

Bible Study # 65
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Life and Letters of Paul Series—Ephesians and Philippians

We are continuing our survey of the Life and Letters of the Apostle Paul, covering the books of Ephesians and Philippians. They are both very short little books, and yet there is a lot that is in these books. They were written during the time of Paul's Roman imprisonment. Some of the modern commentators choose to disagree with that. Some of them just like to come up with anything that is different from what everybody else has always said. They figure their "claim to fame" is to have something different to hear—some new thing.

We are going to notice, as we go through, that there's certainly reference to the fact that Paul was in prison in Rome. In Philippians 4:22, he mentions Caesar's household and in Philippians 1:12-13, the fact of those before whom he was coming as certain evidence it was written at the time when he was in prison in Rome.

Ephesians 6:20 mentions, "for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak." He specifically mentioned that he was chained.

Verse 21, he mentions that Tychicus was the bearer of this letter and would make known the details when he came there to the Church in Ephesus. This Tychicus is also mentioned in Colossians 4:7 as the individual who bore the letter to the Colossians. Ephesus and Colosse were near one another. It is certainly very likely, based on this, that Ephesians was written at about the same time as Colossians. It was clearly sent by the same individual, Tychicus. Reference is made there.

Ephesus was a major city. It was the capital of what was called Roman Proconsular Asia. When we say "Asia" today, we think of a whole vast continent. "Asia," as the term was normally used in classical Greek and Roman history, had to do with a portion of what is today modern-day Turkey. There was the peninsula that is called Asia Minor and there was a Roman Province of Asia, which was where the Churches were located that the Apostle John addressed in Revelation 2 and 3—the letters to the seven Churches. Those Churches were all located in that general area of Asia or Asia Minor. The Roman Province was the western portion, the western edge of Asia Minor.

Ephesus was a major trading city. It had sea connections with Greece. It had connections with both Achaia, which is southern Greece down where Athens was, as well as Macedonia, which was up in the northern part where Philippi was. There were overland connections from Ephesus, coming down overland through what is now modern-day Turkey to Syria. It was a major trade route because it was located close to the sea. It was just a matter of a few miles away from the coast. It was involved in a lot of trade. It was kind of a connecting point, a jumping-off point, for Greece and Europe to the west, as well as a route overland to cut through to the Euphrates River or down through to Syria.

The worship of Diana, one of the goddesses of the Romans and Greeks, was the state religion. A huge statue of Diana dominated the Ephesus harbor. The city had an ancient origin as a Greek colony. That's the way it had originally been established. There was a sizable Jewish population as well as an established synagogue there.

Philippi was in Macedonia. Macedonia is northern Greece and actually extends up into a portion of what is today southern Yugoslavia. Philippi was built and named by Philip of Macedon, who named it after himself. It's amazing how many people build things and name them after themselves. The world is filled with "humility."

It's kind of like the nation of Saudi Arabia, which takes its name from the father of the present king. His name was King Saud. He thought that was a nice name and just named the whole nation after himself. Philippi was named by Alexander the Great's father; he named it after himself.

There had originally been an ancient Phoenician city there. It was a very strategic trading location. The Phoenician city had been wiped out, but Philip of Macedon built a Greek city there. It was later rebuilt by the emperor Augustus. It's a very fertile area. There was a gold mining industry in that area, about 12 miles from the coast. It was a major Macedonian mercantile center because it was on one of the major Roman roads.

There were, however, very few Jews in Philippi. There wasn't a synagogue.

Acts 16:12-13, the evidence from the book of Acts was that there were only a few women who met on the Sabbath out by a riverbank out of town. It was sort of a secluded park-like setting. The indication is there was just a handful.

Verses 13-15, Lydia who was a seller of purple, we are told, was the first convert. This was the first area where the gospel was preached in Europe.

Paul had spent quite a bit of time in Ephesus on his third evangelistic journey.

Acts 19:10, he spent two years in Ephesus. Since the Apostle Paul was there that length of time, the Church was very solidly established and very well organized.

Acts 20:1-3, Paul left Ephesus and went on to Greece. Remember he spent several months there, went through Macedonia, spent three months wintering in Corinth and came back up to Macedonia.

Verse 16, then he left to go back to Jerusalem in order to be there for Pentecost of 56 A.D.

