means to you ...

Pastor Mark suggested Sunday that 'Living A Life Of Love' means ...

* Living A Life **SENSITIZED** To God's Love
'See it, feel it; almost taste and smell it.' (Acts 17:28)

* Living A Life **MOTIVATED** By God's Love
"Love as I have loved you" (Jn. 13:35) – "The Love of Christ compels me" (2 Cor. 5:14)

* Living A Life **IDENTIFIED** Because Of Its Love
"By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (Jn. 13:35)

So how about you?

To what degree are you 'sensitized' – 'motivated' and 'identified' in your experience of this life of love?

Point to Ponder ...

Can an entire **CONGREGATION** imitate God in this way?
What do you think?

“LIVING PLEASANTLY”

*‘Grace Is The Key’ Series
(Ephesians 4:29-5:7)*

Intro ... More than two months ago now we introduced ourselves to the **‘Great Exhortation’** with which the Apostle Paul began the second half of his *‘Epistle to the Ephesians’* ...

And here it is ...

PAUL’S GREAT EXHORTATION – Ephesians 4:1

**“Live A Life WORTHY Of The CALLING
You Have RECEIVED!”**

In the Second Half of this Letter to the Ephesians, Paul spells out in quite some detail what that life looks like.

Nine Directives for living a life worthy of our Calling are given – nine directives for living a life that will truly bring Glory to our Heavenly Father.

So far we have discovered and discussed **Four** of the **Nine**.

So far we have been directed to:

“Live HARMONIOUSLY”

(‘Maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’ - Ephesians 4:3)

“Live MATURELY”

(‘Attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ’ - Ephesians 4:13)

“Live PURELY”

(‘Be like God in true righteousness and holiness’ - Ephesians 4:24)

“Live HONESTLY”...

(‘Put off falsehood and speak truthfully’ – Ephesians 4:25)

This morning we identify the **Fifth** of the **Nine** ...

TODAY'S KEY DIRECTIVE – Ephesians 4:29
(Paul's **Fifth** Directive for Worthy Living)

"LIVE PLEASANTLY" ... Be a **DELIGHT** to be around!
Don't let your **MOUTH** drive others **AWAY!**

"Do not let unwholesome talk come out of your mouths."

The identification of that **Key Directive** immediately stimulates
Today's Key Questions ...

TODAY'S KEY QUESTIONS ...

1. What **KIND** of **TALK** does God consider to be 'unwholesome' talk?
2. And what's at **STAKE** if I do speak in this manner?

Well, first things first – What kind of talk does God consider to be
'unwholesome'? The Holy Spirit gave Paul quite a list ...

See how many of them you can identify in ...

TODAY'S KEY PASSAGE ...

*"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only
what is helpful for building others up according to their needs,
that it may benefit those who listen.*

*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed
for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger,
brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind
and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other,
just as in Christ God forgave you ...*

*Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking,
which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving."
(Ephesians 4:29-32; 5:4)*

I find **four kinds** of 'unwholesome' – inappropriate – words listed there ...

* '**BITTER WORDS**'

(Words springing forth from feelings of bitterness.)

Bitter words are spoken by those who are (to say the least) disappointed with life ... Life has not gone as they had planned ... Situations have arisen that have caused them to become resentful or cynical ... Their bitter words communicate their frustration and heartache. Bitterness we could say is the result of frustration and disappointment turned inward.

* '**HATEFUL WORDS**'

(Words generated by feelings of rage and anger.)

Rage and anger frequently arise when bitterness has completed its work ... Bitterness (deep disappointment over the frustrations of life) can generate feelings of great anger and even rage which frequently express themselves in thoroughly hateful words ... ugly statements spew out of the mouths of those who have allowed bitterness to take control of them.

* '**DESTRUCTIVE WORDS**'

(Words designed to beat-down or slander others.)

Hateful words born of bitterness inevitably find a target ... The disappointing, debilitating circumstances of my life must be someone's fault. If my life is going down in flames then theirs should too.

I will confront them (we think) – I will accuse them – I will demean them – I will do all that I can to destroy them – I will focus all my venom upon them. There is no way that they are going to get away with what they have done to me or allowed to happen to me.

Bitter Words ... **Hateful** Words – **Destructive** Words ... Paul says that none of them should ever come out of our mouths. He lists them one right after another as types of 'unwholesome' speech here in verse 31.

Surely that would be enough for us to focus on this morning – enough for us to judge ourselves by. And surely we can see that how they all relate to each other and stimulate one another. They are all words that can arise in response to the disappointment and the brokenness of life.

Paul's final category of 'unwholesome speech' comes a few verses later and I think that we can see that these too grow out of the brokenness that sin has brought to this fallen world.

I've labeled them this morning simply ...

* '**FILTHY WORDS**'

(Words employed to shock someone's sensitivities.)

*"Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking,
which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving."*

(Ephesians 5:4)

Really when you think about it ... Filthy words like these are spoken by one who 'couldn't care less about life or about the people who make up his life' ...

These are words that serve absolutely no good purpose – they are ultimately 'unwholesome' ... they feed no one's mind or soul.

They are uttered by one who has discovered no ultimate purpose for living and thus has no appreciation for the things of life.

They frequently take the good things of life and twist them into objects of discuss or scorn or sport ... dirty jokes, stupid statements, crude talk ...

They are words deliberately chosen to shock the sensitivities of those who still believe there is something worth living for.

So ... Bitter Words ... Hateful Words – Destructive Words – Filthy Words...

None of these are to be part of the vocabulary of a Follower of Jesus Christ.

Paul says ... '**Do not let them come out of your mouth.**'

Now for the second question of the day ...

"What's at **STAKE** if I do speak in this way?"

Put another way ... "What's the **HARM** in this kind of speech?"

Paul's Two-Part Answer ...

1. UNWHOLESOME SPEECH DOESN'T DO ANYBODY ANY GOOD!

*"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."
(Ephesians 4:29)*

Do you hear what Paul is saying there ... He's actually saying that the purpose of conversation is to benefit the person we are conversing with! Our conversation should be designed to in some way or another build up or encourage our listener ... We need to be sensitive to their needs so we can speak helpfully to them.

People should be better as a result of talking to us – We should walk away from their presence with them saying ... 'I'm so glad you stopped by'. What an incredible thought!

Bitter Words – **Hateful** Words – **Destructive** Words – **Filthy** Words ...

Do not bring about that kind of response.

They don't do anybody any good – including their speaker!

That's one reason to eliminate them from our conversations.

Here's another ...

2. UNWHOLESOME SPEECH ACTUALLY GRIEVES THE HOLY SPIRIT!

*"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."
(Ephesians 4:30)*

God's Holy Spirit is one of 'those who listen' – who hears everything that we say ... It's interesting that it's in the midst of this particular teaching that Paul mentions the fact that the Spirit of God can be grieved – saddened – brought to a place of mourning' even. Is it not interesting and concerning that our words could so affect the Spirit of God? Is it not because God is the ultimate target of all those 'unwholesome words'? Is this not a big deal?

Don't so glibly think ... "He'll get over it" ... What makes you so sure?

Who are we to disregard the consequences of 'Grieving our holy, loving God' by our sinfully chosen words? Paul would say 'Don't mess with it' – Don't allow 'unwholesome talk' to come out of your mouth. Speak in a way that The Holy Spirit can freely enter into the conversation.

Final Thot ...

WORDS can **WOUND** both **GOD** and **MAN** so ...
Speak **PLEASANTLY** not **PAINFULLY!**

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Thirty-Five"

Sunday we shifted our attention back to the book of **Ephesians** and more specifically back to the **Great Exhortation** which began Chapter Four ...

"I **URGE** you to live a life **WORTHY** of the **CALLING** you have **RECEIVED**."

In the second half of the Book of Ephesians, Paul gives **nine** directives to follow that will result in us living such a life ... Sunday's message focused upon Paul's **fifth directive** for living 'Worthy Lives'. Here's how Pastor Mark expressed it ...

"LIVE PLEASANTLY" ... Be a **DELIGHT** to be around!
Don't let your **MOUTH** drive others **AWAY!**
"Do not let unwholesome talk come out of your mouths."
(Ephesians 4:29)

When you hear the phrase 'unwholesome talk' what do you think?
Does it sound like something that should be on the Christians' list of really bad things?
The KJV translates it 'corrupt communication' ... What image does that bring to mind?

The only other place this Greek word is found is in the teachings of Jesus:
Matthew 7:17-18 ... Matthew 13:47-48 ... What do you think? Serious stuff?

In this passage, Pastor Mark identified five types of 'words' that qualify as truly 'unwholesome' ('corrupt' and thus capable of producing corruption) ...

- 'BITTER WORDS'** - Words springing forth from feelings of bitterness.
- 'HATEFUL WORDS'** - Words generated by feelings of rage and anger.
- 'DESTRUCTIVE WORDS'** - Words designed to beat-down or slander others.
- 'FILTHY WORDS'** - Words employed to shock someone's sensitivities.

Would you agree (as Pastor Mark concluded Sunday) that ...

"None of these are to be part of the vocabulary of a Follower of Jesus Christ." ?

Right in the midst of this discussion, the Apostle Paul gave the Ephesians another instruction (Ephesians 4:30) ... **"Do not GRIEVE the HOLY SPIRIT ..."**

How big a deal is this? What would you say are the consequences of such a 'grieving' happening in our lives ... in our church?

Reflect upon this closing statement from Sunday's message ...

"Don't so glibly think ... *"He'll get over it"* ... What makes you so sure? Who are we to disregard the consequences of 'Grieving' our holy, loving God by our sinfully chosen words?
Paul would say *'Don't mess with it'* – Don't allow 'unwholesome talk' to come out of your mouth. Speak in a way that The Holy Spirit can freely enter into the conversation."

Point to Ponder ... Does the Holy Spirit's **GRIEF** bring me **GRIEF**?

“LIVING INQUIRINGLY”

‘Grace Is The Key’ Series
(Ephesians 5:8-17)

Intro ... This morning we continue our investigation of The Great Exhortation with which Paul began the Fourth Chapter of his Epistle to the Ephesians.

PAUL’S GREAT EXHORTATION – Ephesians 4:1

**“Live A Life WORTHY Of The CALLING
You Have RECEIVED!”**

And that’s where the rubber meets the road. Through faith in Jesus Christ we have been born-again into the Family of God – We have been forgiven of our sins and been given the ability to actually live a God-Honoring Life – a life that is ‘*Worthy of the Calling that we have received*’.

So basically Paul is saying ... “Get to it” ... Get on with living that very life – Let your life in this world reveal the fact though you are still in this world, you are no longer of this world for you have received a ‘Calling’ that inspires you to live a completely ‘*otherworldly*’ kind of life.

So how do we do that ... How do we live this truly ‘worthy life’ – this life that shows that we individually and we collectively have responded to this ‘*Higher Calling*’?

The entire second half the book of Ephesians can be organized under **nine key directives for living** that tell us exactly how such a life is to be lived.

So far we have examined **five** of the nine:

If we would live a life that is worthy of our calling we must:

Live Harmoniously and Maturely and Purely and
Honestly and Pleasantly.

Copies (and videos) of all those messages are available at our church website.

Today I would have us consider the **sixth** of the nine ...

TODAY'S KEY DIRECTIVE

(Paul's **sixth** directive for 'Worthy' Living)

"LIVE INQUIRINGLY"

"Find out what pleases the Lord" – Ephesians 5:10

"Understand what the Will of the Lord is." – Ephesians 5:17

Here's the fuller passage from which that directive is drawn ...

TODAY'S KEY PASSAGE

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.
Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness,
righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.

Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.
For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything
exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible.

This is why it is said: "*Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.*" Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise, making the
most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish,
but understand what the Lord's will is.

(Ephesians 5:8-17)

A good starting point for our inquiry is right here in this passage.
Paul tells us that ...

*** *IT DOES NOT PLEASE THE LORD (IT IS NOT HIS WILL)
IF WE LIVE IN DARKNESS!***

"Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness."
(Ephesians 5:11)

'Darkness' is Paul's term for the '*natural sinful state of fallen man*' ...

Mankind is born in '*spiritual darkness*' ...

Unsaved men and women live their lives in '*darkness*' ...

In Ephesians 4:18 Paul referred to the unbelievers as being '*darkened in their understanding*'.

He went on to say that they are “separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them” and that as a result they have “given themselves over to sensuality” and have indulged themselves in “every kind of impurity”.

In this passage, Paul points out that ‘it is shameful even to mention what they do in secret’ – what he calls the ‘fruitless deeds of darkness’.

Those ‘fruitless deeds of darkness’ arise from a sinful, unsundered heart – they are deeds that do not take God or His Standards into account.

They are deeds that are motivated by selfish interests and which follow worldly patterns – some are worse than others in their impact upon people but all of them are displeasing to the Lord.

It does not please the Lord when those who have been born into His Family continue to live as though they have not - when they are indistinguishable from the sinful society around them. More than not please - It surely grieves.

However ...

*** IT DOES PLEASE THE LORD (IT IS HIS WILL)
WHEN WE WALK IN THE LIGHT!**

*“Live as children of light ...”
(Ephesians 5:8b)*

“Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.”

You see, we cannot find out what pleases the Lord until we get out of the darkness. But once the ‘light’ has entered our lives then we can truly begin that quest.

The Apostle John wrote these glorious words in the Gospel that bears his name. John 1:4 ...

“In him (Jesus) was life and that life was the light of men.”

That exactly what Paul was meaning when he wrote these words ...

*“That’s why it is said ...
‘Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’ (vs. 14)*

It's through Jesus Christ that the 'light of life' – the 'light of understanding' – the 'light of enabling' comes. But we must live in 'light of that light'.

We cannot become casual about it – we can easily slip back into a kind of spiritual dimness if we are not careful. Sometimes we need to awaken as it were from a kind of 'spiritual slumber' and re-open our eyes to the glorious light of day.

So is it any wonder that we pray each week as a congregation that our Heavenly Father would ...

*'strengthen us with power through His Spirit in our inner being
so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith.'*

We simply cannot have Christ, the light of life, truly 'dwelling in our hearts' and us not be 'Living as Children of light' which is the very thing that God desires that we do – one thing for sure that definitely 'pleases God'.

Notice in this passage the three key terms that Paul associates with this 'Life of Light' – three things that the 'Light' automatically produces within us.

THREE KEY TERMS ...
GOODNESS – RIGHTEOUSNESS – TRUTH

Goodness: A genuine sin-free nature – purity in heart and mind.

Righteousness: Doing the right thing at the right time in the right way.

Truth: That which eternally is – ultimate insight into life.

'Live as Children of Light' Paul would say for it definitely 'Pleases God'.

Now as we continue our quest to find out what pleases the Lord, here's another set of contrasting observations Paul gives in this passage ...

*** IT DOES NOT PLEASE THE LORD (IT IS NOT HIS WILL)**
WHEN WE LIVE FOOLISHLY!

"Do not be foolish ..." (Ephesians 5:17)

Jews like Paul were very familiar with the contrast between foolishness and wisdom ... they had been raised on it. The Book of Proverbs makes much of it. Those who follow God and His Ways are wise and those who don't are fools. Simple as that.

'Do not be foolish' is actually just another way of saying 'Don't try to make it up as you go along' ... 'Don't try to re-invent the wheel' ...

God has already done it – Follow His Directions for life – You can't go wrong. Don't live in foolishness as the unbelievers around you do ... Don't live as though no specific guidelines for life have been given ... There have been.

And so in contrast we observe ...

*** IT DOES PLEASE THE LORD (IT IS HIS WILL)
WHEN WE LIVE WISELY!**

*"... Live not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity."
(Ephesians 5:15-16)*

Make the most of every opportunity to apply the Word of God to the World of Men. Live as those who are in the know ... Live as those who understand there is a 'Guidebook for Life' ... It is the Word of God.

You can't make people follow it but you can let them know that they are foolish if they don't. And when they try and can't, you can share with them the good news of how they can ...

How they can become new creatures in Christ – How His Light can shine upon them and transform them into 'Light-Walkers' themselves.

This is a good and wise thing to do ... This **pleases God**.
This is what God would have every one of His Children engaged in ...
This surely demonstrates **An Understanding of His Will** for our lives.

"Make the most of every opportunity to reveal His awesome wisdom in sending His Son Jesus into this world that human beings living in darkness might arise from spiritual death and receive the new life he offers."

And as you **seek** to do that be **sure** of this (as our final that expresses it) ...

Final Thot ...

Those who truly **SEEK** to please the Lord will surely
FEEL His **PLEASURE!**

The **Key Directive** that focused our attention Sunday was: "**LIVE INQUIRINGLY**"

The **Key Scripture** identifying the direction of our 'Inquiry' is Ephesians 5:10:

"FIND OUT what PLEASES the Lord."

So how are you doing in your quest to discover what '*pleases the Lord*'?
Take some time and list at least three things that you have come to believe '*please the Lord*' and that would be part of any '*God-Honoring Life*' ...

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Check out these '*God-Pleasing Activities*' listed in the Scripture ...
To what degree are they part of your regular routine?

Hebrews 10:25 ... "**MEETING** together with our **FELLOW BELIEVERS**"

Psalms 150:6 ... "Living a **LIFE** of **PRAISE**"

Malachi 3:10 ... "**BRINGING** our **TITHES** in to the **LORD**"

2 Corinthians 6:14 ... "Avoiding **YOKING** ourselves to **UNBELIEVERS**"

2 Timothy 2:15 ... "Correctly **HANDLING** the **WORD** of **GOD**"

1 Peter 3:16 ... "**SHARING** our **FAITH** with those who **ASK**"

Point to Ponder ...

Is **SEEKING** to please the Lord the same as **PLEASING** Him?

“LIVING WORSHIPFULLY”

‘Grace Is The Key’ Series
(Ephesians 5:18-20)

Intro ... In this meditation this morning we continue our investigation of The Great Exhortation with which Paul began the Fourth Chapter of his Epistle to the Ephesians.

PAUL’S GREAT EXHORTATION – Ephesians 4:1

**“Live A Life WORTHY Of The CALLING
You Have RECEIVED!”**

The entire second half the book of Ephesians can be organized under **nine key directives for living** that tell us exactly how that ‘worthy’ life is to be lived.

So far we have examined **six** of the **nine**:

Today in this communion meditation, I would have us consider the **seventh**.

TODAY’S KEY DIRECTIVE

(Paul’s **seventh** directive for ‘Worthy’ Living)

“LIVE WORSHIPFULLY”

“Sing and make MUSIC in your HEARTS to the Lord”
(Ephesians 5:19b)

Here’s the fuller passage from which that directive is drawn ...

*“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery.
Instead, be filled with the Spirit.*

*Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.
Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always
giving thanks to God the Father for everything,
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

From that passage I would draw Four **Observations** and issue One **Warning** ...

FOUR OBSERVATIONS ...

1. WORSHIP ORIGINATES IN THE HEART

"Sing and make music in your hearts to the Lord" – verse 19b

In the heart is where true worship always begins. In the heart is where our soul can best sing and like 'singing in the shower' singing in the heart always sounds good! Keep your heart focused on the Goodness of God and music will flow.

2. WORSHIP MUSIC COMES IN THREE DISTINCT CATEGORIES

"Speak to one another with Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs" – verse 19a

Here's how I would distinguish them one from the other. Each has its own purpose as it arises from a heart that is focused upon the Goodness of God. Each of them can bring great benefit to the body of Christ as we worship God together.

* Some Songs are **SERMONS** set to music (Hymns);

These are musical messages regarding the Goodness and Greatness of God;
These songs primarily declare the great Truths of our Faith.

* Some Songs are **TESTIMONIES** set to music (Spiritual Songs);

These are musical messages that share how God has changed our lives;
They express our delight in the wonders of our salvation.

* Some Songs are **PRAYERS** set to music (Psalms).

These are musical messages directed to God Himself;
They contain praise and petition; they communicate submission and surrender.
They are vital to corporate worship – We stress them here at **Sonlife** Church.

3. WORSHIP IS ACCOMPANIED BY A SPIRIT OF THANKSGIVING

"Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything" – verse 20a

When our hearts are focused upon the Goodness (and Greatness) of God and when as a result of that focus they spontaneously burst forth in song, our re-born spirit wraps that song in a spirit of thanksgiving before it is sent heavenward.

So here's how it goes ... In the midst of everything this world sends our way, as we retreat into the sanctuary of our hearts, we find a fresh spirit of worshipful praise awaiting us and no matter what the current circumstance might be, we find ourselves thankful for the God who loves us and stands beside us and whose Holy Spirit has been placed within us.

Our final observation is this ...

4. WORSHIP IS INSEPARABLY LINKED TO THE PERSON OF CHRIST

"In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" – verse 20b

In other words, only born-again believers in Jesus Christ can in fact 'Live Worshipfully'. Only Born-Again Children of God can enjoy such a relationship with God.

Would be 'worship attempts' by any other human being are simply worthless efforts; (to paraphrase William Shakespeare) they are 'mere sound and fury signifying nothing'. As Jesus once said ... "No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

And now for the ONE WARNING that Paul felt important to place right here...

"DRUNKENNESS UNDERMINES WORSHIP"

"Do not get drunk on wine ... but be filled with the Spirit." – verse 18

Here's the point ...

We can only be 'under the influence of one Spirit at a time'.

Those who choose to put themselves under the 'influence of alcohol or some other intoxicant' move themselves out from under the Holy Spirit's influence – It's as simple as that.

And a genuine Born-Again Christian has to ask ...

"Why would I ever want to do that?"

Indeed, why would we? Intoxicants mess up and redirect the whole cycle.

And now, as we seek to draw this discussion together,
Consider the insight of **Today's Final Thot** ...

Final Thot...

God is seeking for worshippers who are both SINCERE and SOBER!
Let's be BOTH for His GLORY.

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Thirty-Seven"

The **Key Directive** that focused our attention Sunday was: "**LIVE WORSHIPFULLY**"
What does that directive mean to you? What does it mean to so live?

Sunday's **Key Verse** was:

"SING and make **MUSIC** in your **HEARTS** to the Lord."
(Ephesians 5:19b)

Can **every** believer '*make music in their hearts*' – What do you think?
How would you say that that is done – How do you know if you are doing it?

Paul identified three types of beneficial Christian music:

PSALMS ... HYMNS ... SPIRITUAL SONGS

Pastor Mark characterized them this way:

"HYMNS are **SERMONS** set to music"

"SPIRITUAL SONGS are **TESTIMONIES** set to music"

"PSALMS are **PRAYERS** set to music"

Have you ever analyzed the songs you sing or listen to in this way?

Paul says that we should '*speak to one another*' using these three types of '*musical language*'. How often have you said to someone ... '*I heard the neatest song today*' or '*We sang this awesome song in church last Sunday*'?

What was your reaction to these **Two Observations** from Sunday:

True Worship Is Always Accompanied By A Spirit Of **THANKSGIVING** (and)
True Worship Is Inseparably Linked To The **PERSON** Of Jesus Christ.

Based upon verse 18 ...What would you say is the relationship between

INTOXICATION and **WORSHIP**?

Our *Sonlife* Bulletin identifies us as a **WORSHIP-CENTERED** congregation ...
If someone were to ask you what that means, what would you say?

Point to Ponder ...

All Non-Christian '**WORSHIP**' is just **WASTED EFFORT**.

“LIVING SUBMISSIVELY”

‘Grace Is The Key’ Series
(Ephesians 5:21)

Intro ... Once again this morning we remind ourselves of the Great Exhortation with which the Apostle Paul began the second half of His Epistle to the Ephesian Church ... an exhortation that comes to us today even as it came to them so many years ago.

PAUL’S GREAT EXHORTATION – Ephesians 4:1

“Live A Life **WORTHY** Of The **CALLING**
You Have **RECEIVED!**”

‘Show the world’, (Paul is saying) ‘by your life that you are indeed a Born-Again Child of God - Live in such a way as to leave no doubt in anyone’s mind’.

And how do we do that? Simple, Paul would say ... “**Follow my directives**”. In the second half of the Book of Ephesians Paul gives **nine** of them – **nine directives** for living a life that is indeed ...

‘Worthy of the Calling we have received’.

So far we have examined **seven** of the nine – seven specific ways that we Christians should live if we would live ‘Worthy Lives’ ...

We should: Live **Harmoniously** and **Maturely** and **Purely** and **Honestly** and **Pleasantly** and **Inquiringly** and **Worshipfully**. All these messages are available in printed form and as viewable videos at our church website.

Today we come to the **eighth** of the nine ...

TODAY’S KEY DIRECTIVE

(Paul’s **eighth** directive for ‘Worthy’ Living)

“LIVE SUBMISSIVELY”

“**SUBMIT** to one another out of **REVERENCE** for **CHRIST**”
(Ephesians 5:21)

This **eighth** directive opens the door to three critical areas of relationship – each will require a full message: **Marriage ... Family ... Work.**

In each of these areas of relationship, 'Living Submissively' is the secret to living successfully - the secret to living a life 'Worthy of the Calling we have received'.

So today let's examine that broad-based directive and see if we can come to an understanding of what Paul is in fact directing us to do. First let's take it apart and then let's put it back together.

First of all Paul says that we are to ...

*** SUBMIT ...**

'hupotasso' ... strong term – yield yourself completely to the will or wishes of another

New Testament Usage ...

Luke 2:52 "He (Jesus) was obedient (subject) to them"

This is just after Jesus had demonstrated some independent behavior ... His family had headed home after their visit to Jerusalem and Jesus had chosen to remain behind and involve himself with the teachers of the Law in the temple. When his parents discovered that he was not on the road with them, they came back to the city to look for him ...

When they found him in the temple he said, "*Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?*" ... He had a great desire to be in the presence of those who had devoted their lives to the Lord's Cause.

However the Scripture says ...

"He was obedient (he submitted himself) to them and went home."

Luke 10:17 ... "*Even the devils submit to us in your name*"

This is what the disciples reported to Jesus as they returned from the mission trip he had sent them on. The devils – the demonic spirits - 'submitted' to them. When the disciple took them to leave a person, they left.

1Cor. 15:27 ... "*Put all things put under his feet*"

Here this Greek term is used to picture that moment when God the Father will cause all created things to 'submit themselves' to the authority of Jesus Christ.

James 4:7 "Submit yourself to God"

Here James uses the same Greek word to describe the relationship that we should have with our Heavenly Father ...

Submit – **Hupotasso** ... It's a definitive action – It results in someone being granted authority over me. It's a decision to yield my will to another ... I am being directed to do it willingly. It's a choice that only I can make – I am not to be forced into making it. It's a voluntary action.

So God is telling me as His Child that I am to willingly ready myself to live a life of submission.

Now we Christians should be pretty familiar with that concept.

We cannot be saved if we are not willing to submit ourselves and our eternal destiny to Christ. Unless we submit ourselves to Him as our Savior, we remain in our sins – so we willingly and gratefully submit.

Unless we submit ourselves to the Word of God and to the Spirit of God we cannot grow in our faith – so we willingly and gratefully though sometimes painfully submit ourselves.

So the concept of submission is fairly familiar to every Child of God but here in this passage Paul points that concept in a new direction ...

*** SUBMIT TO ONE ANOTHER ...**

To your fellow believers ... those who are living harmoniously and maturely and purely and honestly and pleasantly and inquiringly and worshipfully in your midst.

We **do not** submit ourselves to unbelievers in this way – we do not yield ourselves to their will and wishes ... In fact we might well need to question and challenge both their will and their wishes and most likely many of their actions.

But we **are** to live submissively with our **fellow believers** – After all, what should there be for us to debate about – what is there to get worked up about – We should already be on the same page, shouldn't we?

Paul is basically saying that we should live with 'A bias toward yes'.

Those who have learned to live harmoniously together in loving honesty and in growing maturity and in ever-increasing purity and who genuinely and regularly seek to find out what pleases the Lord and who speak pleasantly and even worshipfully to one another will just naturally '*in honor prefer one another*' (as Paul says in Romans 12:10).

They will willingly and eagerly surrender their own will and wishes to the will and wishes of their brothers and sisters in Christ simply because they are in fact '*brothers and sisters in Christ*' who are committed to walking the same Christian Path.

As I have said for years - Our definition of the Christian Life is ...
'Following Christ in fellowship with my peers'.

And in that fellowship, we link arms and seek to encourage one another. We listen to and learn from one another. We submit ourselves to one another. We live with that '*bias toward yes*'.

Now Paul points out that the real motivation – the real energy to live this kind of mutually submitted life – is a very special Spirit that comes upon those who are connected to one another in these very special ways.

It's a Spirit of **Reverence!**

*** SUBMIT TO ONE ANOTHER OUT OF REVERENCE ...**

Reverence is the feeling we get when we sense that we are in the presence of something or someone truly special.

So we could say that we are engaging in '*reverential submission*' ... submission prompted by a spirit of reverence.

Reverential Submission arises not from a sense of duty or obligation; not from a sense of intimidation; not from any sense of desperation.

Reverential Submission occurs as we sense we have encountered something or someone that is undeniably greater than ourselves – something delightful and even worshipful – something so awesome that it would be disrespectful not to submit.

And so it is in this case, Paul says ...

*** SUBMIT TO ONE ANOTHER OUT OF REVERENCE FOR CHRIST**

And is that not the case when we gather together as brothers and sisters in Christ? How did Jesus put it?

*"Wherever two or more of you gather in my name,
There I will be in your midst." (Matthew 18:20)*

There in the midst of them, he is found ... They are his beloved brothers and sisters; they are the ones for whom He surrendered the Glories of His Heavenly Estate; they are the ones to whom he submitted himself in the meeting of their needs – even on that final fateful night, as he stooped down to wash their feet before he went to suffer for them on that cross.

Submit to one another – humbly serve one another – in honor prefer one another – seek to please one another – make way for one another – because that's what Jesus would do Himself if he were here.

So then, out of Reverence for Christ we submit ourselves to one another and we pay attention to one another and then we seek to carry out the wishes of one another if at all possible for these people are **HIS PEOPLE!**

And consider this ... Because they **are** His People any one of them at any given time may actually be speaking **for** Him – may be saying to us the very things that Jesus Himself would be saying if He were here - and so we take them seriously and listen to them eagerly and carefully, willing to submit ourselves to what they say.

Now in the coming weeks we are going to see Paul apply this 'submission directive' in three very special relational settings but for today I would like us to simply consider this '**final thot**' ...

Final Thot ...

SUBMISSION to one another is an indication of our **REVERENCE** for Christ.
The more we **REVERE** him the more we will be **WILLING** to
SUBMIT to one another.

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Thirty-Eight"

The **Key Directive** that focused our attention Sunday was: "**LIVE SUBMISSIVELY**"
How does that directive 'hit your ear'? What does it make you think?

Pastor Mark shared Sunday that God would have us live with 'A Bias Toward Yes' when we are dealing with our Fellow Believers.

Would that phrase characterize you? Which by nature is easier for you to say when approached by a fellow believer about something – **Yes** or **No**?

Sunday's **Key Verse** was:

"SUBMIT to one another out of **REVERENCE** for **CHRIST**."
(Ephesians 5:21)

Read and **reflect upon** these statements from Sunday's message:

"Those who have learned to live harmoniously together in loving honesty and in growing maturity and in ever-increasing purity and who genuinely and regularly seek to find out what pleases the Lord and who speak pleasantly and even worshipfully to one another will just naturally 'in honor prefer one another' (as Paul says in Romans 12:10).

They will willingly and eagerly surrender their own will and wishes to the will and wishes of their brothers and sisters in Christ simply because they are in fact 'brothers and sisters in Christ' who are committed to walking the same Christian Path ..."

And these:

*"Submit to one another – humbly serve one another – in honor prefer one another – seek to please one another – make way for one another – **because** that's what Jesus would do Himself **if** he were here.*

*So then, out of Reverence for Christ we submit ourselves to one another and we pay attention to one another and then we seek to carry out the wishes of one another if at all possible for these people are **HIS PEOPLE!***

*And consider this ... Because they **are** His People any one of them at any given time may actually be speaking **for** Him – may be saying to us the very things that Jesus Himself would be saying if He were here - and so we take them seriously and listen to them eagerly and carefully, **willing** to submit ourselves to what they say.*

Point to Ponder ...

Submission to one another is an **INDICATION** of our reverence for Christ.

“LIVING SUBMISSIVELY AS HUSBANDS AND WIVES”

‘Grace Is The Key’ Series
(Ephesians 5:22-27)

Intro ... Today we continue our investigation of the Great Exhortation with which Paul began the second half of his letter to the Ephesian Church – an exhortation that comes as well to us today here in Apple Valley ...

PAUL’S GREAT EXHORTATION – Ephesians 4:1

“Live A Life **WORTHY** Of The **CALLING**
You Have **RECEIVED!**”

Live in such a way that it is apparent to all that
You are a ‘Born-Again Child of God’!

Chapters 4,5 and 6 of Ephesians are filled with instructions – ‘**directives**’ we have called them – for living that most ‘*worthy life*’ ... the kind of life that will surely receive the Father’s ‘*Well-Done*’ at its conclusion. There are **nine** of those directives altogether. So far we have examined **eight** ...

We, as a congregation of believers, have been directed by the Lord to live: harmoniously and maturely and purely and honestly and pleasantly and inquiringly and worshipfully and submissively with one another.

That last one will be guiding our discussion for several weeks ...

It was our **Key Directive** two weeks ago and it’s **Today’s Key Directive** and it will be next week’s and the next week’s as well.

So here it is again ...

TODAY’S KEY DIRECTIVE

(Paul’s **eight** directive for ‘*Worthy*’ Living)

“LIVE SUBMISSIVELY”

“SUBMIT to one another out of **REVERENCE** for **CHRIST”**
(Ephesians 5:21)

* **SUBMIT** ... ‘*hupotasso*’ ... strong term – yield yourself completely to the will or wishes of another – allow yourself to be ‘*lassoed by*’.

Having given that directive generally Paul then applied it specifically into three relational areas of life ... Three areas where a healthy dose of submission could have a powerful impact: Marriage/Family/Job.

The first area of relational life Paul tackles is marriage. Check out ...

TODAY'S KEY SCRIPTURE ... Ephesians 5:22-27

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church (including all the husbands and wives in it) submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

This is one of those messages that I must begin with my frequently used disclaimer: “*All things being equal*”. By that I mean that this passage of Scripture assumes certain things – things that we would like assume to always be true but unfortunately frequently are not.

This passage assumes that we who read it are Christian people – Christian husbands and Christian wives – people who are committed to ‘*Living lives worthy of the calling they have received*’.

Therefore non-Christian people will not understand it – people in unequally yoked marriages will have trouble applying it – people in some toxic marriages might actually need to ignore it.

This passage assumes that we are people (Husbands and Wives particularly) who are seeking to live Harmoniously and Maturely and Purely and Honestly and Pleasantly and Inquiringly and Worshipfully and Submissively with one another. Those are the people that Paul is addressing ...

If you are not one of those people then you are not actually ready to tackle what this passage is talking about but if you are then this passage will seem like child's play.

All the messages that have preceded this one form the foundation upon which this one is to be understood and applied. In fact if the previous messages are being followed then this one would hardly be needed.

This passage would simply be seen to be the application of those other directives to the marriage relationship with every husband and wife saying: *'Of course' – that's the exact way that it should be"*.

So then ... "All things being equal" – that is, when life is flowing along somewhat normally ... for Christian People who are seeking to live those *'lives that are worthy of the Calling they have received'*, here's how that *'worthy life'* expresses itself in a marriage relationship ...

Consider this very simple two statement paraphrase of this great passage:

PASTOR MARK'S PARAPHRASE ...

WIVES ... Allow yourselves to be **LASSED** by your husband's desires and aspirations. Be captivated by the things that captivate him – **DEFINE** yourself by them.

Boy, did I ever *'luck out'* in this area! Linda was defining herself by the things that defined me before we even met. All during her growing up years in her little Baptist Church in Clinton New Jersey, the women in her church told her that someday she would make a wonderful *'Pastor's wife'*. Now even though I possessed a reasonably good smile and a decent sense of humor, the thing that actually *'lassoed'* her for me was her finding out that I felt called to the ministry – that I was in the process of preparing myself to be a *'pastor'*. That sense of common calling created a bond between us that linked us together quickly and securely. And she understood the nature of the calling ...

She felt from the very beginning of our marriage what my daughter Jodi said to me some 15 years into that marriage: *'Dad, being a pastor is not your job – being a pastor is who you are'*. Linda allowed herself to be *'lassoed'* by my desires and aspirations – by the calling that I felt was upon my life and for that I most grateful ... It's exactly what Paul says a wife should allow to happen.

HUSBANDS: Put your wife's **NEEDS** at the top of your **AGENDA**.
Recognize that meeting those needs is **JOB ONE**.

This admonition reflects an intention that will then require continual attention. Making one's wife 'Job One' is an on-going task; it reflects a perspective that will play itself out in one situation after another.

In the wedding ceremonies that I perform I always point out to the groom that his desire should be to 'create an environment in which his wife can flourish in every way'. And, by the way, her definition of 'flourishing' is the only one that matters. She is the only one who knows whether it is happening or not.

So if you have to leave right now ... take those two paraphrased statements with you and allow them to stir your heart and mind and to inform your marriage practice ... But remember, **husbands**: you focus on the husband stuff and **wives**: you focus your attention on the wife stuff.

But if you can stay for a few more minutes, consider ...

Five Key Insights Into Married Life That I Would Share With You This Morning ...

* **KEY INSIGHT ONE:** A wife's greatest **NEED** is to have a husband to whom she can willingly and eagerly and confidently submit herself –
One who helps her feel **SECURE**.

Secure Physically ... Secure Emotionally ...
Secure Financially ... Secure Spiritually ...

There is nothing worse for a wife than to feel that she is standing on 'thin ice' or that she is 'walking on eggshells' or that any minute the 'sky might fall'. All those expressions refer to circumstances of insecurity.

However there is nothing better than for a wife to feel completely secure physically and emotionally and financially and spiritually. Needs are met, bills are paid, heart is at peace and Christ is honored. This is a wife who would say she is experiencing the blessing of a good marriage.

* **KEY INSIGHT TWO:** A husband's greatest **DESIRE** is to have a wife who truly **SEES** him as her provider and protector – One who helps him feel **SIGNIFICANT**.

There is nothing worse for a husband than to feel that he has been 'weighed *in the balance* (by his wife) *and found wanting*'. There is no one on earth whose opinion counts more – there is no one on earth who determines his sense of significance more emphatically.

A man could have a Nobel Peace Prize plaque on his office wall and one disparaging word from his wife can make it seem like mere 'wood, hay and stubble' – just another example of the fact that it doesn't matter whom he has impressed with his achievements if he hasn't impressed her.

But when a man does feel significant in his wife's eyes he doesn't need any other confirmation. He's got what he needs.

Now based upon these first two insights, consider these next two – They hardly need any further explanation.

* **KEY INSIGHT THREE:** The most magical words a husband can say are not '**YES, DEAR**'. They are: 'I'll **TAKE CARE** of it'. Or better yet – 'I've **ALREADY** taken care of it'.

Though we joke about it, the words 'Yes, Dear' are actually 'words of obedience' spoken to the one who is really in charge. They usually come in response to something the wife has determined needs to be done and which the husband has overlooked – usually something that he should have noticed.

They reflect the fact that pressure has been put back on the wife to manage things (including her husband). When a husband can say ... "*I've already taken care of it*", it communicates that he is on the job and on the ball and busy providing that secure environment in which his wife can flourish. They are 'magic words' in his wife's ears.

* **KEY INSIGHT FOUR:** *The most magical words a wife can say are not “I **LOVE** you” but “**THANK YOU**”.*

I should just let that one hang in the air for a few moments ...

“Thank you” communicates that she has noticed and that she feels blessed.

“Thank you” communicates approval and satisfaction ...

“Thank you” contributes toward that sense of significance that men crave.

“Thank you” is a magic phrase in a husband's ears.

Now as we close ... Remember the disclaimer?

“All Things Being Equal”

“All things being equal” – when things are following their normal, expected path – God's instructions fit our lives like a glove.

However, when ‘all things are not equal’ God's instructions can seem absolutely unworkable – in fact they can lead to conflict and turmoil and every kind of marital discord – so consider with me now ...

* **KEY INSIGHT FIVE:** *Make sure that things are **EQUAL BEFORE** you marry ...*

Though it is popular to say and is actually commonly experienced that in marriage ‘opposites attract’ – it is more important to say that in Christian Marriage – in the things that really make a marriage work – it is vital that those getting married are far more alike than they are different.

For two people to produce a marriage that is truly ‘Worthy of the Calling that God has placed upon it’, they must be ...

Equally Committed to CHRIST ... 2 Corinthians 6:14

“Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers”

Christian marriage requires two born-again people – a man and a woman who are committed to following Jesus Christ. **Girls** ... it's not enough for you to simply find a ‘good guy’ or a ‘good enough guy’; it's not enough for you to find a guy who is ‘willing for you to do your church thing’. You need to find a guy who loves the Lord Jesus and who is committed to following the Lord Jesus equal to or more than you.

Equally Embracing Your Life's **CALLING** ... Amos 3:3

"Can two walk together unless they be agreed?"

Before two people marry, they should have a pretty clear idea of what kind of life they feel God is calling them to lead – what has been laid upon their hearts, what aspirations do they have for their lives – It is imperative that they share those things together – that they can support and encourage one another in the pursuit of those things.

It's desirable that they are somewhat prepared to 'do those things' before they get married.

Equally Committed to **MARRIAGE** ... Genesis 2:24; Mark 10:7-9

"For this reason shall a man leave his father and his mother and cleave unto his wife and (they) shall become one flesh ...

What God has joined together, let man not separate."

Marriage is a life-long relationship – God has declared it to be so.

All things being equal marriage is intended to endure and thrive through all the changing circumstances of life.

The more things are 'equal' **before** the marriage takes place, the more likely the marriage will become all that God would desire it to be.

Final Thot ...

Christian **HUSBANDS** and **WIVES** have a very special opportunity to demonstrate lives that are **WORTHY** of their **CALLING**.

Do **TAKE** advantage!

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Thirty-Nine"

Sunday's message examined Paul's instructions to **HUSBANDS** and **WIVES** within the context of "Living Submissively With One Another".

Pastor Mark pointed out that it's imperative that we understand this passage within the 'context' in which it was written ... What did he mean by that? What is the 'context'? How does the 'context' affect the way this passage might be understood?

(The immediate context is Ephesians 5:22 [living submissively to one another] and the extended context is the entire previous letter [living harmoniously and maturely and purely and honestly and pleasantly and inquiringly and worshipfully and submissively with one another].

Agree or **disagree** with these statements from Sunday's message:

*"The most magical words a husband can say are not 'Yes Dear'.
They are: 'I'll take care of it'. Or better yet – 'I've already taken care of it'."*

"The most magical words a wife can say are not 'I love you' but 'Thank You'."

*"Though it is popular to say and is actually commonly experienced that in marriage
'opposites attract' – It is more important to say that in Christian Marriage
(in the things that really make a marriage work) it is vital that those
getting married are far more alike than they are different."*

Pastor Mark identified '**Three Equalities**' that should be in place before marriage is contemplated. The couple in question should be:

Equally Committed To **CHRIST** (true born-again followers of Christ)

Equally Committed To A Life **CALLING** (on the same page)

Equally Committed To **MARRIAGE** (God's plan for man)

How vital would say these three are? Are there any others you can think of?

Point to Ponder ...

Since men (as a popular book once was titled) are from **MARS** and
women are from **VENUS**, aren't they automatically unequally **YOKED**
when they marry – what do you think? Is there any hope?
(Ephesians 2:14-16)

"LIVING SUBMISSIVELY AS CHILDREN AND PARENTS"

'Grace Is The Key' Series
(Ephesians 6:1-4)

Intro ... As we begin today's message I remind you of the Great Exhortation that drives our discussion. It was initially addressed to the Church in Ephesus but applies to Christians everywhere. It's recorded in Ephesians 4:1 ...

PAUL'S GREAT EXHORTATION – Ephesians 4:1

"Live A Life **WORTHY** Of The **CALLING**
You Have **RECEIVED!**"

Live in such a way that it is apparent to all that
You are a 'Born-Again Child of God'!

The final three chapters of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, spell out in considerable detail just what that 'worthy life' looks like – how it is to be lived out in this fallen, sin-filled world. Nine **key directives** for living that 'worthy life' are found in these inspired pages of instruction.

Live harmoniously and maturely and purely and honestly and pleasantly
and inquiringly and worshipfully and submissively ...

It's that **8th** one that has held our attention now for several weeks.
It's Today's **Key Directive** once again ...

TODAY'S KEY DIRECTIVE

(Paul's **eighth** directive for 'Worthy' Living)

"LIVE SUBMISSIVELY"

"SUBMIT to one another out of REVERENCE for CHRIST"
(Ephesians 5:21)

* **SUBMIT** ... 'hupotasso' ... strong term – yield yourself completely to the will or wishes of another – allow yourself to be 'lassoed by'.

'Submit yourself to one another' ... Every Christian is to be willing to be 'lassoed by' the needs and the desires of every other Christian.

We should live with a '*bias toward yes*' in our relationships within God's Family of Faith. It makes for a tight-knit, need-meeting, esteem-building, God-Honoring Body of Believers.

In his letter to the Ephesians, after directing them to '*live submissively*' with one another, Paul then identifies three key areas of life that are to be lived within that context ... three areas of life where such '*submission*' can pay great dividends – marriage, family and job.

Last week we examined what Paul had to say about bringing this '*submissive spirit*' into the realm of marriage ... Today we see how this '*spirit of submission*' can affect things in the family.

Here is ...

TODAY'S KEY SCRIPTURE ... Ephesians 6:1-4

"Children, **OBEY** your parents in the Lord, for this is right.
HONOR your father and mother' — which is the first commandment with a promise — 'that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.'

Fathers, do not **EXASPERATE** your children; instead,
BRING them up in the training and instruction of the **LORD**."

I find three specific commandments in this passage –
Two for Children and One for Fathers.

Consider with me first of all ...

*** TWO COMMANDMENTS FOR ALL US CHILDREN
AS WE SEEK TO 'LIVE SUBMISSIVELY' AT HOME ...**

1. We Are To **OBEY** Our **PARENTS** in the **LORD** (While under their care)

This is a command given to minors – to those who are still being raised toward independence and who are still living under their parents' care.

This used to be a much more defined period of time –
birth to age 18 or possibly 21.

Our government today has extended this period (for health care purposes at least) to age 26. Economic conditions have extended this period for some almost indefinitely – economic conditions for some have caused them to once again live *'under their parents care'*.

And so I'm going to say some things today that some might disagree with but which I believe need to be said ...

*"If you are living under your parent's roof, under their care,
this directive applies to you no matter what your age."*

*You are to obey your parents – you are in their home – you are relying upon them
for your own existence – you are (or you are living as though you still are)
'a child under their care' - you are to obey them.
You are to live submissively with them.*

Now **note** Paul does give one disclaimer ...
He says you are to *'obey them in the Lord'* ...

"Obedience to the Lord **TRUMPS** Obedience to Parents"

However, unless your parents are telling you to assist them in *'robbing a bank'* (or some such other obviously sinful thing) their word is to be your law as long as you are living *'under their roof'*.

Now here's a **second** thing that God had Paul say to us children ...

2. We Are To **HONOR** Our **PARENTS** (For the rest of our lives)
(Life runs more smoothly for those who treat their parents **POSITIVELY.**)

Here again is how Paul put it ...

HONOR *your father and mother' — which is the first commandment
with a promise — 'that it may go well with you and that you
may enjoy long life on the earth.'*

That *'Promise'* was introduced by Moses in Exodus 20 as he presented the Ten Commandments by which the Hebrew People were to live their lives.

In a nutshell it seems that God is saying *'Treat your parents well and you will live a long and happy life'* and there generally seems to be some truth to that.

Now we could discuss at length why that would be true ...
We could all share our insights ...

We could fly in Dr. Phil and have him explain to us all the benefits of having a positive relationship with one's parents - I'm sure he would come up with many. He could no doubt list many difficulties that arise in the lives of those who despise their parents.

However, it's possible that Moses was referring to a much more simple reality – and that reality in the Hebrew World was simply this ...

Those who do indeed *'honor their parents'* get to continue to live upon the earth as opposed to those who *'dishonor or disparage their parents'*.

Listen to this Scripture that comes just one chapter after that Ten Commandment Promise (Exodus 21:17) ...