Verses 17-18, he made arrangements to meet with the Ephesian elders. It was obviously a well-organized Church. There were elders and deacons, and Paul had utilized the time there. It seems to have been, in many ways, sort of the leading or headquarters Church of the area of Asia Minor. In fact, in later years after the destruction of Jerusalem, it was the area where the Apostle John (the last of the apostles living) lived in the latter years of his life. In that sense, the true Church was centered in Ephesus.

The Ephesian Church was the heart and core of the Church of God in the last portion of the first century because the Jerusalem Church had been destroyed by that time. There were remnants of the Church in Pella, but it was scattered. We find the Apostle John living there until almost the end of the first century. In the second century, we find Christians who were keeping the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread—observing the Holy Days. There are specific references to that.

When we pick up the story (those events were many years after what we read here in the Bible in the book of Ephesians), it would tell us that if the Ephesian Church was that strong at a later time in history (50, 75, almost 100 years down the road from when Paul was writing this), then it would certainly tell us that it would have been a strong, well-established Church that stood the test of time for another generation or so.

The Philippian Church was also one in which Paul had spent a pretty fair amount of time. It was a well-organized Church. It seems to have been very generous and spiritually mature.

We will notice there is not a lot of correction in Ephesians and Philippians. They did not have the sort of problems that Corinth or Thessalonica had. Paul, in some of his epistles, was very

highly corrective. He did not have to be so here because these were areas that were not encountering major problems.

Some Churches encountered problems in terms of lifestyle. In Corinth, there was a tendency toward immorality. Not just immorality, but also a tolerance of immorality. There was a tolerant attitude toward immorality in the congregation. In other areas, such as Galatia and Colosse, there was a tendency toward heretical movements and towards ideas and concepts that “smacked” very strongly of the Gnostic influence and things that ultimately gave rise to the Catholic Church. Some Churches had their problems with lifestyle; others, with doctrine. Ephesus and Philippi seemed to not have had those major problems.

Paul dealt with some deep spiritual and philosophical concepts. He wrote both of these epistles pretty close together. He dealt with a lot of things.

Notice in **Ephesians**. Before we get into it, just to set the stage, one thing I might mention is what was known in history as the “two-church theory.” Maybe you have never heard of the two-church theory, but there is a progression that people use to reason themselves astray.

One of the early Catholic historians makes reference to the Millennium. He said that what was at first routinely and commonly believed everywhere, became by degrees simply one opinion on the subject, and then ultimately became viewed as heresy—as a superstition. In other words, there was a progression on the doctrine on the Millennium.

At one time everybody was in agreement. That’s the way it was. When you moved 50 to 75 years down the road, it was merely an opinion that some held. It was a tolerated opinion. There were those who literally believed in the 1,000-year reign of Christ, and there were others who didn’t believe it was to be taken literally. By the time you progress another 50 to 75 years down the road, it had come to be viewed as an error and superstition and something of which the proponents were to be persecuted for and driven out of the Church. There was a progression in terms of how some of these things came about in the first century.

We recognize there was a fundamental problem concerning the law. How do we know there was a fundamental problem concerning the law? We read what Jesus said and did in the gospel accounts. When we read the book of Acts, we find a Church that kept the law. Acts 21:20, James referred to the headquarters Church and

those who constituted the Church in Jerusalem as zealous for the law. When we are introduced to the Church of God in the New Testament, we are introduced to a Church that kept the law. When we meet up with the earlier incipient Catholic Church (as the curtain begins to rise in the third century), we find a church that wasn't keeping the law. How did they make a transition? How do you make a transition from keeping the Sabbath and holy days to not keeping the Sabbath and holy days? One of the major ways that this progression was made was by a doctrine that began to be promulgated.

We will notice from the book of Ephesians that it was already getting started at that time. Some of the Gnostics that we met up with in Colosse were already getting some groups that were propounding this. It did not really become a popular doctrine until right around the end of the first century. Really, it began after the destruction of Jerusalem and in the last years of the Apostle John's life. Once he was dead, it became the ascendant doctrine and the official teaching of the church at Rome, and then it became absorbed elsewhere.

The so-called two-church teaching was that there was one set of rules for the Jews and another set for the Gentiles. The original transition was the Sabbath and the holy days. They said it was fine that the Jews continued to do that, but the Gentiles didn't have to. They said the Gentiles were not obligated to observe the law, although the Jews were. In areas of Judea or areas where the Jewish population was the majority, this was fine, but Gentiles didn't need to observe the law. It wasn't necessary because those things only applied to the Jews.