"Anyone who curses his father or his mother must be put to death."

So originally it was a pretty straightforward proposition ...

"Honor your parents and you get to go on living – dishonor them and you don't".

I'm glad that we are no longer living under that Old Covenant but the principle still stands ...

"Having the kind of heart that can 'honor' and seek to 'treat well' those who gave you life simply because they did 'give you life' generally is the kind of heart that will lead you into a good and prosperous life."

However, the main point I would make here is that God really cares about this Parent/Child relationship ... It pictures his own relationship to those who make up His Family of Faith and He wants that picture to be as clear as possible.

In addition He knows that it is most difficult (if not impossible) to truly honor your Heavenly Parent while you dishonor your earthly ones. Think about it.

So to all of us children (whatever our age) He would say ...

"Honor your father and your mother that it might go well with you and that you might enjoy long life upon the earth."

NOW ...

As we push on through this passage we discover, in addition to the **Two Commands** directed toward all us children who seek to live submissively at home, here's ...

*** ONE COMMANDMENT FOR ALL FATHERS**
AS THEY SEEK TO 'LIVE SUBMISSIVELY' AT HOME ...

“Do not ... **EXASPERATE** your children” – stir up **HOSTILITY** within them.

Now there's not a single Christian Father (or primary parent) anywhere in the world who wants to do that ... None of us wants to 'exasperate our children' none of us wants to 'stir up hostility within them' ... None of us wants to cause them to live frustrated or (worse yet) bitter lives.

Paul knew that so he confidently says (already sensing our heads nodding in agreement) ... **“Don't do that”**.

But we say ... How do I **keep** from doing that?

Now once again this is a place where we could get together and share all the accumulated insights we have gained over the years ...

This is another discussion that we could fly in Dr. Phil to lead for us ...

But before we do either of those things, let's just look at the text ...

Let's assume that the one who has raised such an important issue would be most concerned to counsel us himself.

And that, I am convinced, is exactly what the Apostle Paul has done. Check out this key word ...

“INSTEAD” ...

“Fathers (primary parent) do not exasperate your children,
Instead ... **DO THIS!**

And then Paul gives us ...

A THREE STEP METHOD FOR AVOIDING EXASPERATION:

1. Involve Yourself **PERSONALLY** In Your Children's Lives
“**Fathers**” (primary parent) ... *you play a vital, even indispensable, role*
IGNORING them exasperates them!

This is so easy to say and yet frequently so hard to recognize and to do.

The point is ... Our children need us. They need to know that they matter to us and the very best way to communicate that they matter to us is to spend time with them – regular time, predictable time, scheduled time, dedicated time. The earlier in their lives that you begin the better. They will cherish those moments and because of those moments they will begin to form positive ideas about both themselves and you. Involve yourself **personally** – you play a vital, even indispensable role.

2. Involve Yourself **PERSISTENTLY** In Your Children's Lives

"Bring them up" ... that's an on-going process

INCONSISTENCY exasperates them – on again/off again doesn't cut it!

A few minutes consistently given will pay greater dividends than hours erratically provided. *"Bring them up"* implies persistence – it will take 18 years or more. Human beings mature slowly – some more slowly than others. Stick to it ... you are the primary developer of their lives – they are the primary task that you have been given. Involve yourself **persistently** in this on-going task.

3. Involve Yourself **PROPERLY** In Your Children's Lives

"In the training and instruction of the Lord" ... connect them with Christ and His Ways.

INVENTION exasperates them – making it up as you go along won't do it!

God has already laid out the path that they should walk upon ... He has already designed the process by which they can receive new life. Your task (my task) is to make sure that they know the way to salvation and the way that Children of God are to live. A lot of their learning is going to be by example – your example.

Be sure that they know that you follow the ways of the Lord – that the Bible is your guidebook for life. Be sure that they know that the decisions you make are based on the instructions that God has given and not just your own 'best guess'.

That **proper** approach will keep you **persistently** and **personally** involved in their lives as long as they are under your care.

And so we come to our ***final thot*** which actually is also a 'point to ponder' ...

Final Thot ...

A truly **SUBMISSIVE** dad will never **EXASPERATE** his kids!

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REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Forty"

Sunday's message examined Paul's instructions to **CHILDREN** and **PARENTS – FATHERS** under his over-all directive to **"Live Submissively"** with one another.

This passage contains Three **COMMANDS** ... 2 for Children and 1 for Fathers.

*"Children, **OBEY** your parents in the Lord, for this is right.*

*'**HONOR** your father and mother' — which is the first commandment
with a promise — 'that it may go well with you and that you
may enjoy long life on the earth.'*

*Fathers (primary parent), do not **EXASPERATE** your children; instead,
(You are to) **BRING** them up in the training and instruction of the **LORD**."
(Ephesians 6:1-4)*

What would you say is the difference between '**Obeying**' one's parents and '**Honoring**' one's parents? Are they both 'life-long' commands?
What do you think?

Pastor Mark suggested that Paul included a **Three Step Method** for avoiding exasperating our children.

1. Involve yourself **PERSONALLY** in their lives
(*'Fathers' – you are especially needed to do this.*)
2. Involve yourself **PERSISTENTLY** in their lives
(*'Bringing them up' is a long-term commitment*)
3. Involve yourself **PROPERLY** in their lives.
(*They are to be 'brought up' in the 'training and instruction of the Lord'.*)

Pastor Mark identified (based upon this passage) three things that will definitely exasperate children (provoke them to anger) – Do you agree?

IGNORING them exasperates them
INCONSISTENCY exasperates them
INVENTION exasperates them

How did your father do in these areas – Was he a Christian Dad?

Point to Ponder ...

A truly 'Submissive Dad' will **NEVER** exasperate his kids.

“LIVING SUBMISSIVELY AS EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES”

‘Grace Is The Key’ Series
(Ephesians 6:5-9)

Intro ... Once again on this Firstfruits Sunday I ask you to consider the Great Exhortation that comes to us from our Heavenly Father through the pen of the Apostle Paul ...

PAUL’S GREAT EXHORTATION – Ephesians 4:1

“Live A Life **WORTHY** Of The **CALLING**
You Have **RECEIVED!**”

Live in such a way that it is apparent to all that
You are a ‘Born-Again Child of God’!

Without a doubt Christians are to live a distinctly different kind of life in this fallen, sin-filled world ...

They are to display daily evidence of the ‘New Life’ that they have been given through Jesus Christ ...

They are to live what the Apostle Paul called a ‘*worthy life*’ ...
A life ‘worthy of the tremendous calling to salvation’ that they have received.

It’s a life that should be both deeply satisfying and genuinely attractive.

The second half of Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians spells out in considerable detail just what that life looks like ... **Nine directives** for living that life Paul lays out for us.

It’s as though he were saying, ‘If you want to live a life that is indeed worthy of the calling you have received’, then **live this way** ...

Live with one another harmoniously and maturely and purely and honestly and pleasantly and inquiringly and worshipfully and submissively ...

It's that 8th one that has held our attention now for several weeks.

It's Today's **Key Directive** for the fourth and final time ...

TODAY'S KEY DIRECTIVE

(Paul's **eighth** directive for 'Worthy' Living)

"LIVE SUBMISSIVELY"

"SUBMIT" to one another out of **REVERENCE** for **CHRIST**"

(Ephesians 5:21)

* **SUBMIT** ... 'hupotasso' ... strong term – yield yourself completely to the will or wishes of another – allow yourself to be 'lassoed by'.

So far we have seen Paul say ... 'Live submissively as Husbands and Wives' and 'Live submissively as Parents and Children' ...

Today the title of this message identifies the third relational area where this directive comes into play: "Live submissively as Employers and Employees" ...

TODAY'S KEY SCRIPTURE ... Ephesians 6:5-9

SLAVES, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart.

Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men,
because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for
whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

And **MASTERS**, treat your slaves in the same way.

Do not threaten them, since you know that He who is both
their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

Slavery was a fact of life in the first century ... Conquerors made slaves of the people they conquered ... Slaves were bought and sold in the market place ... Menial tasks were performed by those who were purchased to perform them – like washing the feet of those who had been invited to dinner in the home.

Sometimes the running of the entire household was placed in the hands of a trusted servant. When the New Testament uses the term '*household*' it typically encompasses not only the extended family in the house but also any slaves/servants owned by the master of the house.

Thus when in Acts 16 we read that the Philippian Jailor and his entire household '*believed and were baptized*' that phrase no doubt included both those who were members of the household by birth and those who were members of the household by purchase.

And so that fact of First Century Society led to a potentially awkward ...

FIRST CENTURY REALITY ...

SLAVES and their **MASTERS** were sometimes
MEMBERS of the **SAME** Church Body!

Today it would be **EMPLOYERS** and **EMPLOYEES**.

Imagine that ... Slaves and their Masters (Employers and Employees) sitting together in the same worship service. How in the world would that work out?

Wouldn't it be better if all the born-again Free Men had their own church and all the born-again slaves had theirs? Shouldn't we today have one congregation for management and another congregation for labor?

But wouldn't that be making earthly distinctions more important than heavenly realities?

Didn't Paul already tell us that God the Father is engaged in the process of making '*one new man*' out of all the distinctive '*dualities*' this world contains like Jew and Gentile/ Male and Female / Rich and Poor ...

Isn't the Master and Slave – Employer and Employee duality – just one more to rise above? And if it is, how is it to be '*pulled off*' ... Can it be '*pulled off*'?

Can Christian Masters and Slaves ... Can Christian Employers and Employees find a way to live together submissively? Can they (in the way they relate together) demonstrate a life that is '*Worthy of the Calling they have received*'? Can they make their '*workplace*' just one more place where their '*new life*' triumphs over their '*old one*'?

Paul would say ... 'Indeed they can' ... 'Indeed they must' ...

And I today would say ... 'Indeed they will' if they wholeheartedly embrace and live out the truths expressed in **Today's Key Concept** ...

Now keep in mind the context here ... Christians associating together in the workplace ... Christian Employers and Christian Employees ...

That's what Paul is picturing here ...

A Born-Again Boss with unsaved workers/ Born-Again workers under an unsaved boss is a distinctly different proposition. The Apostle Peter gives excellent instructions concerning that situation.

But when you have Christians working together who embrace and live out this concept you will find something truly extraordinary taking place ...

So here's the key ... The **Key Concept** that makes it happen ... the concept that arise directly from today's **Key Text** ...

TODAY'S KEY CONCEPT ...

JESUS is the real **BOSS** of any **CHRISTIAN** enterprise ...

The **OWNER** works for him; The **EMPLOYEES** work for him;
They are **EQUALLY** important and **EQUALLY** accountable to him.

Therefore all **CHRISTIANS** should approach their **JOB** responsibilities in the same way!

And it's that 'Same Way' that I would have us focus upon this morning.

Consider with me some ...

GUIDELINES FOR CHRISTIANS (Employers and Employees) **IN THE WORK PLACE ...**

Keep in mind that these **five guidelines** apply equally to employers and employees ...

Paul's admonition "*Masters, treat your slaves in the same way*" makes that clear ... these statements have dual application – whatever is said to the one can be (and must be) applied to the other.

So here we go ... **Five guidelines** for Christians in the Workplace ...

I will give each guideline and then one focusing thought that arises from it and then move on ...

*** THEY ARE TO WORK RESPECTFULLY ...** *'obey your earthly masters with respect'*
(This is a Child of God that I am dealing with!)

Don't allow those Christian People you work for or those who work for you to become just a social security number or a 'title' ... Be sure you see them first as a brother or sister in Christ ... Treat them with the respect that they deserve as one for whom Christ died and upon whom Christ has set His Love and within whom Christ has placed His Holy Spirit. Remember that you are to live with (work with) them harmoniously and maturely and purely and honestly and pleasantly and inquiringly and worshipfully and even submissively ...

*** THEY ARE TO WORK REVERENTLY ...** *'obey your earthly masters with ... fear'*
(I am conducting this business under the Lord Jesus Himself!)

There is a sense in which you should feel that you are heading into holy ground when you head into work. All that you do there will be done under the watchful eye of the Lord Jesus Christ ... He is the real owner of this business – He is the One upon whom this business reflects – He is the One by whom each employee has been hired and for whom each employee labors ... manage it (manage yourself) in a way that honors him. Allow your work to become a genuine expression of your worship of Christ.

*** THEY ARE TO WORK RESPONSIBLY ...** *'obey your earthly masters with sincerity'*
(I am to be characterized by sincerity and honesty and faithfulness!)

Sincerity, honesty and faithfulness ... that pretty much says it all. Those are incredible traits to bring to work with you each day when you enter your workplace. These are traits that characterized the Lord Jesus Himself as he carried out His Father's wishes during the days he served Him on earth.

*** *THEY ARE TO WORK REJOICINGLY ...*** 'Serve wholeheartedly'

(I am to throw my whole heart into this task, delighted to be serving the Lord Jesus!)

It's different to say ... "*I am delighted to be serving the Lord Jesus*" than to say "*I am delighted to be doing this job*" ...

Some jobs are far less delightful than others/some jobs have nothing delightful about them ...

But serving the Lord Jesus Christ himself (if we remember that that's what we are doing) can bring a sense of delight to any task. That's when our working becomes something 'worthy' in Christ's eyes.

And that possibility brings us to this final guideline ...

*** *THEY ARE TO WORK REFLECTIVELY ...*** 'you know that the Lord will reward'

(All that I do will be evaluated by the Lord Jesus!)

Our ultimate paycheck – our final balance sheet – will be written out by Jesus Christ Himself ... He is the one who will determine the reward we will receive for the hours of our earthly labor.

We work (as the Apostle Paul said to the Colossians) with our minds set on heavenly things. We keep the bigger picture in view – we make our daily decisions based upon Christ's Call upon our lives knowing that He is the one who will ultimately evaluate our performance.

And so, as followers of Jesus Christ (whether employer or employee) we work respectfully and reverently and responsibly and rejoicingly and reflectively and as a result (as our final thot says) ...

Final Thot ...

Genuine **CHRISTIANS** bring genuine **BLESSING**
to their place of **BUSINESS**.

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Forty-One"

Sunday's message examined Paul's instructions to **EMPLOYERS** (Masters) and **EMPLOYEES** (Slaves) under his over-all directive to **"Live Submissively"** with one another.

Here was Sunday's **Key Concept** ...

JESUS is the real **BOSS** of any **CHRISTIAN** enterprise ...

(The **OWNER** works for him; The **EMPLOYEES** work for him;
They are **EQUALLY** important and **EQUALLY** accountable to him.)

Therefore all **CHRISTIANS** should approach their **JOB** responsibilities in the same way!

In a sense ... we are all 'employees' aren't we? Have you ever looked at it that way before?

Pastor Mark then shared **Five Guidelines for Workers** (Employers and Employees) in the workplace. How do they strike your ear? Which one is the easiest for you to pull off? Which is the hardest?

* **THEY ARE TO WORK RESPECTFULLY** ... 'obey your earthly masters with respect' ...
(*"This is a Child of God that I am dealing with!"*)

* **THEY ARE TO WORK REVERENTLY** ... 'obey your earthly masters with ... fear'
(*"I am conducting this business under the Lord Jesus Himself!"*)

* **THEY ARE TO WORK RESPONSIBLY** ... 'obey your earthly masters with sincerity'
(*"I am to be characterized by sincerity and honesty and faithfulness!"*)

* **THEY ARE TO WORK REJOICINGLY** ... 'Serve wholeheartedly'
(*"I am to throw my whole heart into this task, delighted to be serving the Lord Jesus!"*)

* **THEY ARE TO WORK REFLECTIVELY** ... 'you know that the Lord will reward'
(*"All that I do will be evaluated by the Lord Jesus!"*)

Here was Sunday's **Final Thought** ...

Genuine **CHRISTIANS** bring genuine **BLESSING** to their place of **BUSINESS**.

Do you agree?

Would you say that you have?

Point To Ponder ...

If all Christians **WORKED** just like you, would **JESUS** be better or worse thought of?

“LIVING STEADFASTLY”

‘Grace Is The Key’ Series
(Ephesians 6:10)

Intro ... Today we launch ourselves into the final major section of the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Ephesians and we do so under the impetus provided by the Apostle Paul’s ninth key directive for carrying out the Great Exhortation that comes to all born-again followers of Jesus Christ.

You remember that Great Exhortation, don’t you?
It should be firmly implanted within our minds by now ...

PAUL’S GREAT EXHORTATION – Ephesians 4:1

“Live A Life **WORTHY** Of The **CALLING**
You Have **RECEIVED!**”

Live in such a way that it is apparent to all that
You are a ‘Born-Again Child of God’!

Nine directives for living that ‘worthy life’ Paul lays out in this incredibly complete epistle ... Any one of them put into daily practice would cause people to sit up and take notice – all together they create a style of living that causes the Church of Jesus Christ to stand out dramatically from the world around it. So far we have discussed **eight** of the **nine**.

In defining the ‘worthy life’ (that type of life that honors Jesus Christ and that draws the attention of the watching world and that brings great blessing to every member of the Body of Christ who experiences it) Paul so far has directed us to live **harmoniously**, and **maturely** and **purely** and **honestly** and **pleasantly** and **inquiringly** and **worshipfully** and **submissively** together.

Today (and for the next six weeks) we focus our attention upon the **ninth** and final one ...

TODAY'S KEY DIRECTIVE

(Paul's **ninth** directive for 'Worthy' Living)

"LIVE STEADFASTLY" – Stand your ground.

NO RETREAT – NO SURRENDER – NO MATTER WHAT!

*"Put on the whole **ARMOR** of God so you can **TAKE** your **STAND** ..."*
(Ephesians 6:11)

Here's the larger passage from which that directive is drawn ...

TODAY'S KEY SCRIPTURE ... Ephesians 6:10-14a

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ***Stand firm then ...***"

Also from that passage arises ...

TODAY'S KEY CONCEPT ...

STANDING firm – Remaining **STEADFAST** - (no **EASY TASK**)
is the ultimate **ACHIEVEMENT** of the Christian Life.

Only those who have achieved it will
receive the Father's '**WELL DONE**'!

Standing firm for Christ is no easy task ... Standing firm for Christ in a world that is in rebellion against His Heavenly Father is no easy task ... Standing firm for Christ in a world that has pockets of people that literally hate His Name is no easy task ... Standing firm in a world that brings trouble and tribulation and difficulties and disappointments of many kinds is no easy task.

Knowing the difficulty of the task, Jesus once questioned (no doubt agonizingly) ...

“And when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”
(Luke 18:8)

The Apostle Paul himself, knowing the frailties of human nature, understood that even he could conceivably get to the place where he (as he put it to the Corinthian believers in 1 Corinthians 9:27) ...

*“having preached to others might himself
become a castaway – disqualified for the prize.”*

There's not one of us in this room who should not feel a bit of a knot in our stomach when we hear those words.

I can't tell you how it hurts me as Pastor of this congregation when one of you falls away – when one of you who has been faithful, finds yourself caught up in some new focus and you disappear.

If all who have been faithful to this congregation over the years who still live in the High Desert were here today we would have standing room only.

It is not an easy thing to live steadfastly – to stand your ground – to remain faithful to the Call of Christ and to His Church.

On the other hand, there is nothing that blesses me as the Pastor of this congregation more than those who have demonstrated their faithfulness to Christ over the years – you who have walked through the difficulties of life with your faith intact and the many who over the years have reached the end of their days with their faith intact.

You and they are some to whom the Father's “*Well Done*” is provided.

So once again hear **Today's Key Concept** ...

STANDING firm – Remaining **STEADFAST** - (no **EASY TASK**)
is the ultimate **ACHIEVEMENT** of the Christian Life.

Only those who have achieved it will
receive the Father's '**WELL DONE!**'

Standing firm is no easy task but it is an absolutely doable task. Paul spends the rest of the book of Ephesians addressing how it can in fact be done.

In this intro to the conclusion of his Great Ephesian Epistle then, I find ...

SIX ESSENTIAL TRUTHS FOR THOSE WHO WOULD INDEED 'STAND FIRM' ...

I just want to touch on them this morning; we will examine each of them in more detail in the weeks to come ... These however are things that we must be aware of and things that we just count on if we are indeed to 'stand firm for Christ no matter what'!

1. THE DEVIL HIMSELF SCHEMES AGAINST YOU

"Take your stand against the devil's schemes" – Ephesians 6:11

"Our struggle is not against flesh and blood ..." – Ephesians 6:12

*"Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion
looking for someone to devour" – 1 Peter 5:8*

Make no mistake about it, we followers of Jesus Christ are engaged in a spiritual warfare...

It's bad enough that we live in a fallen 'flesh and blood' world - a world where if anything can go wrong, it probably will – but on top of that, there is an unseen world and an unseen adversary that is dedicated to 'knocking us off our feet' and 'grinding us into the dust'!

This enemy of ours has dedicated himself to the task of destroying the Church of Jesus Christ by destroying as many members of it as he can.

We need to know what we are up against.

2. DAYS OF EVIL WILL INEVITABLY COME TO YOU

*"Put on the whole armor of God so that when
the day of evil comes ..." - Ephesians 6:13a*

Notice that Paul did not say **IF** 'the day of evil comes' but **WHEN** 'the day of evil comes' ...

Here are the opening two paragraphs of a newsletter I received just this past week from a Christian organization called 'Voice of the Martyrs' ...

Every day in North Korea's prison camps, 30,000 Christians rise in the predawn hours, eat a few mouthfuls of corn porridge and cabbage, and trudge to an assigned workplace. They then spend about 15 hours toiling in coal mines, cleaning and maintaining the camp, or doing farm work or construction work.

In late evening, they return to housing units or apartments above their workplace to eat the same meager meal before falling to sleep on concrete floors. Other Christians are not so fortunate. Instead of laboring for hours at backbreaking work under the eye of cruel guards, they're locked in torture chambers and underground prisons. Survivors of North Korean prison camps have described being locked in cages like animals, forced to stand for hours in tortuous positions and beaten until they vomited blood.

Paul himself experienced many such 'days of evil' ... He was beaten with rods; he was pelted with stones and left for dead; he was imprisoned for his faith and he was ultimately executed by the Roman Government for treason.

Those are 'Capital E' days of Evil ... there are many 'lower case e' days of evil as well. There will be days when our faith in Christ puts us at odds with the people around us – with perhaps the company that employs us – with the values of the society that would seek to shape us.

And then, of course, there are the moments when the evil results of man's sin come crashing down upon us and we endure injury or sickness or jeopardy of one kind or another. Paul says we need to know that these days will come.

3. YOU MUST RESPOND ACTIVELY NOT PASSIVELY

"Our struggle is ... against the powers of this dark world" – Ephesians 6:12

"... and after you have done everything" – Ephesians 6:13b

These are words of action – we struggle/wrestle (the KJV says) – We resist the current that would carry us away from our settled faith in Christ.

We engage ourselves in this warfare – We see ourselves as Soldiers in Christ's Army and we face the foe courageously and aggressively.

And now we come to perhaps the most important of these
Six Essential Truths ...

4. STEADFASTNESS EQUALS VICTORY

"Stand firm then ..." – Ephesians 6:14a

So 'stand firm then' Paul says ... Don't allow the devil or the days of evil to 'knock you off your feet' ... He doesn't say 'chase the devil back to his lair' or 'figure out a way to live a life free of all difficulty or disappointment' ... He says 'stand your ground' – 'stand firm' – don't give an inch.

That's why I frequently say that my ultimate goal as your Pastor is to see you come to your last day on earth 'with your faith intact'.

That I believe is what the Apostle John meant when he said (1 John 5:4) ...

"This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith."

You come to the end of your life with your faith in Christ intact and you will have won the victory – you will take your place in God's Hall of Fame right along with all the others. You will stand before the Father and hear him bestow upon you those coveted words ...

"Well done, Good and Faithful Servant"

Paul wants you – Jesus Christ wants you – I want you - to know that Steadfastness Equals Victory and thus victory is a possibility for each and every follower of Jesus Christ!

And now in light of this revelation that '*steadfastness equals victory*' and yet knowing that '*steadfastness is in no way easy to accomplish*', Paul shares next that ...

5. DIVINE STRENGTH IS AVAILABLE TO YOU

"Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power" – Ephesians 6:10

Suffice it to say that this is the same power that raised the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead and that raised you from spiritual death – this is the full blown dynamite of God.

It has power to carry you through and to free you from anything that comes against you or that would drag you down. Paul wants you to know that it is available to you.

And now one last thing – the thing that we are going to be focusing on for the next six weeks ...

6. DIVINE PROTECTION IS PROVIDED FOR YOU

“Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand ...” Ephesians 6:11a

- * God knows that a blow to the head can knock you off your feet so He provides a protective **HELMET**.
- * God knows that a blow to the heart can also knock you off your feet so He provides a protective **BREASTPLATE**.
- * God knows that slippery ground can cause you to lose your footing so He provides you with some **NON-SLIP FOOTWEAR**.
- * God knows that arrows from the enemy can be launched at you from far away so He provides a **SHIELD** big enough to hide behind.
- * God knows that sometimes the Enemy will get close enough to you to engage you (as it were) in hand to hand combat so He provides you with a **SHARP-ENDGED SWORD**.
- * God knows that sometimes soldiers can get all tangled up in their own clothing (their own ideas) so He provides a **BELT** to hold everything in place.

God has provided **SIX** incredible **PIECES** of **ARMOR** to protect you and me as we seek to ‘*stand our ground*’ in the midst of the challenges that life and the devil bring our way.

We need to understand just what they are and how they are to be employed.

Don't miss any of these messages if you can help it because as our final thought puts it ...

Final Thought ...

A **PROPERLY** outfitted Christian simply **CANNOT** be **KNOCKED** off His **FEET** – When the **DUST** settles, He will be found **STANDING FIRM!**

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

-

"Lesson Forty-Two"

Sunday we entered into the final great section of thought in Paul's great Epistle to the Ephesians (Ephesians 6:10-20) guided by Paul's **ninth** and final '**Directive**' for living a life that is 'Worthy of our Calling' ...

"LIVE STEADFASTLY"

NO RETREAT – NO SURRENDER – NO MATTER WHAT!

"Put on the full Armor of God so you can **TAKE YOUR STAND** against the devil's schemes."
(Ephesians 6:11)

How would you respond to someone who said to you that the #1 Task of a Christian is to "Stand Firm for Christ in This Fallen World"?

What would you have previously thought was the Christian's #1 task in the world?

Here are some 'tasks' that possibly might have made the 'list':

'**MASTER** the **BIBLE**' (know where to find stuff and what it means)

'**DEFEND** the **FAITH**' (know how to answer the attacks of the critics of Christ)

'**WIN** the **LOST**' (learn how to share the Gospel effectively)

'**REACH** the **WORLD**' (invest in world-wide missionary endeavors)

'**BUILD** the **CHURCH**' (strive for numerical Church Growth)

Are not all of these most 'worthy' tasks? Why do you suppose Pastor Mark would zero in on Paul's admonition to "Stand Firm against the devil's schemes" as the most important task of all?

Points to Ponder ...

Do you suppose that the devil '**SCHEMES**' to undermine each of these '**TASKS**' that we have just identified?

Do you suppose that the '**ARMOR**' that Paul is going to identify is going to somehow provide the means whereby we can '**STAND FIRM**' as we live out our life for Christ and seek to do all these '**WORTHY**' things?

"THE BELT OF TRUTH"

'Grace Is The Key' Series
(Ephesians 6:14)

Intro ... Once again I would draw your attention to the 'Great Exhortation' that has motivated our thinking for the past number of weeks. It's the exhortation with which Paul began the second half of His Great Letter to the Ephesian Believers. It's the exhortation that expresses God's Will for every one of us on earth today who belong to His Re-Born Family of Faith.

PAUL'S GREAT EXHORTATION – Ephesians 4:1

"Live A Life WORTHY Of The CALLING
You Have RECEIVED!"

Live in such a way that it is apparent to all that
You are a 'Born-Again Child of God'!

God wants His Born-Again Children to be noticed ...

God wants His Born-Again Children to reflect the family into which they have been spiritually born ...

God wants the world to see that spiritual birth produces a type of life that is radically different from that which is commonly experienced in this fallen, sin-filled and sin-stained world ...

God wants His new born-again family – the Church of Jesus Christ – to live a life that is truly worthy of the name "Christian".

To that end, Paul filled the second half of his letter to the Ephesians with directions concerning the nature of that truly 'worthy life' ...

We have identified **nine** such 'Directives' over these past weeks.

Paul has said (in effect) ... If you would live a life that is truly worthy of the 'Calling to Salvation' that you have received then ...

Live harmoniously and maturely and purely and honestly and pleasantly
and inquiringly and worshipfully and submissively and steadfastly.

It's that last one – that **ninth** one – that we discovered just last week – It's that one that is today's directive as well and it will motivate our discussions for the next several weeks. Here it is again as we expressed it last Sunday ...

TODAY'S KEY DIRECTIVE

(Paul's **ninth** directive for 'Worthy' Living)

"LIVE STEADFASTLY" – Stand your ground.

NO RETREAT – NO SURRENDER – NO MATTER WHAT!

*"Put on the whole **ARMOR** of God so you can **TAKE** your **STAND** ..."*
(Ephesians 6:11)

"Put on the whole armor of God" ... Here's what a fully armored Roman soldier looked like ... Linda and I examined a lot of possibilities before we selected this image.



Notice his posture – He ready to repel an attack – Something is heading right toward him and he has readied himself to withstand the charge.

That's what Paul says we are to be ... 'Fully armored' so that we can 'stand up against' anything that comes our way. Every piece of our 'Armor' will come into play as we seek to 'Live Steadfastly' - to 'Stand Firm'.

TODAY'S KEY SCRIPTURE ... Ephesians 6:14

*"Stand firm then with the **BELT** of **TRUTH**
BUCKLED around your waist ..."*

God's Truth ... Revealed Truth ... Faith-Procured Truth ... Life- Enhancing Truth

Paul says that 'Truth' is like the 'Belt' or 'Metal and Fabric Girdle' that the Roman Soldier wore around his waist to hold his otherwise free-flowing robe in place.

You don't want to get '*tangled up in your own clothing*' (or in your own ideas) when in the heat of battle. Truth is an incredibly important part of our protective equipment as we seek to 'stand firm' for the Lord!

Consider with me then ...

FOUR FANTASTIC FUNCTIONS TRUTH PERFORMS IN OUR LIVES

We will, of course, allow the Word of God to be our teacher. Many specific 'truths' will be discussed over the next few weeks but today I would have us consider somewhat generally what 'Truth as Truth' can do for us.

1. TRUTH (God's Truth) GUARDS US FROM ERROR

Truth points us in the right direction and keeps us from heading down wrong paths. Remember what Paul has already told the Ephesians?

*"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ
might give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation ..."*
(Ephesians 1:17)

God's truth – the truth that can guard us and keep us, is always 'revealed truth' ... It's not truth that we have '*figured out on our own*' ... It's truth that the Spirit of God has revealed to the Children of God through the Apostles and Prophets of God. It's encased in the 66 Books of the Bible. It's been summarized in the great statements of faith formulated over the years.

Here at *Sonlife* Community Church we summarize God's Truth in our Church Statement of Faith and our Church Covenant of Behavior.

And the reason that Paul was so motivated to pray that the Ephesian Believers (and us) have their eyes opened to God's revealed truth is because he wanted us all to come to the place where (as he put it in chapter four) ...

"We will no longer be ... blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men. Instead speaking the truth in love, we will grow up into Him who is the Head ..."
(Ephesians 4:14-15)

Truth guards us from error – It keeps us from embracing false teaching and being led astray by false teachers. On the other hand, it's easy to get 'knocked off our feet' when we don't know what we believe.

Remember this statement from our study of Psalm 119 some months ago?

*"I have chosen the way of **truth** ... do not let me be put to shame."*
(Psalm 119:30-31)

That is the confession of one who has chosen to 'Put on the Belt of Truth' ...

Key Word: CONTENT ...

The core doctrines of the Christian Faith

Putting on the Belt of Truth means allowing the Truths of God to Guard Us and Keep Us ... Putting on the Belt of Truth means committing ourselves to a continual study of God's Word and to the recognition that His Word is indeed 'True'.

God's Truth will guard us from error ... Reason enough to 'Put It On' every day! But there's more – much more ...

2. TRUTH (God's Truth) **FREES US FROM BONDAGE**

*"You shall know the **truth** and the **truth** shall set you **free**"*
(John 8:32)

* Truth sets us free from Bondage to **Sin**

"Sin shall no longer be your master" - Romans 6:14

* Truth sets us free from Bondage to **Guilt** and **Condemnation**

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."
(Romans 8:1)

* Truth Sets us free from Bondage to the Devil's **Accusations**

"Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour."
(1 Peter 5:8)

Key Word: CONFIDENCE ...

Assurance that I truly am a forgiven
Child of God – capable of living a God-Honoring Life.

Guarded from Error and Freed from Bondage – two great benefits that come to those who ‘Put on the Belt of Truth’ but there’s still more ...

3. TRUTH (God's Truth) **LINKS US WITH CHRIST**

*“I am the way, the truth and the life”
(John 14:6)*

The Apostle John wrote in the Gospel that bears his name that Jesus came into the world ‘full of grace and truth’.

It was the Apostle Peter who confessed on that day when many of the crowd that followed Jesus turned away ...

*“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words (the truths) of Eternal Life.”
(John 6:68)*

Paul prayed for the Ephesians (even as we pray for ourselves each week) that ‘Christ might dwell in their hearts through faith’ – and that as a result they might be ‘filled to the measure of all the fullness of God’ ...

This is really just another way of asking that they might be immersed in the fullness of the truth of God and thus inseparably linked with the Son of God Himself.

Remember how he had explained to them that they had been ...

“included in Christ when they heard (and believed) the word of truth”

And how as a result of that new relationship they had actually been ...

*‘sealed by the Holy Spirit’ – who is (as Jesus pointed out) the Spirit of Truth Himself?
(Ephesians 1:13; John 14:17)*

Key Word: CONNECTION

(The Eternal Bond between Christ and all Born-Again, Holy Spirit Sealed Believers)

One final fantastic function that Truth performs in our lives ...

4. TRUTH (God's Truth) **SEPARATES US FROM THE WORLD**

*“Sanctify them (set them apart) by the truth; your word is truth.”
(John 17:17)*

These words come from what is commonly called ‘Christ’s High Priestly Prayer’, the great prayer he prayed for his Disciples on the very night that he would be betrayed.

In that prayer, Jesus acknowledges that His Disciples are not 'of the world' any more than He himself was 'of the world' ...

They are distinctly different beings than those who are identified with 'the world'.

But they are still 'in the world' ...

And it's because they are still 'in the world' that they can have a witness 'to the world' and that they can make an impact 'upon the world'.

But none of that will happen if they are indistinguishable 'from' the world and so Jesus ask the Father to 'sanctify them' ... to set them apart – to secure them – to cause them to stand distinct from the world around them.

In a word – He was asking the Father to make them **HOLY** even as they live their lives in the midst of an unholy population.

Note what Jesus says has the power to make such 'sanctification' possible – **TRUTH!** You want to live a distinctively holy Christian Life – Fill your mind and heart with the Truths of God ... with the Words of Christ.

Key Word: CONSECRATION

(A conscious commitment to Holiness – more about that next week!)

So ... **TRUTH** is a powerful piece of Spiritual Armor:

It guards us from error. It sets us free from bondage.

It links us to Christ. It separates us from the world.

Put on the Belt of Truth every day – It's God's Provision for you!

And remember – as our ***final thot*** says and will continue to say ...

Final Thot ...

A **PROPERLY** outfitted Christian simply **CANNOT** be **KNOCKED** off His **FEET** – When the **DUST** settles, He will be found **STANDING FIRM!**

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Forty-Three"

Sunday's message turned our attention to the first piece of the 'Armor of God' ...

THE **BELT** OF **TRUTH**

How will **Truth** help you to 'stand firm for Christ' ... Can you think of a time when it has done just that?

Here's an intriguing line from an ancient hymn ...

"Truth forever on the scaffold"

What do you think that hymn-writer meant?

Is truth more prized today or do people still try to 'do away with it'?

Does 'Standing Firm for Christ' sometimes just mean 'Standing up for the Truth' ...

Might it sometimes simply mean 'acknowledging that there is in fact some absolute truth – some Divinely Revealed Truth - in this universe of ours'?

Think how commonly these phrases are used today ...

"My '**TAKE**' on it is ..."

"What's **YOUR** 'take' on the subject ..."

"I **THINK** that ..."

"It may not be **TRUE** for you but for me ..."

"Everyone needs to find his **OWN** way ..."

"There are no **ABSOLUTES** – Everything is **RELATIVE** ..."

Which of these '**Actions**' of Truth mentioned Sunday impressed you the most?

'Truth guards us from **ERROR**' (Ephesians 4:14-15)

'Truth separates us from the **WORLD**' (John 17:17)

'Truth frees us from **BONDAGE**' (John 8:32)

'Truth links us with **CHRIST**' (John 14:6)

Point to Ponder ...

Does God's Truth **STABILIZE** you or **TERRIFY** you?

"THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS"

'Grace Is The Key' Series
(Ephesians 6:14b)

Intro Today we continue our examination of the 'Armor of God' ... the protective spiritual armor that God has provided for those who would take seriously his directive to '*Stand Firm*' for Christ in the midst of this fallen, sin-filled, sin-stained world.

TODAY'S KEY DIRECTIVE

(Paul's **ninth** directive for 'Worthy' Living)

"LIVE STEADFASTLY" – Stand your ground.

NO RETREAT – NO SURRENDER – NO MATTER WHAT!

*"Put on the whole **ARMOR** of God so you can **TAKE** your **STAND** ..."*
(Ephesians 6:11)

"Put on the whole armor of God" ... Here's the image that I said last week I would have capture your mind as we proceed through this passage:



Notice his posture – He ready to repel an attack – Something is heading right toward him and he has readied himself to withstand the charge.

That's what Paul says we are to be ... 'Fully armored' so that we can 'stand up against' anything that comes our way. Every piece of our 'Armor' will come into play as we seek to 'Live Steadfastly' - to 'Stand Firm'.

Last week we examined the '**BELT OF TRUTH**'.

Paul told the Ephesian Believers ...

*"Stand firm then with the '**Belt of Truth**' buckled around your waist ..."*

Last week we discovered and discussed the Four Great Things That Truth Does In Our Lives:

Truth **Guards Us** From Error

Truth **Frees Us** From Bondage

Truth **Links Us** With Christ (and)

Truth **Separates Us** From The World.

Today's **Key Scripture** continues Paul's Instruction and our Investigation ...

TODAY'S KEY SCRIPTURE ... Ephesians 6:14b

"Stand firm then ...

*With the **BREASTPLATE** of **RIGHTEOUSNESS** in **PLACE**..."*

The **BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS** ...

It's an awesome piece of equipment. The blows of the enemy cannot penetrate it. Using today's terminology and technology this would be our 'Bullet-Proof Vest' ...

Though the initial impact might shock or even momentarily stun us, this piece of armor keeps our vital organs from damage and that's good!

So how exactly does righteousness do that ...

How does righteousness protect us from the deadly blows of enemy?

Well, let's begin with ...

TODAY'S BASIC DEFINITION ...

RIGHTEOUSNESS means: '**DOING RIGHT** or **BEING RIGHT**'

Therefore the Breastplate of Righteousness is the **PROTECTION**
that comes from '**Being Right**' and '**Doing Right**'!

Now that makes sense, doesn't it?

If we live righteously – If we live perfectly,
Then our enemy, the Devil, cannot bring any accusation against us (and)
Our enemy, the World, cannot in any way corrupt us (and)
Our enemy, the Flesh, cannot ever overwhelm us.

That's what Jesus did himself ... He lived a sinless, flawless righteous life!

Satan couldn't accuse him – The world didn't attract him – and His own human weaknesses never got the best of him.

Jesus put on the Breastplate of Righteousness every day and at the end of his life was still standing firm.

He never **retreated** ... never **surrendered** ... never **suffered defeat**!

It was a perfect way to live ... Live every day protected by righteousness.
Paul says that we should (and supposedly can) do that.

Stand firm then (He says) ...with the Breastplate of Righteousness in place –

Be right, **Live** right and you'll march right through life
completely unscathed – Just like Jesus did!

Sounds good, doesn't it? Let's just '*Put on that Breastplate of Righteousness*'
and march triumphantly (and sinlessly) through life.

So then, should we move on to the discussion of the next piece of our protective armor?

Or is there just that small issue that I forgot to mention but that some of you at least are just about to shout right out loud ...

TODAY'S (not so) SMALL ISSUE ...

We are not **JESUS CHRIST** - we cannot **PULL** off what He did!

We are not naturally righteous and actually never will be.

We are unrighteous by nature – We were not given a
'Breastplate of Righteousness' at birth like Jesus was.

And that 'Not So Small Issue' leads directly to ...

TODAY'S BIG INSIGHT ...

The **ONLY WAY** we can actually **EVER** put on a
Breastplate of Righteousness is if Jesus **ALLOWS** us to **WEAR** His.

And now allow that 'Big Insight' to cause you to rejoice over ...

TODAY'S BIG DISCOVERY ...

That's exactly what **JESUS** has **DONE**.

*"God made him who knew no sin to become sin for us so that
In him we might become the Righteousness of God."
(2 Corinthians 5:21)*

That's what happens at 'Spiritual Birth' ...

If you have been 'Born-Again' through faith in Jesus Christ then God the father has done this marvelous thing for you.

He has declared you to be 'righteous' (sinless) in His Sight.

The Bible Calls This ...

'IMPUTED' RIGHTEOUSNESS

Imputed: To be placed on someone's account or record.

It was regarding Abraham that that phrase was first used ...

*"Abraham believed God and it was imputed to him as righteousness."
(Genesis 15:6)*

Abraham didn't actually pull off a righteous, sinless life but he did find the faith to 'believe the Word of God' and to commit himself to it and God said 'That's enough'...

*Because you do believe what I have said
I will declare you to be 'righteous' – sinless in my sight"!*

Paul picked up on that phrase in his letter to the Romans as he explained the manner in which you and I come to be declared righteous by God.

Here's what he wrote in Romans 4:23-24 (referring to that Genesis passage)...

"The words 'it was imputed to him' were written not for him alone but also for us to whom God will impute righteousness – for us who believe in Him Who raised our Lord from the dead."

It's faith that pleases God – faith that stimulates God to act on man's behalf. Paul would write these words just a few chapters later in his Letter to the Romans (Romans 10:9-10)...

"If you will confess with your mouth 'Jesus is Lord' and believe (exercise faith) in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

We can't actually **be** righteous (perfectly sinless) any more than Abraham could – we have already acknowledged that – but we can do what Abraham did do ... We can believe God – We can exercise faith in what God has done and in what God has said.

And here is what God has done for all of us who have exercised such faith in Him and in His Son Jesus Christ the LORD.

God Himself has acted to alter our record of wrongs – He has decided that he will erase our actual record of misdeeds and write in the accomplishments of Christ instead!

All the righteous living that Jesus did – all the being righteous that Jesus was is now recorded as though we were him. Our record is now spotless and His Breastplate of Righteousness is in fact ours to put on!

We can now say "We are sinless in God's sight" ... The Devil's accusations will never be validated in Heaven's Courtroom – Our own history of sinful behavior will never be brought up – our record of wrongs committed has been expunged. We have been granted righteous standing in God's eyes.

In the vocabulary of the Christian Faith that is called '**JUSTIFICATION**' ...
It's 'just as if' we had never actually ever sinned at all!

That truth will protect us from fear of hell and judgment – that truth will protect us from the Devil's condemning voice here on earth. Our hearts can rest in the righteousness that God has freely granted to us – the righteousness that He has '*imputed*' to each of our accounts.

That's a great protective piece of equipment God has provided for us.

So Paul says (and here I paraphrase a bit) ...

*"For heaven's sake, put it on; get yourself under its protection.
Know beyond a shadow of a doubt that God has cleansed you of sin
and has declared you to be 'righteous in his sight'!"*

Now here's an amazing thing that happens as we '*Put on the Breastplate of Righteousness*' each day...

More and more as time goes by, it seems to '*fit better*' ...

It seems less and less like a '*Borrowed Item*' and more and more like it actually belongs in our closet and on our body. When we '*put it on*' it seems more and more to fall comfortably into place.

What I mean is we find ourselves living more and more like Jesus all the time – His way of life seems to be more and more the way that we want to live and the way of life in which we find the most pleasure.

It seems that compared to where we were when we first put our faith in Christ, that we actually **are** more '*righteous*' – less willfully sinful – less worldly – less flesh-driven ...

This Is What I Would Call ...

'EXPERIENCED' RIGHTEOUSNESS

Remember what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian Believers (2 Cor. 5:17) ...

*"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation;
The old has gone, the new has come!"*

Remember all the wonderful statements we discovered in Ephesians chapters one and two that included the phrase "In Christ"?

"Chosen in Christ"

"Blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ"

"Marked in Him/Christ with the Seal of the Holy Spirit"

"Created in Christ to do good works"

Remember what we read just last week in Jesus' High Priestly Prayer as we examined the protective power provided by the **Belt of Truth** ...

*"Father I do not pray that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world even as I am not of it. Sanctify them (make the righteous) by the truth; your Word is truth."
(John 17:15-17)*

Here in this passage Jesus introduces the **Key Word: SANCTIFICATION** to the Christian Vocabulary.

Little by little ... day by day ... year by year ... the 'Declared Righteous' Child of God becomes more and more familiar with the 'Experience **of** Righteousness' ... The life of Christ begins to show itself. It's no longer just that he has been saved – He is being increasingly sanctified – made obviously righteous in the midst of an incredibly unrighteous world.

Every Sunday we close our service by praying the prayer that Paul first prayed for the Ephesians believers that includes this awesome request:

"I pray that He (the Father) may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."

'Growing in Grace' – the 'Experience of Righteousness' – the growing desire to 'Live a life worthy of the Calling we have received' – this reality provides some wondrous protection for us ...

It guards us from instability and 'wishy-washyness'. We look into the mirror and see not only a 'sinner saved by grace' but also a Child of God who, by that same grace of God, is taking his stand in the world. It's a good feeling ...

So put on the **Breastplate of Righteousness** and allow the Life of Christ to increasingly define you in this fallen world.

Now there's one more aspect – one more dynamic protective element contained in the Breastplate of Righteousness.

It's what we could call...

<u>COMPLETED</u> RIGHTEOUSNESS

You see no matter how much we grow in grace – No matter how much we yield to the Spirit of Christ dwelling within us – No matter how much we seek to stand firm for Christ and resist the ungodly forces that come against us ...

We still live in a fallen sin-filled, sin-stained world that continually opposes the things of God, and we still contain that old sin nature that would tempt us toward selfish indulgence and independence and we still must contend with the devil himself who seeks to devour and destroy everyone who has been linked to Christ through faith.

We begin to hunger and thirst for a final solution – We hunger and thirst for a place where Sin and Self and Satan no longer will be granted admission – a place where the entire plan of God to restore righteousness to His universe will come to completion.

Such a 'final solution' the Scripture says is coming ...
Our hunger and thirst will be wonderfully satisfied ...

Hear these words of Jesus Himself - they should sound familiar ...

*"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."
(Matthew 5:6)*

Hear these words from the Apostle Peter ...

*"But in keeping with His promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven
and a new earth – the home of righteousness."
(2 Peter 3:13)*

Now hear these words from the Apostle Paul ...

*"We ourselves who have the firstfruits of the Spirit groan inwardly
as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons – the redemption of our bodies."
(Romans 8:23)*

As the old song says ... "What a day of rejoicing (and completion) that will be.

These passages would add to the Christian Vocabulary the ...

Key Word: GLORIFICATION

As we put on the Breastplate of Righteousness, we take firm hold of the fact that there is coming a day when Righteousness will prevail over all ...

When the earth will be glorified – When all Born-Again Children of God will be glorified – When Christ will be seen in all the Glory that is His.

This present battle will not last forever – the foes of God will one day all be vanquished and the Father will begin to enjoy what Paul called in Ephesians Chapter One ...

"The Riches of His Glorious Inheritance In The Saints"

What an incredible piece of protective armor is this **Breastplate of Righteousness**... How it guards and strengthens my heart!

Every time I put it on I am reminded that I have been declared righteous by God the Father Himself;

Every time I put it on I am reminded that I am being made more and more into the image of Christ and that I am gaining ground in my desire to live a life worthy of the Calling that I have received; and ...

Every time I put it on I am reminded as well that there is coming a day when I shall be granted admission into that glorious place where righteousness dwells supreme!

Think now specifically of and thank God for the **Breastplate of Righteousness** as once again we read this **final thot** ...

Final Thot ...

A **PROPERLY** outfitted Christian simply **CANNOT** be **KNOCKED** off His **FEET** – When the **DUST** settles, He will be found **STANDING FIRM!**

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

-

"Lesson Forty-Four"

How does '**Righteousness**' help you 'stand firm'?
(Imputed – Experienced – Completed)

Does it help you 'stand firm' to know that Jesus' righteousness has been applied to your record in heaven and that God has declared you to be '*sinless in His eyes*'?

Does it help you 'stand firm' to know that the '*righteousness*' that is growing within you will actually enable you to stand firm?

Does it help you 'stand firm' to know that there is a '*home of righteousness*' awaiting you where there will be no more effort needed to 'stand firm'?

This past Sunday Pastor Mark pointed out that when it comes to providing for our righteousness, Jesus did all the heavy lifting ...

Pick out one of these **SIX ESSENTIAL ACTIONS** Jesus took in providing for our righteousness and share what it means to you ...

- 1. HE LEFT THE GLORIES OF HEAVEN**
- 2. HE ENTERED A FALLEN, SIN-FILLED WORLD**
- 3. HE LIVED AN ABSOLUTELY SINLESS LIFE**
- 4. HE SACRIFICED HIMSELF WILLINGLY**
- 5. HE ROSE FROM THE DEAD TRIUMPHANTLY**
- 6. HE ATONED FOR OUR SINS COMPLETELY**

Pastor Mark pointed out Sunday that all Jesus asks of us in response to these '**SIX ESSENTIAL ACTIONS**' that he took on our behalf is that ...

"WE REMEMBER HIM!"

Is that enough? What do you think?

Point to Ponder ...

Is it possible to truly **REMEMBER** without renewed **SURRENDER**?

Pastor Mark Mikels

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August 10, 2014

"THE BATTLE SHOES OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE"

'Grace Is The Key' Series
(Ephesians 6:14b)

Intro As an introduction to the message this morning I would like to share with you a 'Selfie' that one of our members sent me this week. See if you can identify who it is ...



Obviously it's someone who has taken our current study in the Book of Ephesians very seriously. Paul's says in Ephesians 6:11 ...

*"Put on the full 'Armor of God'
so you can take your stand against the devil's schemes ..."*

In that verse is contained Paul's ninth and final **Key Directive** for living a life 'Worthy of the Calling that we have received'. We've been considering this directive for several weeks now ...

TODAY'S KEY DIRECTIVE

(Paul's **ninth** directive for 'Worthy' Living)

"LIVE STEADFASTLY" – Stand your ground.

NO RETREAT – NO SURRENDER – NO MATTER WHAT!

*"Put on the full **ARMOR** of God so you can **TAKE** your **STAND** ..."*
(Ephesians 6:11)

Six Incredibly Protective Pieces of Armor make up the full suit. So far we have discussed the **BELT** of **TRUTH** and the **BREASTPLATE** of **RIGHTEOUSNESS** .

Today we consider the third ...

"The BATTLE SHOES of the GOSPEL of PEACE"

TODAY'S KEY SCRIPTURE ... Ephesians 6:14-15

"Stand firm then ...

*With your FEET fitted with the READINESS that
comes from the GOSPEL of Peace."*

When you think about it ... Footwear is perhaps as important a consideration for a soldier as anything else that he might pull out of his closet.

After all ... What good would it do to be wearing your Belt of Truth and your Breastplate of Righteousness if you are slipping and sliding all around and can be easily pushed out of the way and run right over?

Imagine yourself standing on ice in your bare feet ... pretty hard to stand firm under those circumstances, isn't it?

So Paul finds an application here as well ... What is it that will stabilize our footing as we *'take our stand against the devil's schemes'*?

Paul says that it's the Gospel of Peace that can provide that kind of stability. He wants us to be able to say ...

*'Nothing can knock me over or cause me to lose my footing,
when I've got my Gospel Shoes on!'*

TODAY'S KEY QUESTION ...

What is it about the GOSPEL of PEACE that
STABILIZES a believer in the midst of the STRUGGLE?

PEACE: An inner sense of CONTENTMENT,
of CONFIDENCE, of ASSURANCE.

Now that's a great way to live ... with an inner sense of contentment and confidence and assurance. Paul says that the Gospel of Peace can provide just such a life – a life that is stabilized by the assurances it provides.

This morning I would have us consider **FIVE** of them ...

Five Great Assurances provided by the Gospel of Jesus Christ that provide stability in the midst of whatever attacks the devil might launch against us.

1. THE ASSURANCE OF GOD'S COMPLETE FORGIVENESS

This is the very **Heart** of the Gospel that brings peace - God has taken steps to forgive men and to restore them to fellowship with Him ...

*"God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ,
not counting men's sins against them."
(2 Corinthians 5:19)*

Notice the **Effect** of this Gospel that brings peace – Men can know beyond a shadow of a doubt that they have been forgiven and accepted ...

*"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation;
The old has gone (and) the new has come!"
(2 Corinthians 5:17)*

*"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God
so that you may know that you have Eternal Life."
(1 John 5:13)*

"In Christ" ... God and Man are beautifully reconciled and God wants them to know that they are! This assurance '*stabilizes us*' against Satan's most fundamental accusation ...

"You're not saved!"

What makes you think that you (of all people) are a born-again Christian?"

He levels that accusation when we are at our most vulnerable moments: When we are spiritually low, when we are emotionally drained, when we are physically worn down ... It can knock us for a loop if we are not properly prepared for it.

But if we have our 'Gospel Shoes' firmly fastened on our feet, we will stand our ground against it ...

We '**know**' that our faith is in Christ not ourselves ...

We '**know**' that our faith is a gift not something that we have earned.

We '**know**' that we are not yet all that we will someday be.

We '**know**' – based upon the very Word of God – that we are saved –

We are sure of it!

The devil's accusation is brushed aside – He must find some other way to knock us down. The Assurance of God's Complete Forgiveness is a tremendous stabilizer for us when we are engaged by the enemy of our souls.

Here now is another tremendous Stabilizing Assurance found in the Gospel of Peace ...

2. THE ASSURANCE OF GOD'S LOVE AND CARE

Sometimes the very Gospel that assures us of God's complete Forgiveness can inadvertently paint an incorrect or at least incomplete picture of our Heavenly Father on the canvass of our mind.

God can be seen as a kind of cosmic bookkeeper – the One who keeps track of rights and wrongs – the One who carefully notes who has exercised faith in His Son and who hasn't - the One who is forever updating the family register as new born-again sons and daughters of God are added each and every day.

The devil can have a field day with that perception of our Heavenly Father ...

"Who do you think you are?"

"What makes you think that God cares about you?"

"Sure God dispenses a little salvation now and then but that's His job – He does that primarily to honor His Son but (with regard to you and all those other so called 'born-again people') it's not personal, it's just business."

There are times in our lives when those accusations come with devastating force ...

Times of real need ... Times of tragedy and heartache ...

Times when it seems like people have turned away or have little to offer.

"Maybe God does just save and then forget ...

Why would he care about me anyway ... Surely He has far more important things to do than to concern Himself with me and my problems."

It's easy to pick up the devil's accusation and allow it to unsettle us.

At times like that it's imperative that we lace up our Battle Shoes and stand firm, stabilized by the Assurance of God's Love and Care provided in the Gospel of Peace!

Here's what Jesus prayed in his High Priestly prayer ...

"Righteous Father ... I have made you known to them and I will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them ..."
(John 17:25-26)

Jesus wants us to know the Father the way that He knew the Father – as a Father filled with love ... as a Father who loves us as much as He loves His Own Eternal Son ... as a Father who is personally connected to and involved in every detail of our lives.

The Apostle Peter who heard Jesus pray that prayer and who came to experience the Father's Love himself wrote these words for us ...

"Cast all your anxiety upon Him for He cares for you."
(1 Peter 5:7)

God is not some impersonal manager of cosmic affairs – God has declared himself to be a Father to all who come to him through faith in His Son, Jesus, and as Father His heart goes out to all who are His Own. He knows you – He cares for you ... You can call upon Him and He will hear and answer.

And more than just knowing us and caring for us, the Father involves Himself in the very circumstances of our lives that the devil would try to use to get us to doubt Him.

The Apostle Paul, who went through many of those moments when it seemed like the world was crashing down on him, surely had his Gospel Shoes on when he wrote these words ...

"And we know that in all things God works for the Good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."
(Romans 8:28)

Because of His Love and Care, the Father involves Himself in every one of the events of our lives and He works in those events to produce something that will be for our good. He orchestrates the music of the universe to produce something sweet to the ear ...

The best the unbeliever can do in times of distress is say ...

"This too shall pass".

The Child of God who has his Gospel Shoes fastened firmly will say ...

"This too shall work out for my Good."

Since we live in a fallen, broken, sin-filled, sin-stained world whose effects impact our lives on a regular basis, few things can provide such stability for a Child of God as the Assurance of God's Love and Care.

The **Third Assurance** that I would identify this morning grows directly out of the second for in addition to providing the Assurance of God's Love and Care, the Gospel of Peace provides for us ...

3. THE ASSURANCE OF GOD'S CONTINUAL PRESENCE

This assurance is vitally important for this world can at times become a very lonely place ... There are times when it seems like we are the only one – on the job, in the classroom, sometimes even at home.

The devil plays on that reality. He seeks to get us to feel what could be the loneliness of the Christian Life – He uses that feeling of loneliness to introduce fear into us ...

*"How can I stand against the world all by myself – Surely I am going to fall and fail ...
I just can't make it by myself ... I can't hold on."*

And as we think those thoughts we are already on our way down!

But here's where the **Gospel of Peace** comes to our aid ...

The God who loves us and cares for us and who works in every circumstance of our lives has chosen to 'walk through this life with us'. We can be **'Assured of His Personal Presence'** ...

The writer of Hebrews would encourage us with these words ...

*"God has said ... 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.
So we say with confidence (settled assurance)'The Lord is my helper;
I will not be afraid. What can men do to me?'" (Hebrews 13:5-6)*

How about those parting words spoken by Jesus Himself ...

*"Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."
(Mathew 28:20)*

The Apostle Paul who like us never saw Jesus in the days of his earthly ministry shared this personal testimony (and what can be the testimony of every believer) in his letter to the Galatians ...

*"Christ lives in me ... And the life I live in the body, I live by faith in the
Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)*

And there's no way that we can fail to mention this promise from Jesus ...

*"I will ask the Father and He will give you another Comforter to be with you forever."
(John 14:16)*

There's no greater lie – no more false accusation - ever uttered by the devil than the one that tells me '*I am alone*' in this world!

The Father is with me – Jesus is with me – The Holy Spirit is with me ...
Far from '*being alone*' my life is overflowing with Divine Presence!

As long as I have my '*Gospel Shoes*' firmly fastened, there's no danger of that accusation knocking me down!

These are pretty awesome '*Battle Shoes*' are they not?

They stabilize me through the ups and downs of life by assuring me that:

1. God has Completely Forgiven me and that
2. God Loves and Cares for me and that
3. God is Present with me.

And we don't even have them fully laced up yet ...

Two more Assurances (at least) are provided by the '***Gospel of Peace***' ...

Fourthly the Gospel of Peace provides ...

4. THE ASSURANCE OF GOD'S SUSTAINING GRACE

You see, our Triune God-Family, not only saves us and loves and cares for us and walks with us through the ups and downs of life, *Our Triune God enables us* (makes us able) to win this battle we are in ...

The Apostle Paul experienced that reality when he (following Peter's good counsel) was casting all his care upon the Lord ... Three times he said that he asked God to remove a troublesome situation from him and here's what God said back to him ...

*"And He said to me ...
'My Grace is sufficient for you for my strength is made perfect in weakness.'
(2 Corinthians 12:9)*

There's something called '*Grace*' that God dispenses into the lives of those who seek to follow after Christ ... This grace is administered by the Holy Spirit who indwells each of us who are born-again Children of God.

This 'grace' which can be understood to be 'divine enabling' enables us as believers to experience success in the Christian Life and to 'Grow toward maturity in Christ' ... the very thing that we want to do.

Someone once said that the Grace of God comes into our lives in nine delicious favors ... like nine fruits plucked from heaven's orchards ... Here's how the Apostle Paul expressed it:

*"Now the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control – against such things there is no law."
(Galatians 5:22-23)*

"Against such things there is no law" ... Indeed, who would make such a law against such things? For our purpose today it's important for us to realize that '*against such things there is no victory for the devil*' ...

For what problem, what difficulty of life is one of these not the answer?

Whenever the devil would say 'You can't' – the grace-enabled, fruit-filled believer can confidently say ...

"I most certainly can' – God's grace will be sufficient for me in whatever form it comes ... In this circumstance, I can and will stand firm!"

Praise God for all of you who are doing that this very moment!

And now the final and perhaps greatest assurance of them all ...

5. THE ASSURANCE OF GOD'S ULTIMATE TRIUMPH

Though the best the unbeliever can say during challenging days is:

"This too shall pass" ...

We believers can say ... *"There's a new day coming".*

Here's how the Apostle Peter who ultimately was executed by the Romans for his faith in Christ expressed this confident assurance in the face of earthly trial ...

"The day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare." (2 Peter 3:10)

The Apostle John who was granted a glimpse into the distant future wrote:

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away." (Revelation 21:1)

It's right here that the devil will launch one last desperate attack against us.

"Right" he will say ... *"they have been saying that for years.*
There's no coming Kingdom – You are believing a pipe dream.

But even if it's true – Why deny yourself so much while you are waiting;
Why should the unbelievers be the only ones to enjoy the good life?"

You can almost see the Apostle Peter lacing up his Battle Shoes as he writes these words in response to that final desperate attack ...

"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise ... He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9)

God's plan is world-wide and centuries long ...

Jesus said the gospel must be '*preached in all the world*' before the end comes but be assured '**the end will come**'.

As Peter ties the final knot on the final shoe and jumps to his feet, he raises this question to us ...

*"Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be?
You ought to live holy and godly lives (Lives worthy of the Calling you have received)
as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming."
(2 Peter 3:11)*

To that Paul would say and we certainly should say ... "**AMEN!**"

SO ... "*Put on those 'Battle Shoes of the Gospel of Peace' –
Don't allow any accusation of Satan to knock you down!"*

Once again our **final thot** assures us that ...

Final Thot ...

A **PROPERLY** outfitted Christian simply **CANNOT** be **KNOCKED** off
His **FEET** – When the **DUST** settles, He will be found **STANDING FIRM!**

In Sunday's message we examined the ...

BATTLE SHOES OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE

How important is 'Footwear' when you are engaged in an arduous task?
Have you ever tried to do something with the 'wrong' shoes on your feet?

Paul says that the 'Gospel of Peace' is what provides the proper 'Footwear for Battle' for us as Christians – What does that term suggest to you?

Pastor Mark shared with us **Five Great Assurances** that the Gospel of Peace bring into our lives as Followers of Christ. Do you remember what they were?

1. The Assurance of God's **COMPLETE FORGIVENESS**
2. The Assurance of God's **LOVE** and **CARE**
3. The Assurance of God's **CONTINUAL PRESENCE**
4. The Assurance of God's **SUSTAINING GRACE**
5. The Assurance of God's **ULTIMATE TRIUMPH**

Pick one of the 'Accusations' of the devil or one of the 'Life Circumstances' listed below and match it up with one of these Stabilizing Assurances and share how the 'Assurance' you've chosen helps you 'Stand Firm'.

* "There's no way that you are going to be able to keep up this Christian Commitment you have made – the world is too attractive and the flesh too strong."

* "You're no Christian – What makes you think that you (of all people) are born again?"

* "Is pretty lonely being the only believer isn't it – Why not just rejoin the rest of us?"

* "You're believing in a pipe-dream designed to sustain losers."

* "God doesn't care about you – God doesn't even pay attention to you."

* * * * *

* You sin and disappoint yourself – You feel unworthy – You feel like staying home.

* It seems that you are all alone and it's tough standing true to your beliefs.

* Tragedy strikes and it seems like God is far away and your faith isn't working.

* Evil abounds and it seems like the world is getting worse not better.

* People let you down – There doesn't seem to be anyone you can count on.

Point to Ponder ...

Can a Christian get by with just **ONE PAIR** of shoes?

"THE SHIELD OF FAITH"

'Grace Is The Key' Series
(Ephesians 6:16)

Intro Once again let's take a look at our 'fully armored' Roman Soldier – the inspiration for Paul's instruction to us to "Put on the full armor of God".



These soldiers were seen every day on the streets of every city in the Mediterranean World ... They were the backbone of Rome's army and the main reason Rome ruled the world and kept the peace for nearly 1000 years.

Each piece of this man's armor played a vital part in his over-all protection; if he wasn't 'fully' armored then he wasn't really 'armored' at all.

So with us as Christians ... Paul says 'Put on the full armor (the whole armor) of God so that we can stand our ground against the devil's schemes".

So far Paul has identified for us the "Belt of Truth" and the "Breastplate of Righteousness" and the "Battle Shoes of the Gospel of Peace" ... vitally important pieces of our protective equipment.

Today's **Key Scripture** identifies the next piece of our protective equipment.

TODAY'S KEY SCRIPTURE ...

"In addition to all this, take up the SHIELD of FAITH, with which you can EXTINGUISH all the flaming arrows of the EVIL one."
(Ephesians 6:16)

Look at the size of that thing – the Roman shield measured some 2 ½ feet wide by some 4 ½ feet high. It took a well-conditioned man just to carry it.

When under attack, a row of soldiers could place their shields side by side on the ground and form an almost impenetrable wall ... in one commonly used formation the soldiers could use their shields to build a virtual fortress of protection with a row of shields placed as the outer walls and the soldiers in the middle raising and joining their shields to create a protective roof against incoming arrows or spears. They could even move forward in such a formation until they were close enough for hand to hand combat.

A shield of well-tempered metal or leather covered hardwood was an incredibly important piece of the Roman soldier's battle gear.

So having an idea now of the First Century reality that provided the pattern for Paul's Instruction we raise ...

TODAY'S KEY QUESTIONS ...

*So what is the **Shield of Faith** and how does it **PROTECT** us?*

Consider with me this morning ...

1. FAITH'S DEFINITION ... (What faith actually is)

*"Trusting explicitly **REGARDLESS** of circumstances"*

Allow that definition to just 'sink into your mind' a bit ...

"Trusting explicitly" ...

Committed to something or someone no questions asked.

That's the nature of the saving faith God gives to those who are being saved.

It's a no questions asked – no need to figure it out for myself – kind of trust.

'God said it; I believe it and that settles it!'

"Regardless of circumstances" ...

'No matter what comes' – no matter the circumstances I find myself in – no matter how unexpected or unpleasant, I will continue to trust in Him' –

That's Biblical Faith, the kind that truly pleases God.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES

Consider ...

JOB

"Though He slay me, yet will I trust (put my hope in) Him"
(Job 13:15)

And Job, this ancient man of faith, nearly was slain ... He had come to that place where he could say and did say, *'I wish that my mother had never given me life'*. His body was wracked by torments of various kinds – His fortune and his children had been taken away by calamities of various kinds.

But he never lost faith in the Goodness and the Rightness of God ...

'God will work this out – God has not ceased to be either just or good – I will continue to Trust in Him regardless ... I will not lose my faith.'

It may well be that Job himself never came to understand until he stood in God's Presence that all that had happened to him was for the purpose of God demonstrating to all the watching world (you and me included) and to the devil himself that such faith in fact is possible in this fallen world.

It's as though God were saying ...

*'Here is a man protecting himself with the Shield of Faith.
Learn from him!'*

How about ...

DAVID

*"Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil for You are with me."*
(Psalm 23:4)

David found himself walking as it were through that valley on more than one occasion and generally it was because evil men (as well as the evil one) were seeking to destroy him. King Saul at one point had the entire army of Israel tracking him down.

And though we know that David (unlike Job) occasionally wavered – these words from the 23rd Psalm were written at a time when his shield of faith was up and his trust in the Lord was providing full protection for his mind and heart.

"Trusting God explicitly regardless of the circumstances"

That's what a person is doing who has taken up his 'Shield of Faith'!

Now if that is **Faith's Definition** – (What faith actually is) ...

Consider with me now ...

2. FAITH'S DESCRIPTION ... (What faith actually produces)

*"Now faith is being **SURE** of what we **HOPE** for and **CERTAIN** of what we do not **SEE**." (Hebrews 11:1)*

Faith '*trusts God explicitly regardless of circumstances*' because faith produces '*absolute certainty*' in the one who possesses it.

Again some Biblical examples and this time we go to the Greatest Chapter on Faith in the entire Bible to make our selections – Hebrews chapter 11.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES:

Consider ...

NOAH

"By faith, Noah when warned about things not yet seen ... built an ark ..." (Hebrews 11:7)

What kind of '*certainty*' did it take to undertake the building of something that had never been built before (a 450 foot long ark) to avoid something that had never been experienced before (a world-wide flood of water) – It took '*absolute certainty*' and that's exactly what Noah's faith produced in him.

Now consider ...

ABRAHAM

"By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice". (Hebrews 11:17)

What kind of '*certainty*' does it take to offer up for death the very one who God has told you would be your heir and who would carry on the Promise that through you all nations on earth would be blessed ...

What kind of 'certainty' in the Person and Power of God does it take to obey His command to make of your beloved son a sacrifice?

It would take 'absolute certainty' and that's exactly what Abraham's faith produced in him. No wavering – no second guessing – no debating – just 'explicit trusting' based upon the 'absolute certainty' produced by his God-Given, God-Pleasing faith.

Indeed, there is great protective power in being '*absolutely certain*' about the things God has said!

So now ... having considered Faith's **Definition** and Faith's **Description**, consider with me now ...

3. FAITH'S DEPLOYMENT ... (When is faith needed?)

Whenever the '*flaming arrows of the evil one*' are **ON THEIR WAY!**

Here are four of his most commonly used ones ...

* Arrows of **DOUBT** ...

'Temptation to question God'

If faith produces 'absolute certainty' doubt produces the exact opposite.
Doubt produces '*absolute uncertainty*' ...

*"I'm not sure; I don't know if I can believe that; what if it's not true;
what if there's another way; Isn't it narrow-minded to limit ourselves to just one Book?
What if I can't maintain my commitment if I make one?"*

The devil delights in getting believers to 'doubt God' – to 'doubt themselves' – to lose their sense of security and confidence in God – **Doubt** puts believers on the sideline watching others play the game.

* Arrows of **DECEPTION** ...

'Temptation to go beyond what God has said'

Jesus said that the devil is a Liar and indeed he is – He invents, he twists, he perverts and he pretends that what comes out of his mouth is actually from God.

Many are the ways that the Christian Faith has been manipulated over the years by those who have been deceived by the devil.

Our faith must be in the things that God has actually said not in the things that men have said He said or things they say He should have said.

Surely the devil delights in getting the believer to believe things that are actually counterproductive to the desires of God.

Such **deception** is worse than just '*putting the believer on the sideline*' ...
Such **deception** puts him in another arena altogether.

* Arrows of **DIVISION** – Temptation to withdraw from fellowship

The Apostle Paul in writing to the Corinthian Church said ...
"I hear that there are quarrels among you."

This is a particularly damaging flaming arrow – It's been used with success by the devil for years – probably at one time or another in almost every congregation that has ever been formed.

More than one congregation has '*crashed and burned*' as a result of the fires created by this particular arrow.

The devil loves to get God's people at odds with each other – He loves to get them to forget that they are '*members of one glorious body*' and that they are '*brothers and sisters in Christ*' and that they are progressing toward the same goal.

He relishes those moments when fights break out in the midst of the game between members of the same team – the other side can just sit back and watch their opponents destroy themselves as they divide into their individual factions.

Eventually ... some of the players just pack up and go home – they withdraw from the team and resolve to watch the games at home on TV.

Since the opening days of *Sonlife* Community Church we have consciously sought to avoid as many of the things as possible that the devil commonly uses to create **division** within a congregation of believers.

It's not an easy task for the devil has many of these arrows in his quiver.

And now for the final '**Arrow**' I would mention ...
it's one that will probably be targeted at all of us sooner or later ...

* Arrows of **DESPAIR** – Temptation to quit trying

Despair piggybacks on weakness and times of weakness
eventually come to us all.

Physical weakness – Emotional weakness – Relational weakness –
Financial weakness.

There is nothing like the feeling of inadequacy to cause our shield of faith
to drop and to open ourselves to serious damage – It's like our arms
are just too tired to hold it up any longer.

Feelings of inadequacy lead us to conclusions that in turn
lead us down a dark path.

Despair is at the end of that path and despair says "I quit" – "I can't do it".

Arrows of **doubt** and **deception** and **division** and **despair** –

They need to be deflected and extinguished and they can be and will be
when the believer under attack ... (by faith) 'Lifts up the Shield of Faith'.

A SHIELD-RAISING SCRIPTURE ...

*"I know whom I have believed (put my faith in) and am convinced
that He is able to guard that which I have committed to Him
(my whole self) for (until)that day." (2 Timothy 1:12)*

My faith is not in me ... My faith is in **HIM** ...

Faith in God will keep us protected from all the 'Flaming Arrows'
the devil might send our way!

So once again we remind ourselves that ...

Final Thot ...

A **PROPERLY** outfitted Christian simply **CANNOT** be **KNOCKED** off
His **FEET** – When the **DUST** settles, He will be found **STANDING FIRM!**

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

-

"Lesson Forty-Six"

Sunday's message focused upon the **fourth piece** of Spiritual Armor that Paul identifies in Ephesians chapter six ...

"THE SHIELD OF FAITH"

Remember the Roman Soldier image we are using each week?
What comes to mind when you focus on his Shield?
How important was the shield to his survival?
For what purpose was it most useful?

How did Paul apply this imagery to our Spiritual Warfare?

"TAKE up the Shield of Faith with which you can
EXTINGUISH all the flaming **ARROWS** of the evil one."
(Ephesians 6:16)

What did you think of this Definition of Faith shared Sunday?

"TRUSTING God **REGARDLESS** of the circumstances"

Remember who Pastor Mark selected as Biblical examples of such faith?

JOB ... DAVID ... NOAH ... ABRAHAM

What others would you add to the list? How was their faith demonstrated?

Pastor Mark identified **Four Flaming Arrows** that Satan carries in his quiver:

- * The Arrow of **DOUBT**
- * The Arrow of **DECEPTION**
- * The Arrow of **DIVISION** (and)
- * The Arrow of **DESPAIR**.

Have any of these been fired in your direction?
Did they strike home or did your Shield of Faith protect you?

Point to Ponder ...

Is there such a thing as "**GROUP FAITH**" ...
Can one person's faith help **PROTECT** another (like the Roman formation)?

"THE HELMET OF SALVATION"

'Grace Is The Key' Series
(Ephesians 6:17)

Intro ... Today we continue our quest to turn ourselves into fully-armored, completely protected followers of Jesus Christ ...

The Apostle Paul instructs us by means of the Epistle he sent to the Ephesians to:

*"Put on the full armor of God so you can
take your stand against the devil's schemes."
(Ephesians 6:10)*

So far he has identified and we have discussed ...

*"The Belt of Truth" (and)
"The Breastplate of Righteousness" (and)
"The Battle-Shoes of the Gospel of Peace" (and, just last week)
"The Shield of Faith".*

Four incredible pieces of Spiritual Armor!

In Today's Key Scripture we find identified the **fifth** ...

TODAY'S KEY SCRIPTURE ...

*"Take the **HELMET** of **SALVATION** ..."
(Ephesians 6:17)*

A helmet of salvation to protect our head – our mind!

We could put it this way ...

If you would stand your ground against the devil's schemes,
You must "**WIN** the **BATTLE** for the **MIND!**"

The battle for the mind is an incredibly important and ever-present battle – It rages on day and night.

Our enemy well understands ...

TODAY'S KEY CONCEPT ...

What happens **BETWEEN** your **EARS** is the most important **THING** that happens in your **LIFE!**"

And since our enemy understands that, he does his best to fill our minds with confusion and bewilderment, with discouragement and frustration, with anxiety and even desperation ...

He seeks to dis-orient us and get us to forget if not outright deny things that we once knew to be true ... The very fact and nature of our salvation itself.

For if he can get us to question our salvation – If he can get us to forget essential aspects of our salvation, if he can steal our wonder as well as our assurance, then he will have won a great victory.

This we cannot allow to happen ... We cannot allow him to 'mess with our minds' – to jumble things up with regard to the salvation that is ours in Christ.

And so we come to ...

TODAY'S KEY QUESTION ...

How can we **KEEP** our thoughts **STRAIGHT?**

How do I **PUT ON** the Helmet of Salvation?

ANSWER:

EMPLOY THESE FOUR SALVATION AFFIRMATIONS EVERY DAY!

These 'Affirmations' are contained within and are implied by and are a kind of summary of the great truths that Paul has already shared in this wondrous Epistle to the Ephesians. Though there are a host of scriptures that could be added under each one, I have resisted the urge to list them.

Let them strike your ear as though you were a young believer in the Ephesian Congregation – as though you were a young believer whose mind the devil has been messing with – as though you were one for whom this letter from Paul has been received like manna from heaven – as though this letter from Paul is the sole piece of divine revelation that you possess.

Hear these things – these summary statements – these salvation affirmations – as exactly what they are intended to be ... short statements that will keep your mind focused upon the great work of salvation that God has done on your behalf - statements of truth that will guard your mind from the devil's attacks.

I've personalized them so we can be sure that we are putting the Helmet of Salvation on our own head when we repeat them!

Memorize them and repeat them regularly.

They will keep your thoughts wonderfully straight and biblically sound.

Well ... here they are ...

MY FOUR SALVATION AFFIRMATIONS!

1. GOD CHOSE ME ...

*"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.
For he chose us in him before the creation of the world
to be holy and blameless in his sight."
(Ephesians 1:3-4)*

That was the initial verse that caught our attention in this Great Epistle. God himself has '*blessed us (me) with every spiritual blessing in Christ*'.

And the first of the four blessings that Paul identifies in that initial passage is the 'Blessing of Selection' ...

As a now, born-again Child of God, I must never forget that I am a beneficiary of the inexplicable decision of the Almighty God to include me in the great host of those who will make up His '*Forever Family*'.

The basis of His Choice has not been revealed but the fact of His Choice surely has ... God has selected a family of faith that will reflect his wisdom and mercy and grace ... a family that will bring great honor to His Son ... a family that will (as Paul said further on in Ephesians chapter one) actually become the Heavenly Father's own glorious inheritance.

And here's the point of the affirmation ... He has included me in it!

GOD CHOSE ME!

Say that to yourself over and over ...

Say it until it becomes a fundamental part of your spiritual DNA.

Say it when the devil seeks to confuse you with some kind of seemingly rational, human reasoning ...

Say it when he tries to tell you that God actually chooses everyone whether they know it or not ...

Or **say it** when he tries to convince you that God merely chooses everyone who chooses him – it's not a personal choice at all ...

Say it when he reminds you that of all the people on earth who might be worthy of being chosen you are not even close.

Say it when he would remind you of the worst part of your past.

Say it when he backs himself into a corner by reminding you that you do not even possess the capability of understanding let alone the will to seek God or to desire godliness.

And then say ... **You're right** ... In and of myself I did not possess either the capability of understanding or the will to seek or desire godliness **BUT** ...

2. GOD CHANGED ME ...

"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

*All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. **Like the rest**, we **were** by nature objects of wrath. **But** because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions."*

(Ephesians 2:1-4)

God has intervened in my life ...

Though He took the step of choosing me in Christ before the creation of the world, He was forced to wait for step two until it came my time to be born and to make my entrance into this fallen, sin-filled world where I would be born in sin and would function like any other fallen human being.

I, just like everyone else, would follow the cravings of my own sinful nature (the nature that puts me and my desires ahead of everything else).

The ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air (the devil) would seem normal and natural and even desirable to me. I would be living as a 'spiritually dead man' and not even know it.

But the truth is ... God intervened in my life ...

He changed me ... He put spiritual life within me ...

He made me capable of things that I was not otherwise capable of ...

I can indeed and gladly will tell the devil that he is right ...

I **was** incapable of understanding or desiring spiritual truth but **GOD CHANGED ME** and He provided for me what I was previously lacking. He made me capable ... He brought me to spiritual life ... He **readied** me.

The devil will challenge that affirmation by saying 'What is the evidence of this 'Change' ... What is the evidence that God has performed this change in you which is supposedly the follow-up step to God having chosen you in the first place? And what exactly was it that He 'readied you' to do?

And that's when we can confidently say to the devil or to any of his earthly mouthpieces ...

"I'm glad you asked that for as a result of God Changing Me and thus "readying me" spiritually ...

3. GOD CALLED ME ...

"And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation." (Ephesians 1:13)

There came a day when I heard the Gospel message – I heard how ...

'God so loved the world that He gave His One and Only Son that whoever believes in him (puts their complete trust in him) shall not perish but have eternal life.'

In that message I heard the voice of Christ saying "Come, follow me". And the amazing thing was ...

I understood my need; I understood His Love;
My eyes were opened – My mind was enlightened –
My heart was delighted and My will was activated!

God called and I responded ...

I yielded myself to His Call upon my life;
I received His Gift of Forgiveness;
I confessed His Son as my Savior and Lord;
I bowed myself before Him and resolved to follow His Ways.

Only one who has been fundamentally 'Changed By God' would be able or willing to take such an action ... It runs contrary to every inclination of our fallen human nature – contrary to every value of the world or desire of the devil himself.

The very fact of God's Gospel Call and my response to it serves as evidence that I have been both Chosen and Changed.

Well, you would think that there's not much more for the devil to say ... not much more energy that he would be willing to expend in his attack upon our mind but we would be wrong. He actually saves his best attack for last ...

At this point in the battle he is forced to concede that God has Chosen Me and that God has Changed Me and that God has Called Me and that I have responded to His Call. In fact, he knows those things to be true ...

Now if he cannot confuse me about those things, if he cannot get me to doubt the validity of my salvation – this gift that God has mercifully bestowed upon me – then he will just have to launch this final attack.

An attack that basically says ... **THEN GOD IS A FOOL!**

Picture him saying to you ...

'If you are an example of what Jesus came to die for and if you are one that God set his Love upon even before the foundation of the world, then I've got to question the Wisdom of God because you are one pathetic example of a Christian. God obviously missed the mark when He chose you!'

That can be a devastating attack upon the mind (and heart actually) of any believer, especially one who is new or for some reason weak in the faith.

Time to strap on the '**Helmet of Salvation**'!

Time to say ... 'Yes, God chose me and yes, God fundamentally changed me and yes, God called me and made me a member of Christ's wondrous band of followers and no, I didn't immediately become (and still am not) all that God (and I) would want me to be **BUT** ...

4. GOD IS CONFORMING ME ... (a process is underway of which Paul was well aware)

*"Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession — to the praise of his glory."
(Ephesians 1:14)*

"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10)

*"Put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness"
(Ephesians 4:24)*

In addition to changing me to make me spiritually alive and spiritually capable of responding to Him and desiring to live for Him, God has placed his Holy Spirit within me to enable me to embrace my new self and to become in reality what God has already declared me to be ... a full-fledged child of God living out life in this fallen, sin-filled world, and doing it more and more in keeping with the desires and example of Christ himself.

There is growth that is underway ... There is more to come ... More and more Christ's own Spirit is 'taking up residence' within me and I am 'seeing myself' more and more as one who is 'yoked to him' through all the experiences of life. I'm not there yet but I'm making progress and someday God will receive me as part of His Glorious Inheritance" so devil ...

'Put that in your pipe and smoke it'!

Here then is the conclusion of the matter ... Put on your 'Helmet of Salvation' and allow these four salvation affirmations to provide 'helmet-like protection' for your mind ... They will do the job!

God **chose** me; God **changed** me; God **called** me and
God is even now **conforming** me to His own family likeness!

So here too with regard to this 'battle for the mind' it's true that ...

Final Thot ...

A **PROPERLY** outfitted Christian simply **CANNOT** be **KNOCKED** off
His **FEET** – When the **DUST** settles, He will be found **STANDING FIRM!**

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Forty-Seven"

Sunday's message focused upon the **fifth piece** of Spiritual Armor that Paul identifies in Ephesians chapter six ...

"THE HELMET OF SALVATION"

What did you think of **Sunday's Key Concept** – Do you agree with it?

What happens **BETWEEN** your **EARS** is the most important **THING** that happens in your **LIFE!**"

Reflect upon this statement from Sunday's message.
Circle words or phrases that seem significant ...

"And since our enemy understands that, he does his best to fill our minds with confusion and bewilderment, with discouragement and frustration, with anxiety and even desperation ...

He seeks to dis-orient us and get us to forget if not outright deny things that we once knew to be true ... The very fact and nature of our salvation itself.

For if he can get us to question our salvation – If he can get us to forget essential aspects of our salvation, if he can steal our wonder as well as our assurance, then he will have won a great victory.

This we cannot allow to happen ... We cannot allow him to 'mess with our minds' – to jumble things up with regard to the salvation that is ours in Christ."

Paul says 'Put on the Helmet of Salvation' which could be taken to mean

"THINK through the **REALITIES** of your salvation **REGULARLY**.

Do you do that? Does it help keep your thinking straight?

On Sunday Pastor Mark shared with us **Four** of those **Realities**:

God **CHOSE** Me – God **CHANGED** Me –
God **CALLED** Me – God is currently **CONFORMING** Me.

Choose one of those "Affirmations" and consider how it impacts you.

Point to Ponder ...

How often do I **FOCUS** my thoughts upon my **SALVATION**?

"THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT"

'Grace Is The Key' Series
(Ephesians 6:17)

Intro ... So for one of the final times let's take a look at the fully armored Roman Soldier that gave rise to the imagery the Apostle Paul used in his wonderful letter to the Ephesians.



*"Put on the full armor of God", he said,
"so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes".*

Not content with just painting that mental picture, he then itemized and characterized each piece of armor individually.

So far his instructions have led us to place upon ourselves:

"The Belt of Truth" and "The Breastplate of Righteousness" and "The Battleshoes of the Gospel of Peace" and "The Shield of Faith" and "The Helmet of Salvation".

Only one piece remains. It's identified in ...

TODAY'S KEY SCRIPTURE ...

*"Take ... the **SWORD** of the **SPIRIT** which is the **WORD** of **GOD**."*
(Ephesians 6:17)

Held in the soldier's strong right hand, the two-edged sword came into play when the enemy drew near ... when the enemy himself came with sword drawn. This sword like all the other pieces of armor played a huge role in the soldier's defense.

Though he, of course, could seek to block the blows of the enemy with his shield, the shield was far too cumbersome to wield effectively in that way.

And though, of course, he could stick his helmeted head or his breast-plated chest in the path of the enemy's swing those wouldn't be his best defensive maneuvers.

His best defensive maneuver would be to '*parry the blow of the enemy's Sword with his own*' ... Engage in a sword fight as it were.

'*Parry and thrust*' ... defend and then counter. So the sword was the one piece of equipment that could actually inflict direct damage upon the enemy. ... It was both defensive and offensive.

And so we come to ...

<p>TODAY'S KEY QUESTIONS ...</p> <p>WHAT IS THIS <u>WEAPON</u> AND</p> <p>WHAT MUST WE DO TO <u>USE IT WELL</u>?</p>

Now I know a number of you are thinking ...

"Why even waste time asking the first part of that question?"

Of all the pieces of armor, this is the one that we know best – this is the one that is the most obvious. Paul, in fact, clearly spells it out as he gives us this directive.

"Take ... the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God."

How many preachers over the years, in seeking congregational participation, have started their message by holding up their Bible and then asking the congregation ...

"How many of you have your 'Sword' with you this morning?"

Obviously, the Sword of the Spirit is the written Word of God – the Bible.

What if I told you this morning that that is not necessarily or primarily or most accurately the case? If I **were** to tell you that then the first part of today's **Key Question** might regain some significance. So I **will** tell you that.

SO ... FIRST OF ALL THEN ... Let's consider the first part of Today's Key Question:
WHAT IS THIS WEAPON?

Two Key Phrases make up this directive from Paul and both of them carry great significance ...

First of all Paul tells us to "**Take** ...

1. THE 'SWORD OF THE SPIRIT' ...

Now the most important word in the phrase is the smallest one – the little word '**of**' ... It's not in the Greek text here but it is necessary in our English translation to express a relationship that does exist in the Greek text.

We have seen this little word used in every previous item of armor ... The Belt **of** Truth ... The Breastplate **of** Righteousness ... The Battleshoes **of** the Gospel of Peace ... the Shield **of** Faith and the Helmet **of** Salvation.

In each of those instances the little word 'of' can be and should be taken to mean '*which is*' as in ...

'Stand firm then with the Belt which is Truth' buckled around your waist and with The Breastplate which is Righteousness in place and so forth ...

However, in this case the little word 'of' cannot be understood in that way.

It does not communicate Paul's meaning and it is not true to the Greek language in this case to say...

'Take the Sword which is the Spirit'.

Though the Holy Spirit Himself would be a powerful weapon ... Paul is not telling us to '*take up the Spirit*' ... He tells us in the second phrase exactly what this 'Sword' itself is ...

Here in this first phrase the little English word 'of' is intended to communicate a relationship that is expressed in the Greek Language and that is a relationship of ownership or possession.

The most accurate English translation would be ...

Take ...the Sword which **BELONGS** to the Spirit.

This is the Spirit's Sword which we are to take to ourselves and use to protect ourselves!

Now I know that just raised more questions like 'How do we get it?' and "When do we get it?" and "How exactly is it to be used?"

Just hold on to those while we look at the **second key phrase** in this directive from the Apostle Paul ...

Take ... the 'Sword which belongs to the Spirit' which is ...

2. THE 'WORD OF GOD' ... not LOGOS but RHEMA

Two Greek words for the 'Word of God' are used in the New Testament:

The first and far more common one is the word 'Logos' ...

"In the beginning was the Word (the Logos)" John declares ...

"Preach the Word (the Logos)" Paul instructed Timothy ...

"The Word of God (the Logos) is alive and powerful" Hebrews tells us ...

The word 'Logos' refers to the **body of truth** that is the Word of God.

Logos is used to refer to both the **written** Word of God (the Scriptures)

and to the **Living** Word of God (Jesus Christ).

Rhema (pronounced with a long "A" sound refers to ...

The **SPECIFIC** Word given in time of **NEED**

This word for 'word' is used far less frequently in the Scripture than the word 'Logos'. However Paul uses it here and it's significant that he does.

'Rhema' is never used to refer to the Scriptures as a whole ...

Let me share with you several examples ...

* Mary said to the angel ...

"Let it be to me according to your 'rhema'."
(Luke 1:38)

* Peter to Jesus on the day when the multitude turned away ...

"Where shall we go, you possess the words (rhema) of life"
(John 6:68)

* In the wilderness when he was tempted by the devil, Jesus said ...

*"Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word (rhema)
that proceeds from the mouth of God."*
(Matthew 4:4)

We will see in just a little bit how those (rhemati) were given to Jesus in the midst of that encounter ...

* Peter when testifying about the conversion of the Gentile Cornelius and his whole household said...

"Then I remembered what the Lord Jesus had said (rhema) ..."
(Acts 11:16)

I believe we are ready now for ...

TODAY'S EXPANDED DIRECTIVE ...

*'Take the powerful **SWORD** of the **SPIRIT** which is the specific Word of God **CHOSEN** and **GIVEN** to you in your **MOMENT** of **NEED**.'*

So ... the first part of our two-part question is answered which was:

"WHAT IS THIS WEAPON – This 'Sword of the Spirit'

"It is the specific Word of God chosen and given to us in our moments of need – especially when we are in the heat of the battle."

NOW THEN ... ON TO THE SECOND PART OF THAT TWO-PART QUESTION:

WHAT MUST WE DO TO USE IT WELL?

Three Key Steps:

1. IMMERSE YOURSELF IN GOD'S WRITTEN WORD

The Spirit's '*Rhema*' is always taken from or consistent with God's '*Logos*' so the more familiar we are with the '*Written Word of God*' the more room for '*Sword-Play*' there will be in our spiritual warfare. Immerse yourself in it.

Remember when we '*immersed ourselves*' in Psalm 119? Here again are some key reminders of how we should approach the written Word of God.

* **READ** it ... *"Open my eyes that I may see wondrous things in your law."* - Psalm 119:18

* **MEMORIZE** it ... *"Thy Word have I hid in my heart"* – Psalm 119:11

* **REFLECT** upon it ... *"I love your law! I meditate on it all day long."* – Psalm 119:97

(Journal your thoughts – write your own commentary – see what the Holy Spirit brings to mind in light of the circumstances that you are in – review what you have previously written.)

* Be **CHARACTERIZED** by it ... *"I run in the paths of your commands."* – Psalm 119:32

(Consciously and deliberately seek to implement the directives of Scripture into your daily life ... Look at the world through '*Biblical Eyes*'.)

2. KEEP YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT UNHINDERED

Obviously, if the **Sword** we will need for battle **belongs** to the Holy Spirit then we will need to be in such a relationship with Him that He can **hand us** that Sword on a moment's notice.

So we must be sure that nothing hinders our relationship – our fellowship – with Him.

The Apostle Paul was most concerned about that ...

Listen to these instructions regarding our relationship with the Holy Spirit within us ...

* Don't **GRIEVE** Him ... Ephesians 4:30

"Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."

* Don't **QUENCH** Him ... 1 Thessalonians 5:18

*"Do not put out the Spirit's fire (quench);
Do not treat prophecies with contempt."*

* Stay **FILLED** With Him ... Ephesians 5:18

*"Do not get drunk on wine which leads to debauchery.
Instead be filled with the Spirit."*

Basically Paul is saying ... Live in such an unhindered relationship with the Holy Spirit that He can easily place His Sharp Two-Edged Sword in your hands whenever it is needed.

SO ... If you would use the 'Sword of the Spirit' effectively and well ...

*"Immerse Yourself in God's Written Word" and
"Keep Your Relationship With the Holy Spirit Unhindered"*

THEN ...

3. LISTEN FOR THE SPIRIT'S VOICE ... Grab the **SWORD** when he **OFFERS** it!

* **JESUS DID** ...

*"At once, the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness." – Mark 1:12
'It is written – It is written – It is written' - Matthew 4:1-10*

Three times (and probably more) Satan swung his sword at Jesus there in the wilderness and every time Jesus parried the blow with a most specifically chosen and appropriate 'Rhema' of God!

The account of the battle can be read in the Gospel of Matthew Chapter Four and the Gospel of Luke Chapter Four ...

Read it and observe the Sword of the Spirit in action. **Jesus**, even in his weakened physical condition, clearly heard the Spirit's voice and grabbed the Sword when it was offered!

*** STEPHEN DID ...**

*"They could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit
by whom he spoke." – Acts 6:10*

Here was a young man confounding these who had rejected Christ.

They had no answer for the arguments for Christ that he advanced –
He spoke by the Spirit – He spoke words given to him by the Spirit and those
words slashed like a Sword.

They ultimately had to execute him to 'quiet him'.
Stephen clearly heard the Spirit's voice and 'grabbed the Spirit's Sword'.

*** JESUS SAID THAT WE ALL SHOULD ...**

*"Just say whatever is given you at the time for it is not you speaking
but the Holy Spirit." – Mark 13:11*

O what a thrill that is when it happens - when you find yourself saying
something that is 'Biblically Sound and Appropriately Applied'!

Sometimes those are words spoken to your own soul – sometimes they are
words that need to be shared with others – They are words that parry the
blows (the challenges) of the enemy and that keep us standing firm!

What an incredible piece of "**Battle Equipment**" ... The Sword of the Spirit!

Be ready at all times to 'take hold of it' and use it to 'protect yourself' from
the enemies advances against you. It is the **final piece** of your armor.

Consider yet once again the truth contained in this '**final thot**' ...

Final Thot ...

A **PROPERLY** outfitted Christian simply **CANNOT** be **KNOCKED** off
His **FEET** – When the **DUST** settles, He will be found **STANDING FIRM!**

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Forty-Eight"

Sunday's message focused upon the **sixth piece** of Spiritual Armor that Paul identifies in Ephesians chapter six ...

"THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT".

Would you say that the 'Sword of the Spirit' is the Bible – Why or why not?

In Sunday's message Pastor Mark pointed out the distinction between the Greek words: 'Logos' and 'Rhema'. Do you remember what that distinction was?

'Logos' generally refers to the **ENTIRE** content of God's Word while
'Rhema' refers to **SPECIFIC** utterances of God or of God's agents.

Check out these New Testament passages where the word 'Rhema' is used:
(Luke 1:38; John 6:68; Matthew 4:4; Acts 11:16)

In Ephesians 6:17 the word that Paul uses is the word 'Rhema' so what would you say that suggests about the nature of the 'Sword of the Spirit'?

(The Sword of the Spirit is a very specific '*message from God*' – a word specifically chosen for the particular battle in which the believer is engaged.)

So can we just '*take up the Sword*' whenever we feel the need or is there more to it? What do you think? Do you sometimes find yourself '*searching for just the right rhema*' – searching as it were for the Spirit's Sword?

What did Jesus say that we should do? (Mark 13:11)

What's your take on Sunday's expanded directive ...

'Take (hold of) the powerful **SWORD** of the **SPIRIT** which is the specific Word of God **CHOSEN** and **GIVEN** to you in your **MOMENT** of **NEED**.'

On Sunday, Pastor Mark shared **three steps** of preparation for 'Sword Play'.

- 1. IMMERSE** yourself in the Written Word of God – learn to think '*Biblically*'.
- 2. KEEP** your relationship with the Holy Spirit unhindered – stay close to Him.
- 3. LISTEN** for His Voice – Take hold of the Sword whenever He offers it to you.

Point to Ponder ...

Can you think of a time when you **WIELDED** the Sword of the Spirit?

"THE COM-LINK OF PRAYER"

'Grace Is The Key' Series
(Ephesians 6:18-20)

Intro ... Okay today is most likely the final time that we put this picture in front of you ... Here's our Roman Soldier – the inspiration for the Apostle Paul's teaching concerning the Armor of God.



Six pieces of Protective Spiritual Armor Paul mentions based upon the six pieces of armor or equipment that every Roman Soldier put on or took up every single day of his active duty life ... Here's how Paul identifies them:

The Belt of Truth

The Breastplate of Righteousness

The Battle Shoes of the Gospel of Peace

The Shield of Faith

The Helmet of Salvation (and)

The Sword of the Spirit.

The fully armored Christian Soldier is a formidable foe to the Enemy of our Faith.

The fully armored Christian Soldier simply cannot be knocked off his feet. When the day of evil comes, he stands his ground and does not give up an inch of the territory that the Lord Jesus Christ has won for him.

The fully armored Christian Soldier is the most protected, most prepared and most secure person in the world.

Paul had to be thrilled to find such a useful pattern – such a vivid image – to place in the minds and hearts of those Ephesian Believers.

This morning I want to finish up this series of lessons with a discussion of the **Seventh Piece** of Spiritual Armor – the one that the Roman Soldier did not have but that he desperately needed.

In fact it is such a desperate need that I have already added it myself to his now most familiar battle attire.

Do you see it ... the new item? It's right there in front of his right shoulder – a little black device of some sort ... Let's just zoom in on it.



It's a **communicator** – a communication device. Our 21st Century Technology can fulfill a 1st Century need – the need for warriors in battle to have continuous communication with their commanding officer.

Paul knew the need – but there just was nothing that the Soldiers of Rome possessed that could serve as an example so instead of a seventh piece of armor Paul just talked about a necessary battle practice.

Listen to his ongoing battle instructions in Ephesians 6 verse 18 – a verse that flows directly out and adds to the previous eight.

It's **Today's Key Text** ...

TODAY'S KEY TEXT ...

*"And **PRAY** in the Spirit on **ALL** occasions,
With **ALL KINDS** of prayers and requests."
(Ephesians 6:18)*

Allow me to suggest for the seventh piece of Spiritual Armor this ...

21ST CENTURY MILITARY APPLICATION ...

"FASTEN on securely the **COM-LINK** of **PRAYER**"
Maintain unbroken **COMMUNICATION**
with your **COMMANDING** Officer!

"Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests"

Let's continue Paul's practice of allowing the Roman soldier to be our example – our living parable of the Christian life ...

Imagine the Tribune Marcellus (outfitted with a 21st Century Communications Device) communicating with His Commanding Officer, Julius Caesar.

Imagine the different kinds of occasions that might have come up and the different kinds of communications that might have taken place.

"Commander Julius ... Tribune Marcellus here ... Victory is ours. The enemy army has been completely defeated. All those who have not been killed have surrendered. Prepare the victory parade for our return.

* * * * *

"Commander Julius ... Tribune Marcellus here ... We've run into an ambush. We've fought them off but I'm sure they will be back. We have wounded men in need of medical attention; we have many shattered shields and broken swords; a good number of our younger men are heading into panic mode. We need some experienced reinforcements and replacement equipment."

* * * * *

*"Commander Julius ... Tribune Marcellus here ... It is a glorious day!
The countryside is at peace and we have just entered one of the larger towns
in the area to the shouts and cheers of the people. It is a great feeling
to be a Roman and to be under your command."*

Unbroken Communication with the Commanding Officer ...
That's something we Christian Soldiers also need to experience –

That's something the Apostle Paul says is possible ...

*"Pray (communicate with your commanding officer) in the Spirit
on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests."*

Let's examine Paul's instruction phrase by phrases as he tells us exactly
HOW to use this' Com-Link of Prayer' in our daily warfare ...

*** PRAY ... IN THE SPIRIT**

(The Spirit is the Com-Link's Power Supply ... Don't short-circuit Him.)

This keeps coming up, doesn't it? Paul has already told us that the sharp, two-edged sword belongs to the Spirit and is given to us to use in our moment of greatest need – we must be filled with Him and stay close to Him, so He can hand us that sword on a moment's notice.

Now Paul points out that the Spirit is the one who makes our prayer connection happen. So again ... don't grieve Him or quench Him. Rely upon Him to convey the thoughts and needs (the desires even) of your heart directly to the Father's Throne!

*** PRAY ... ON ALL OCCASIONS**

(There is not an occasion that God is to be left out of.)

Don't 'save up' your 'prayer minutes' for just the most needy of circumstances – prayer is not just for emergencies. The Father enjoys sharing every moment of your life with you ... Remember – He is an infinite being – His switchboard is never overloaded – His mind is never distracted. There is a part of Him that is 100% devoted to you.

Think of him as your ultimate 'Face Book Friend' ... He's interested in your every thought and feeling – your joys and frustrations – your victories and your struggles. Keep the Comm-Link of prayer open continuously.

*** PRAY ... WITH ALL KINDS OF PRAYERS AND REQUESTS**

(Our type of prayer (adoration/confession/thanksgiving/supplication) should be appropriately chosen and our requests confidently yet submissively presented.)

Someone once said that the acronym **ACTS** can remind us of the various aspects of prayer: There's **Adoration** (praise and worship prayer) and there's **Confession** (acknowledging and owning-up prayer) and there's **Thanksgiving** (gratitude- expressing prayer) and there's **Supplication** (need-addressing, petitioning prayer).

Paul says that all these types of communications will eventually pass through our com-link to the Father's Himself. We recognize that He exercises final authority over all requests that we send along – He is our Commanding Officer. We content ourselves with the knowledge that He is overseeing the entire battle strategy.

At this point in the letter the Apostle Paul **expands** upon this prayer instruction – this battle preparation.

Here's ***Today's Full Text*** ...

TODAY'S FULL TEXT ... Ephesians 6:18-20

"And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should."

Did you notice the two additions?

*** PRAY ... FOR ALL THE SAINTS**

(Pray that they too might be fully armored and continually connected.
Stay aware of their life circumstances and bring their needs to the Father.)

By this statement Paul reminds us that we are not 'solitary soldiers' – we are all part of a larger unit of faith and our success in the battle is directly linked to the success of the entire unit. So after making sure that we are 'battle ready' we need to take note of those around us ... Are any of them unarmed? Are any of them experiencing 'battle fatigue'? Are any of them in need of some kind of reinforcement? Bring their needs to the attention of the Heavenly Father. Pray for them intelligently and faithfully.

***PRAY ... FOR CHRIST'S MINISTERS**

(Pray that they might effectively use the opportunities to speak for Christ that come to them by virtue of the calling that they possess.)

Paul then personally requests prayer ... prayer from the believers that will be added to his own prayers. Notice the two things that he asked for: Insightful words and a fearless spirit.

That's what every Minister for Christ needs: **Words** that will unravel what for all unbelievers is a great mystery ... the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the **Courage** to speak out those words when given the opportunity to do so. Ministers of Christ are often given opportunities to speak that others are not given.

Paul was in Roman custody, under arrest and awaiting trial before Caesar when he wrote this letter. It was a unique opportunity that came to him because he was the most notable Christian minister of his day. He asked them to pray for him.

I have the unique opportunity to stand before you every Sunday ... I don't want to speak nonsensical gibberish or be afraid to say what I know we all need to hear. I ask you to pray for me. And as you do so ...

"Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests."

And so we come to our **Final Thot** of the morning ...

Final Thot ...

Consistent **COMMUNICATION** with God is absolutely **ESSENTIAL** if we would win the battle and **STAND** our **GROUND!**

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Forty-Nine"

Sunday's message focused upon the previously unknown **seventh piece** of Spiritual Armor that Pastor Mark identified as ...

"THE COM-LINK OF PRAYER".

What was/is your reaction? What did Pastor Mark say was its purpose?

"To **MAINTAIN** unbroken **COMMUNICATION**
with our **COMMANDING OFFICER**"

The suggestion of this **Seventh Piece of Battle Equipment** which has no parallel to any First Century Roman Soldier's piece of equipment arises from the 'battle instructions' Paul gave in Ephesians 6:18-21.

*"And **pray** in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of **prayers** and **requests**.
With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying **for all the saints**."*

***Pray also for me**, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me
so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am
an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should."*

Here are three sample communiques Pastor Mark shared Sunday arising from the various 'occasions' that a First Century Roman Soldier might experience.
What kinds of prayers or occasions would you say they illustrate?

*"Commander Julius ... Tribune Marcellus here ... Victory is ours. The enemy army has been
completely defeated. All those who have not been killed have surrendered.
Prepare the victory parade for our return."*

* * * * *

*"Commander Julius ... Tribune Marcellus here ... We've run into an ambush. We've fought them off
but I'm sure they will be back. We have wounded men in need of medical attention; we have many
shattered shields and broken swords; a good number of our younger men are heading into panic mode.
We need some experienced reinforcements and replacement equipment."*

* * * * *

*"Commander Julius ... Tribune Marcellus here ... It is a glorious day! The countryside is at peace and
we have just entered one of the larger towns in the area to the shouts and cheers of the people.
It is a great feeling to be a Roman and to be under your command."*

On sheet of paper, write out three brief battlefield communiques that you as a Christian Soldier might send to your Commanding Officer in the course of your daily duties as a Christian Soldier ...

Point to Ponder ...

Do you always **REMEMBER** to **PUT** your Com-Link **ON?**

"THE FULLY ARMORED CHRISTIAN"

'Grace Is The Key' Series
(Ephesians 6:10-20)

Intro ...

Remember this '**Great Exhortation**' from the Apostle Paul?

PAUL'S GREAT EXHORTATION – Ephesians 4:1

"Live A Life **WORTHY** Of The **CALLING** You Have **RECEIVED!**"

Live in such a way that it is apparent to all that
You are a 'Born-Again Child of God'!

That exhortation transitioned us from the first half of this Ephesian Letter – three chapters that centered on Christian Doctrine – to the second half – three chapters that centered on Christian Behavior. With this exhortation Paul transitioned us from a period of learning about our faith into a period of living out our faith.

*"Live in such a way that it is apparent to all that
you are indeed A 'Born-Again Child of God'!"*

That, of course is no easy task and so Paul filled the rest of the letter (chapters 4-6) with specific directives to be followed – **key directives** that, if followed, would actually result in us living "A Life Worthy of the Calling we have received". There were **nine** of them all together.

Here are the first eight he mentioned: Live Harmoniously, Live Maturely, Live Purely, Live Honestly, Live Pleasantly, Live Inquiringly, Live Worshipfully and Live Submissively with one another.

Remember the **ninth** and final '**Key Directive**' the Apostle Paul gave concerning the living of that 'Worthy Life'?

PAUL'S NINTH KEY DIRECTIVE ... Ephesians 6:13

LIVE STEADFASTLY – "Stand your ground"

NO RETREAT – NO SURRENDER – NO MATTER WHAT!

All that we possess has been given to us – we are not directed to be continuing ‘*winning new territory*’ we are directed to hold on to and guard that which we have been given. ‘*Standing Firm For Christ*’ is a most ‘*Worthy Way*’ to live.

Standing Firm is a God-Honoring, God-Pleasing Way to Live ...
It’s the way that all true believers truly want to live ...
No Retreat – No Surrender – No Matter What!

Remember what the Apostle Paul told us to do so we could in fact
‘*Live Steadfastly*’ – the specific battle instruction he gave us?

PAUL’S SPECIFIC BATTLE INSTRUCTION ...

“Put on the whole **ARMOR** of God so you can **TAKE** your **STAND** ...”
(Ephesians 6:11)

Put on (take up) the whole armor of God ... all seven pieces!

The ***Belt*** of Truth – The ***Breastplate*** of Righteousness – The ***Battle Shoes*** of
the Gospel of Peace – The ***Shield*** of Faith – The ***Helmet*** of Salvation –
The ***Sword*** of The Spirit and (the seventh one we identified just last week)
The ***Com-Link*** of Prayer.

Having identified and discussed them all over the past seven weeks,
consider now with me ...

TODAY’S KEY CONCEPT ...

Once on, the Christian’s **ARMOR** is **NEVER** to be **TAKEN** off!

It is true ... You can sleep in it ... It should fit you as comfortably as
your own skin ... It is a depiction of your life in Christ – It is a kind of
tangible representation of the Character of Christ –
Jesus was fully armored at all times!

Praying the **WARRIOR’S PRAYER** can help you
‘**PUT** it on’ and make sure that it ‘**STAYS** on’.

Praying the Warrior’s Prayer is like ‘*looking in the mirror*’
to make sure that everything is in proper place
before you head out into the world.

Today I would like to make a contribution to the battle.

TODAY'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE BATTLE ...

"MY Sonlife WARRIOR'S PRAYER"

- Allow it to speak to your heart -

I would like to offer to you my version of the 'Warrior's Prayer' ... It's been a delight this past week to formulate it ... I believe that on more than one occasion the Spirit has slipped His Sword into my hand. The test of that will be whether or not it speaks to your heart and whether or not the Spirit in you speaks words of affirmation to you as it is read.

Don't try to take notes ... Copies will be available after the service. The full text will be posted on our church Website this week. You might want to even close your eyes and simply picture the pieces of armor as I read this prayer. It will take a while – It's an extended prayer.

MY Sonlife WARRIOR PRAYER ...

I pray this day, Heavenly Father, that out of Your glorious riches, You may strengthen me with power through Your Spirit in my inner being, so that Christ may dwell in my heart through faith.

And I pray that I, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — so that I may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

And I also pray, Father, that today I might take my stand against the devil's schemes and not surrender one inch of the territory that Jesus Christ has won for me but that when the dust settles at the end of this day I will be found 'standing firm'.

And now Father, to that end I do ready myself for today's battles by equipping myself with every piece of spiritual armor that You have made available to me.

First of all, I fasten securely around my waist the **Belt of Truth** and as I do so I rejoice in the marvelous impact Your Truth makes in my life:

Your Truth completely guards me from error – it insulates me from the lies and the deceptions of the Enemy. It highlights the incorrect and short-sighted thinking that characterizes the world around me. Your truth keeps me from putting my feet on the broad path of human reasoning.

Your Truth frees me from so many kinds of bondage that tie up and hinder those who know not your truth – bondages to guilt and shame; bondages to man-made systems of religion; bondages to ungodly societal standards; even bondage to sin itself and to the condemnation it brings.

Your Truth separates me from the world system around me – the system of thought that is atheistic and naturalistic - the system of thought that only values the truth that comes through human discovery and that discounts all truth that has come through Divine Revelation.

Most importantly of all,
Your Truth draws me close to the Person of Jesus Christ, Your Beloved Son.

Jesus is the embodiment of Your Truth – when I walk in Your Truth, when I delight in Your Truth, when I speak Your Truth to those around me, I feel His Presence and His Pleasure.

Secondly now, I place carefully upon myself the **Breastplate of Righteousness** and as I do so a tremendous sense of your gracious provision comes over me.

You have provided for me – placed on my account as it were – the very Righteousness of Jesus Christ – the righteousness that is required of anyone who would enter into Your Presence and be received as one of Your Own.

This Imputed Righteousness provides me with a great confidence in my own salvation. You have declared me to be righteous in Your Sight and Your decrees can not be overturned or even debated.

But more than that ... You have placed within me a righteous seed – a new life that is itself conformed to and committed to the righteous life that You desire from those who have become Yours.

And You have placed within me as well a portion of Your Own Holy Spirit to nurture that righteous seed and to help it grow into maturity and to thus cause me to actually experience righteous living in the midst of this unrighteous world.

This Experienced Righteousness bears witness to those who know me that I have indeed become a Child of God.

And in addition to this you have placed within my mind and heart the prospect of me someday dwelling in the new heaven and earth which the Apostle Peter called the 'Home of Righteousness'.

The thought of this Completed Righteousness which I will someday enjoy will surely encourage and strengthen my heart this day.

Thirdly now as I ready myself for the day, I check to make sure that my feet are properly fitted with the **Battle Shoes of the Gospel of Peace** for there are many things in this unpredictable and frequently unfair world that could easily 'knock me off my feet' were I not so properly shod .

The Gospel of Peace stabilizes me – the Gospel of Peace contains the kinds of assurances that keep me 'standing firm' even when all else seems to be giving way.

*** The Gospel of Peace Assures me of Your Complete Forgiveness ...**

I know what it's like to begin to doubt when troublesome times come – I know what it's like to question my salvation when my experience of righteousness falls short and I find myself falling back into sinful ways.

But my own momentary failures will not cause me to give up or lose ground for I am confident that you have completely forgiven me in Christ – the Gospel of Peace assures me of that.

*** The Gospel of Peace Assures me of Your Love and Care ...**

What a marvelously stabilizing thing it is to know that You really do love and care for me personally ... You know my name and you have a personal interest in me ... You want to see me grow and mature as a Child of God and you are committed to me as the best of earthly Fathers would be. I can count on you and that confidence stabilizes me tremendously.

*** The Gospel of Peace Assures me of Your Personal Presence ...**

The Apostle Paul once confidently asserted ...

"If God be for us, who can be against us?"

I would like to say, Father ...

"If God be with me, who can frighten me?"

One of the most peace-producing things contained in the Gospel is that You are indeed with me – that you will never leave me or forsake me – and knowing that makes my feet grip the ground even more securely.

*** The Gospel of Peace Assures me of Your Sustaining Grace ...**

There is nothing more comforting – more peace generating – than the knowledge that Your Grace will be sufficient for every situation I will ever encounter in this fallen, sin-filled world.

You told the Apostle Paul that Your Power would be 'made perfect' in his times of greatest weakness – I believe that's true of me as well and so I will confidently 'stand firm and hold my ground' when difficulties arise for I will expect Your Grace to sustain me.

Your grace provides me the power to stand firm and that thought surely brings a sense of stability to me.

*** The Gospel of Peace Assures me of Your Ultimate Triumph**

Evil is not going to win out ... You are patiently drawing all things to their pre-determined end. Jesus said that this 'Gospel of Peace' must first be preached in all the world and then the end would come and when that end comes You will gather all those who are Yours unto Yourself.

That truth will keep me standing firm during days when it could seem like the battle is being lost.

And now, as I further prepare myself for this day, I take up the **Shield of Faith**.

I marvel at its size ... It can completely cover me if I properly position myself behind it. Faith has a way of shielding me from so much stuff if I just remember to use it.

Faith ... that commitment to trust You regardless of the circumstances ...
has amazing protective powers.

I long as I continue to 'trust You' I don't have to fear any of the
'Flaming Arrows' of Doubt or Despair that the devil would send my way.

Faith will link me to all the men and women of faith who have preceded me
and who have demonstrated for me faith's utility – men like Job and Noah
and Abraham and David and women like Rahab and Mary.

These all died with their faith intact - unharmed by the devil's attacks
against them. That's how I want to live and end this day.

As I crouch behind the Shield of Faith, I am reminded of the observation
made by the Apostle John when he said ...

"This is the victory that overcomes the world –
even our faith."

The fact that I do believe in Jesus Christ and in His Words is the very definition
of victory – this is the faith that I know pleases You and that shields me from
anything the enemy would send against me.

And now as I pick up the **Helmet of Salvation** I marvel at its beauty.

This helmet will keep the devil from 'messaging with my mind'.
This helmet will guard me from the confusion and bewilderment
with which the devil would like to fill my mind.

He knows that if he can get me to question my salvation – if he can get me
to forget essential aspects of my salvation – if he can get me to lose the
wonder to say nothing of the assurance of my salvation,
then he will have won a great victory.

This I cannot and will not allow to happen – I will not allow my mind
to remain unguarded with regard to the marvelous salvation
that You have provided for me.

As I place the Helmet of Salvation on my head, I will focus my mind upon the
Four Great Salvation Affirmations that provide its protective power.

I affirm that You Chose Me for salvation long before the world began.

I affirm that You Changed Me – You raised me from spiritual death to spiritual life – You placed that Seed of Life within me.

I affirm that You Called Me to embrace Your Son, Jesus, as my Savior and Lord – a Call to which I did eagerly and to which I do continually respond.

I affirm that You Are Presently Conforming Me to Christ's Image and that I am showing myself more and more to be a Born-Again Child of God.

These Salvation Affirmations keep my Helmet of Salvation strapped on tight - no mortal wounds to my mind need I fear when it is securely in place.

And now I ready myself to take the **Sword of the Spirit** – that enemy- repelling Word of God given to me by Your Holy Spirit in my moment of need.

As I walk through this day I will keep my free hand open so that Your Holy Spirit can slip me that powerful Sword on a moment's notice.

I will trust that words will be given to me whenever I find myself in close combat with the forces of the enemy or even with the enemy himself.

I know that the 'Words' Your Spirit gives to me in the midst of the battle will always be either 'Words' that you have previously spoken or 'Words' that are consistent with and perhaps an application of 'Words that you have previously spoken'.

So to that end I will immerse myself in Your Written Word – I will seek to fill my mind with knowledge of Your Will and Your Ways.

And as I seek to make Your Word very familiar to me – I will as well seek to make Your Holy Spirit very comfortable with me.

I will seek to 'Walk in Step with Him' and to allow myself to be 'Filled with Him'. I will surely seek to avoid ever 'Grieving' or worse yet 'Quenching' Him.

Our relationship needs to be close and compatible if I am to ever brandish His Sword in battle.

Finally Father, there is a piece of equipment for battle that only we 21st Century Christians can visualize but for us it perfectly pictures what the Apostle Paul so wanted the believers of the 1st Century to understand.

As the Final Piece of Spiritual Armor – My Seventh Piece of Battle Equipment –
I Fasten securely to myself the **Com-Link of Prayer**.

There is a great need, Father, for me to remain in unbroken
communication with you all day long.

Paul said that I should ...
“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.”

If he could have foreseen the developments of the next 2000 years,
he might well have said ...

‘Employ your Com-Link of Prayer continually’.

Every detail of every situation needs to be shared with You.

Now since the Gospel of Peace assures me that you are continually with me
and that you deeply love and care for me and that Your supply of grace
is more than sufficient for me, how awesome is it that I can
maintain unbroken communication with you!

I will never allow You to be ‘out of my loop’.
I will continually rejoice that we are in this together!

AND SO ... Being now fully and completely outfitted for today's battle,
I pray that ...

‘You, (who are able to do immeasurably more than all I can ask or
even imagine) will, (according to Your power that is at work within me)
be glorified this day in my life! Amen!

So now all that remains this morning is pointing out the pretty obvious truth
contained in today's **Final Thot** ...

Final Thot ... If your **ARMOR** isn't **ALL ON**, It's not **ON** at **ALL!**

Never go out half-dressed for ‘half-dressed’ is actually ‘undressed’.

Hint: You may not have time for the whole prayer each day but be sure
you take a quick glance in the mirror – physically touch each part of your
body as you make sure you have your full armor on.

Sonlife
REFLECTION

"GRACE IS THE KEY SERIES"

"Lesson Fifty"

This past Sunday as we concluded our investigation of the '**Armor of God**', Pastor Mark presented us with a 'Warrior's Prayer' – a prayer designed to help us 'put on' and 'keep on' that very armor.

By way of review and hopefully to create a time of reflection, see if you can match up these statements from the 'Warrior's Prayer' with the particular piece of armor to which they apply. Just write the name in the blank in front of each statement ...

**(Belt of Truth- Breastplate of Righteousness – Battle Shoes of the Gospel of Peace –
Shield of Faith – Helmet of Salvation – Sword of the Spirit – Com Link of Prayer)**

_____ (This) insulates me from the lies and the deceptions of the Enemy. It highlights the incorrect and short-sighted thinking that characterizes the world around me. (It) keeps me from putting my feet on the broad path of human reasoning.

_____ What a marvelously stabilizing thing it is to know that You really do love and care for me personally ... You know my name and You have a personal interest in me. You want to see me grow and mature as a Child of God and You are committed to me as the best of earthly Fathers would be. I can count on You and that confidence stabilizes me tremendously.

_____ (This piece of armor) provides me with a great confidence in my own salvation. You have declared me to be righteous in Your Sight and Your decrees can not be overturned or even debated.

_____ Evil is not going to win out... You are patiently drawing all things to their predetermined. Jesus said that this 'Gospel of Peace' must first be preached in all the world and then the end would come and when that end comes You will gather all those who are Yours unto Yourself. That truth will keep me standing firm during days when it could seem like the battle is being lost.

_____ (This piece of armor) can completely cover me if I properly position myself behind it. (It) has a way of shielding me from so much stuff if I just remember to use it.

_____ As I walk through this day I will keep my free hand open so that Your Holy Spirit can slip me (this piece of armor) on a moment's notice.

_____ The fact that I do believe in Jesus Christ and in His Words is the very definition of victory – this is the faith that I know pleases You and that shields me from anything the enemy would send against me.

_____ This will keep the devil from 'messaging with my mind'. (It) will guard me from the confusion and bewilderment with which the devil would like to fill my mind.

_____ There is nothing more comforting – more peace generating – than the knowledge that Your Grace will be sufficient for every situation I will ever encounter in this fallen, sin-filled world.

_____ And as I seek to make Your Word very familiar to me – I will as well seek to make Your Holy Spirit very comfortable with me. I will seek to 'Walk in Step with Him' and to allow myself to be 'Filled with Him' – I will surely seek to avoid ever 'Grieving' or worse yet 'Quenching' Him.

_____ ... (This piece of armor) separates me from the world system around me – the system of thought that is atheistic and naturalistic - the system of thought that only values the truth that comes through human discovery and that discounts all truth that has come through Divine Revelation.

_____ There is a great need, Father, for me to remain in unbroken communication with you all day long. Every detail of every situation needs to be shared with You. I will never allow You to be 'out of my loop'.

_____ I know what it's like to begin to doubt when troublesome times come – I know what it's like to question my salvation when my experience of righteousness falls short and I find myself falling back into sinful ways. But my own momentary failures will not cause me to give up or lose ground for I am confident that you have completely forgiven me in Christ – (this piece of armor) assures me of that.

Answers In Order:

Belt of Truth – Battle Shoes – Breastplate of Righteousness – Battle Shoes – Shield of Faith –
Sword of the Spirit -Shield of Faith – Helmet of Salvation – Battle Shoes – Sword of the Spirit –
Belt of Truth – Com-Link of Prayer – Breastplate of Righteousness

Point To Ponder ...

Can I **FAIL** to **LIVE** a
'Life that is worthy of the Calling I have received'
If I '**KEEP** my **ARMOR** on'?

“A BAND OF ENCOURAGERS”

‘Grace Is The Key’ Series
(Ephesians 6:21-24)

Intro ... Today we come to our final message taken from Paul's marvelous Epistle to the Ephesians ... We have spent over a year in our investigation of this Inspired New Testament Book.

Today I would have us focus our attention upon the man who was chosen to transport this letter from the city of Rome to the city of Ephesus – a journey of some 1,200 miles, mostly by ship.

The man's name was Tychicus ... Paul called him:

“A dear brother and faithful servant of the Lord.”

He obviously was also a courageous brother and one who sincerely trusted the Lord – It was no insignificant or easy task that he was assigned.

To carry the Inspired Word of God to a congregation of saints – to cross dangerous and unpredictable seas – to stay healthy and strong over the several months that the journey would take.

But as daunting as the physical aspect of the task was that was not the most difficult part of his task.

Notice what else Paul says ...

Today's Key Scripture ...

*“He (Tychicus) will **TELL** you **EVERYTHING**, so you will also may know how I am and what I am doing. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may **ENCOURAGE** you.”*
(Ephesians 6:21-22)

Tychicus had a two-fold assignment – Did you pick up on it?
Here's how I would phrase it ...

I hear Paul saying it this way:

Tychicus' Two-Fold Assignment ...

"Tychicus ... TELL them EVERYTHING and tell them in such a way that THEY will be ENCOURAGED."

What a task ... To be an encourager of the Church Family.

What a skill ... To share truth in an encouraging way.

Now the truth of it is ...

That's not an easy task "*sharing truth in an encouraging way*".

Just imagine the impact if Tychicus had shared the '**truth**' this way ...

How is Paul? Well, how do you think he is ... He's been pelted with stones on several occasions and left for dead ... He's been flogged at least five times that I know of ... His body is basically one big scar ... He's in almost continual pain ... His name is Mudd in Rome where they are about to try him for treason ... His eyesight is terrible –even this letter that I'm delivering had to be written by someone else and beyond all this he endures a kind of torment that he has pleaded with God to take away and God has absolutely refused to do it. And every time he hears something distressing about any of the churches it completely tears him up. It's enough to make you want to cry. In fact, we don't we all have a good cry right now?

Tychicus could have said exactly that and successfully met the first part of his assignment which was '*Tell them how I am and what I am doing*' but he would have completely botched the second part ...

"And tell them in such a way that you encourage their hearts"

How about this as an option ...

So how is Paul doing? Well let me tell you ...

He is the most amazing man of God I have ever been around – He's been so beat up over the years that his body is like one big scar but he bears every one of those scars proudly – he can even tell you where he was when he got each one – The flogging in Phillippi that landed him and Silas in jail the night of the big earthquake – the stoning in Iconium that left everybody stunned when he dragged himself out from under that pile of rocks and went right back to preaching – the near fatal beating that he endured in Jerusalem the day the Jews dragged him out of the temple where he was worshipping ... He's proud of them all – he says it's such a privilege to 'share in the sufferings of Christ' ... I've never known anyone like him. I know that he is in nearly constant pain but he seems to almost rejoice in it.

And of course he's under arrest there in Rome and his ministry has been pretty much curtailed but the letter I carry here in my hand says that he is making good use of the time.

Though his body is stuck in Rome, it's like his mind and heart are free to travel throughout the Empire ... I listened in while he was dictating this letter that I am delivering to you and the one that I am taking to the Church in Philippi and the one that going to the Church in Colossae and the one that is heading for the Church in Galatia and it's like he was sitting right there with you as the words flowed from his lips. He doesn't feel or acknowledge any actual confinement – His spirit is free.

And by the way, wait to you get to the end of this letter that he wrote to you. You can't understand it now but let me say that Paul is a most '*fully armored*' soldier for Jesus Christ. It has been and continues to be a blessing and a privilege to minister with him.

Now that is the truth of Paul's condition seen through the lens of faith and revelation. God's work was going forward – Paul's sufferings had incredible purpose and can provide inspiration for others to follow in his steps.

And that's the way the truth of our lives will be seen when we look through that same lens. So ...

Here's Today's Key Observation...

Christ would have all of us be:

ENCOURAGEMENT - GENERATING TRUTH-TELLERS!

Christ would have all of his followers be people who look at the circumstances of their lives through that lens of faith and revelation and who encourage their fellow believers to do the same.

After spending an entire year in this inspired Ephesian Letter, wouldn't you say that we are pretty ready to be that? Let's just ask ourselves ...

* Knowing what we know now about the **WORKINGS** of God in raising up what we have called His **FINAL FAMILY** of **FAITH**, how can we not be encouraged and how can we not speak of those **WORKINGS** in such a way that we and our fellow-believers are encouraged?

* Being carefully directed how to '**LIVE** a life **WORTHY** of the **CALLING** we have received, how can we not be encouraged and how can we not speak of these things in such a way that we and our fellow-believers are encouraged?

* Being fully outfitted with the **ARMOR** of **GOD**, how can we not be encouraged and how can we not speak of these pieces of **ARMOR** in such a way that we and our fellow-believers are encouraged?

Through His Divine Word, God has shared with us an incredible amount of His Truth ... What a privilege it is to rehearse that truth regularly with ourselves and with one another and to encourage ourselves and one another as we do so.

Pastor Mark's Sonlife Community Church 20th Anniversary Prayer ...

*That Sonlife Community Church will be forever known
as a Fellowship of Believers who continually*

***"ENCOURAGE one another by SHARING
God's TRUTH with one another".***

Notice the encouraging way that Paul ends this letter as he highlights just a few of the marvelous things he has addressed in this great epistle ...

* "**PEACE** to the brothers"

I hear Paul saying ...

"He himself is our peace who has destroyed the barrier between Jew and Gentile and has created in himself one new man thus making peace".

That was a key message that he carried throughout the entire Roman world.

* "**LOVE** with **FAITH** from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"

Here is echoed Paul's prayer that the Father may 'strengthen us with power in our inner being so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith' and that as a result we might have power to know and to experience the limitless love that Christ brings with him. We have prayed that prayer as a congregation every Sunday for the past number of months.

* “**GRACE** to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love”.

Ever more spiritual strength and power is given to those who truly love the Lord Jesus with an ‘undying love’. What a great expression – What a way to encourage our hearts ...

We possess an undying love for the Savior! The love we have for Him will not die with us but will be waiting for us on the other side!

Surely one of the most encouraging things that I have experienced over the now 20 year history of this Congregation is the example that so many of our members have lived out before us ... Men and women who have viewed their lives through the lens of faith and revelation who have come to the end of their days with their faith intact and hearts at peace.

Men like Lee Greene and Jim Landreth and Lyle Smith ... three men who stood at the door on that very first Sunday and welcomed over 140 people to that very first gathering of *Sonlife* Community Church.

Men and women like Dorothy Herschelroath and Ralph Agens and Ken and Doris Schleusner and Wynona Brock and Del Tucker and Helen Stefferrud and Dorothy Bishop and Ron Carlson and Bea Palmer and Cathy Crase and Gene Neisen and Ann Neison and Barbara Lueck and Roy and Virginia Adams and Bob Abolnik and George and Wilma Cain and Larry Alexander and Millie McClure.

Each of these entered into the Lord’s Presence with that undying love for Christ filling their hearts – love sustained by the wondrous Grace of God! Their lives inspire and encourage me.

And so now we end this extended series of messages with a ***Final Thot*** that expresses the very truth with which we began it ...

Final Thot ...

GRACE is indeed the **KEY** to all that **GOD** would have us be.
So continually **EMBRACE** the ‘**RICHES** of His **GRACE**’!

In Sunday's concluding message from our extended study of the Book of Ephesians, Pastor Mark focused our attention upon the man **TYCHICUS** who bore the responsibility of delivering this letter to the Ephesian Church.

Paul assigned Tychicus a two-fold task ... Here's how Pastor Mark expressed it ...

"Tell them **EVERYTHING** about me: how I am and what I am doing and do it in such a way that they will be **ENCOURAGED**."

How tough of a task would you say that was? Why do you say so?

How difficult is it to ...

'SPEAK the **TRUTH** in an **ENCOURAGING** way'?

Pretend you are a young believer in the Church in Ephesus and Tychicus had given his report this way ... How do you feel? Would you be encouraged or discouraged?

How is Paul? Well, how do you think he is ... He's been pelted with stones on several occasions and left for dead ... He's been flogged at least five times that I know of ... His body is basically one big scar ... He's in almost continual pain ... His name is Mudd in Rome where they are about to try him for treason ... His eyesight is terrible – even this letter that I'm delivering had to be written by someone else and beyond all this he endures a kind of torment that he has pleaded with God to take away and God has absolutely refused to do it. And every time he hears something distressing about any of the churches it completely tears him up. It's enough to make you want to cry!

How about if he had given his report **this way** ... Make any difference?

So how is Paul doing? Well, let me tell you ... He is the most amazing man of God I have ever been around – He's been so beat up over the years that his body is like one big scar but he bears every one of those scars proudly – he can even tell you where he was when he got each one – The flogging in Phillippi that landed him and Silas in jail the night of the big earthquake – the stoning in Iconium that left everybody stunned when he dragged himself out from under that pile of rocks and went right back to preaching – the near fatal beating that he endured in Jerusalem the day the Jews dragged him out of the temple where he was worshipping ... He's proud of them all – he says it's such a privilege to 'share in the sufferings of Christ' ... I've never known anyone like him. I know that he is in nearly constant pain but he seems to almost rejoice in it.

And of course he's under arrest there in Rome and his ministry has been pretty much curtailed but the letter I carry here in my hand says that he is making good use of the time.

Though his body is stuck in Rome, it's like his mind and heart are free to travel throughout the Empire ... I listened in while he was dictating this letter that I am delivering to you and the one that I am taking to the Church in Philippi and the one that going to the Church in Colossae and the one that is heading for the Church in Galatia and it's like he was sitting right there with you as the words flowed from his lips. He doesn't feel or acknowledge any actual confinement – His spirit is free.

And by the way, wait to you get to the end of this letter that he wrote to you. You can't understand it now but let me say that Paul is a most '*fully armored*' soldier for Jesus Christ. It has been and continues to be both a blessing and a privilege to minister with him.

What's the difference between these two '*imagined*' reports? In the second version, was Tychicus just putting a good '*spin*' on the situation or is there more than that at work?

Pastor Mark said that the second report would be the result of looking at Paul's situation '*through the lens of faith and revelation*' ... What do you think that means?

REVELATION is what God has said –
FAITH is me believing that what He has said is **TRUE**.

Was that the way that Paul himself was looking at his situation?

Should we look at our life situations in that way ...
What happens when we do?

Well, we might just find our brothers and sisters in Christ talking about us the way that we have imagined Tychicus talking about Paul ... Wouldn't that be something!

Final Wrap-Up ...

Take a moment and quickly skim through Ephesians ...

Pick out several verses that have particularly impacted you during this year of study. Reflect upon what their impact has been. Write down your conclusions.

My Sonlife **WARRIOR PRAYER**

'Standing Firm Against The Devil's Schemes'



Pastor Mark Allen Mikels
Sonlife Community Church
Apple Valley, Ca

MY Sonlife WARRIOR PRAYER ...

I pray this day, Heavenly Father, that out of Your glorious riches, You may strengthen me with power through Your Spirit in my inner being, so that Christ may dwell in my heart through faith.

And I pray that I, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — so that I may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

And I also pray, Father, that today I might take my stand against the devil's schemes and not surrender one inch of the territory that Jesus Christ has won for me but that when the dust settles at the end of this day I will be found 'standing firm'.

And now Father, to that end I do ready myself for today's battles by equipping myself with every piece of spiritual armor that You have made available to me.

First of all, I fasten securely around my waist the **Belt of Truth** and as I do so I rejoice in the marvelous impact Your Truth makes in my life:

Your Truth completely guards me from error – it insulates me from the lies and the deceptions of the Enemy. It highlights the incorrect and short-sighted thinking that characterizes the world around me. Your truth keeps me from putting my feet on the broad path of human reasoning.

Your Truth frees me from so many kinds of bondage that tie up and hinder those who know not your truth – bondages to guilt and shame; bondages to man-made systems of religion; bondages to ungodly societal standards; even bondage to sin itself and to the condemnation it brings.

Your Truth separates me from the world system around me – the system of thought that is atheistic and naturalistic - the system of thought that only values the truth that comes through human discovery and that discounts all truth that has come through Divine Revelation.

Most importantly of all,
Your Truth draws me close to the Person of Jesus Christ,
Your Beloved Son.

Jesus is the embodiment of Your Truth – when I walk in Your Truth,
when I delight in Your Truth, when I speak Your Truth to those around me,
I feel His Presence and His Pleasure.

Secondly now, I place carefully upon myself the **Breastplate of Righteousness**
and as I do so a tremendous sense of your gracious provision comes over me.

You have provided for me – placed on my account as it were –
the very Righteousness of Jesus Christ – the righteousness that is required
of anyone who would enter into Your Presence and be received
as one of Your Own.

This Imputed Righteousness provides me with a great confidence in
my own salvation. You have declared me to be righteous in Your Sight
and Your decrees can not be overturned or even debated.

But more than that ... You have placed within me a righteous seed –
a new life that is itself conformed to and committed to the righteous life
that You desire from those who have become Yours.

And You have placed within me as well a portion of Your Own
Holy Spirit to nurture that righteous seed and to help it grow into
maturity and to thus cause me to actually experience righteous
living in the midst of this unrighteous world.

This Experienced Righteousness bears witness to those who know me
that I have indeed become a Child of God.

And in addition to this you have placed within my mind and heart
the prospect of me someday dwelling in the new heaven and earth
which the Apostle Peter called the 'Home of Righteousness'.

The thought of this Completed Righteousness which I will someday enjoy
will surely encourage and strengthen my heart this day.

Thirdly now as I ready myself for the day, I check to make sure that my feet are properly fitted with the **Battle Shoes of the Gospel of Peace** for there are many things in this unpredictable and frequently unfair world that could easily 'knock me off my feet' were I not so properly shod .

The Gospel of Peace stabilizes me – the Gospel of Peace contains the kinds of assurances that keep me 'standing firm' even when all else seems to be giving way.

The Gospel of Peace Assures me of Your Complete Forgiveness ...

I know what it's like to begin to doubt when troublesome times come – I know what it's like to question my salvation when my experience of righteousness falls short and I find myself falling back into sinful ways.

But my own momentary failures will not cause me to give up or lose ground for I am confident that you have completely forgiven me in Christ – the Gospel of Peace assures me of that.

The Gospel of Peace Assures me of Your Love and Care ...

What a marvelously stabilizing thing it is to know that You really do love and care for me personally ... You know my name and you have a personal interest in me ... You want to see me grow and mature as a Child of God and you are committed to me as the best of earthly Fathers would be. I can count on you and that confidence stabilizes me tremendously.

The Gospel of Peace Assures me of Your Personal Presence ...

The Apostle Paul once confidently asserted ...
'If God be for us, who can be against us?'

I would like to say, Father,
"If God be with me, who can frighten me?"

One of the most peace-producing things contained in the Gospel is that You are indeed with me – that you will never leave me or forsake me – and knowing that makes my feet grip the ground even more securely.

The Gospel of Peace Assures me of Your Sustaining Grace ...

There is nothing more comforting – more peace generating – than the knowledge that Your Grace will be sufficient for every situation I will ever encounter in this fallen, sin-filled world.

You told the Apostle Paul that Your Power would be ‘made perfect’ in his times of greatest weakness – I believe that’s true of me as well and so I will confidently ‘stand firm and hold my ground’ when difficulties arise for I will expect Your Grace to sustain me.

Your grace provides me the power to stand firm and that thought surely brings a sense of stability to me.

The Gospel of Peace Assures me of Your Ultimate Triumph

Evil is not going to win out ... You are patiently drawing all things to their pre-determined end. Jesus said that this ‘Gospel of Peace’ must first be preached in all the world and then the end would come and when that end comes You will gather all those who are Yours unto Yourself.

That truth will keep me standing firm during days when it could seem like the battle is being lost.

And now, as I further prepare myself for this day, I take up the **Shield of Faith**.

I marvel at its size ... It can completely cover me if I properly position myself behind it. Faith has a way of shielding me from so much stuff if I just remember to use it.

Faith ... that commitment to trust You regardless of the circumstances ... has amazing protective powers.

I long as I continue to ‘trust You’ I don’t have to fear any of the ‘Flaming Arrows’ of Doubt or Despair that the devil would send my way.

Faith will link me to all the men and women of faith who have preceded me and who have demonstrated for me faith’s utility – men like Job and Noah and Abraham and David and women like Rahab and Mary.

These all died with their faith intact - unharmed by the devil's attacks against them. That's how I want to live and end this day.

As I crouch behind the Shield of Faith, I am reminded of the observation made by the Apostle John when he said ...

"This is the victory that overcomes the world –
even our faith."

The fact that I do believe in Jesus Christ and in His Words is the very definition of victory – this is the faith that I know pleases You and that shields me from anything the enemy would send against me.

I now as I pick up the Helmet of Salvation I marvel at its beauty.

This helmet will keep the devil from 'messaging with my mind'.
This helmet will guard me from the confusion and bewilderment
with which the devil would like to fill my mind.

He knows that if he can get me to question my salvation – if he can get me to forget essential aspects of my salvation – if he can get me to lose the wonder to say nothing of the assurance of my salvation,
then he will have won a great victory.

This I cannot and will not allow to happen – I will not allow my mind
to remain unguarded with regard to the marvelous salvation
that You have provided for me.

As I place the Helmet of Salvation on my head, I will focus my mind
upon the Four Great Salvation Affirmations that
provide its protective power.

I affirm that You Chose Me for salvation
long before the world began.

I affirm that You Changed Me – You raised me from spiritual death
to spiritual life – You placed that Seed of Life within me.

I affirm that You Called Me to embrace Your Son, Jesus, as my Savior and Lord – a Call to which I did eagerly and to which I do continually respond.

I affirm that You Are Presently Conforming Me to Christ's Image and that I am showing myself more and more to be a Born-Again Child of God.

These Salvation Affirmations keep my Helmet of Salvation strapped on tight - no mortal wounds to my mind need I fear when it is securely in place.

And now I ready myself to take the **Sword of the Spirit** – that enemy- repelling Word of God given to me by Your Holy Spirit in my moment of need.

As I walk through this day I will keep my free hand open so that Your Holy Spirit can slip me that powerful Sword on a moment's notice.

I will trust that words will be given to me whenever I find myself in close combat with the forces of the enemy or even with the enemy himself.

I know that the 'Words' Your Spirit gives to me in the midst of the battle will always be either 'Words' that you have previously spoken or 'Words' that are consistent with and perhaps an application of 'Words that you have previously spoken'.

So to that end I will immerse myself in Your Written Word – I will seek to fill my mind with knowledge of Your Will and Your Ways.

And as I seek to make Your Word very familiar to me – I will as well seek to make Your Holy Spirit very comfortable with me.

I will seek to 'Walk in Step with Him' and to allow myself to be 'Filled with Him' – I will surely seek to avoid ever 'Grieving' or worse yet 'Quenching' Him.

Our relationship needs to be close and compatible if I am to ever brandish His Sword in battle.

Finally Father, there is a piece of equipment for battle that only we 21st Century Christians can visualize but for us it perfectly pictures what the Apostle Paul so wanted the believers of the 1st Century to understand.

As the Final Piece of Spiritual Armor – My Seventh Piece of Battle Equipment – I Fasten securely to myself the **Com-Link of Prayer**.

There is a great need, Father, for me to remain in unbroken communication with you all day long.

Paul said that I should “pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.”

If he could have foreseen the developments of the next 2000 years, he might well have said ...

‘Employ your Com-Link of Prayer continually’.

Every detail of every situation needs to be shared with You.

Now the Gospel of Peace assures me that you are continually with me and that you deeply love and care for me and that Your supply of grace is more than sufficient for me so how awesome is it that I can maintain unbroken communication with you!

I will never allow You to be ‘out of my loop’.
I will continually rejoice that we are in this together!

AND SO ...

Being now fully and completely outfitted for today's battle,
I pray that ...

YOU, (who are able to do immeasurably more than all I can ask or even imagine)
WILL, (according to Your power that is at work within me)
BE GLORIFIED IN MY LIFE THIS DAY!

AMEN and AMEN!