Their original doctrine was one of tolerance. That's fine; they didn't try to interfere with the Jews keeping the law—it's just that it didn't apply to the Gentiles. They sought to make a distinction between what God expected of Jews and what He expected of Gentiles. There was a great emphasis on different sets of standards that they had that was clearly beginning at the time Paul wrote Ephesians. By the end of the first century, the idea that there was a different set of standards that God expected of Jews and Gentiles was a major controversy in many areas. As they ultimately got the ascendancy and the power, then it was the fact that not only should the Gentiles not keep the law, but also the Jews shouldn't be doing it either.

Then there began to be an open hostility toward the law and toward any who kept the law. There was an attempt to stir up persecution against it as

the Roman church moved closer to becoming the official religion of the Roman Empire. There was a gradual shift between a tolerance of the law and yet teaching that it was not necessary for Gentiles to keep it. In many areas where there were Jews, it was fine to go ahead and do that. But in areas where it is just Gentile congregations, they said it was not really necessary.

This was the original excuse of the group at Rome—some of the followers of Simon Magus and others. This was their explanation of why they didn't keep the law. They said it wasn't necessary because they were centered in the Gentile areas. They sought to spiritualize away the law saying it was not to be taken literally. They said a lot of it was allegory and there was also a difference in what was expected of Jews and Gentiles. They confused the fact.

The Jews continued to circumcise their children, and there wasn't anything in the New Testament that expected them to do otherwise. The emphasis of the controversy of circumcision was the fact that it was not a matter of spiritual salvation. Gentiles who were being converted and coming into the Church were not required to be circumcised in order to be received into the Church. The controversy over circumcision had to do with access to God. But it was a physical sign of the covenant of the people of the descendants of Abraham, and there wasn't any expectation that Jewish Christians would cease doing so—nor did they.

All the way on up to 135 A.D., the statement is made that the Church in Pella, which was the remnants of the Jerusalem Church, was presided over by circumcised Jews. All of the leadership and ministry there were circumcised Jews. This was all the way up to 100 years after the time of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. It was never an issue among the Jewish population.

Some of these Gnostic teachers and other early heretics sought to make a distinction. They said, 'Some of those things, the Jews do it, but it doesn't apply to us. Really, none of the law, the Sabbath, all of these matters of the law, these things really don't apply to Gentiles. If we are living in a Jewish area, it's fine to go to church on the Sabbath, but there isn't any point for us to. We are not expected to.'

Paul stresses in the book of Ephesians that this was just getting started. It didn't really become full blown until several decades later, but Paul could see it already beginning. These heresies of the "two-church theory" were already beginning to be promulgated. **Paul lays great emphasis in**

the book of Ephesians on the fact that it was one body. There was not a distinction. There was not a basis of spiritual distinction between Jews and Gentiles. That is not valid. There isn't a spiritual distinction to be made whatsoever.

Ephesians 1:1, notice, "Paul an apostle by the will of God..."

He greets them.

Verses 1-5, "...To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us [the Church] in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will."

God has preordained. Here, we come to predestination or election or choosing. The world does not understand predestination.

The followers of John Calvin emphasized predestination and their belief in election. Because others emphasized their beliefs in free will, they had great controversy. None of them understood either subject; that is what it amounts to. You can't understand predestination if you think that today is the only day of salvation.

The universal lie that is believed by all of them is the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. If the soul is immortal, you have to do something with it when it dies. You have to send it somewhere—heaven, hell or the Catholics who are stuck in purgatory. The Protestants had to get rid of purgatory because they couldn't find it in the Bible. If they had looked a little harder, they couldn't have found going to heaven or hell either. But if you hold on to the immortality of the soul, you have to send the soul somewhere. And if you have to send the soul somewhere when you die, then that means it is all over with; that is when judgment is made.

You can't understand predestination or elected or chosen if you think that the issue is whether or not you will be saved. God has not predestined some to be saved and others to be lost. What He has predestined is that there will be a Church—firstfruits. He predestined that before the foundation of the world—God knew where He was going before He started.

Can you imagine somebody setting out to build a house and he doesn't have any house plans? He doesn't know the dimensions of the house,

doesn't know the details of how it is going to be built, what the pitch of the roof is going to be and what materials he is going to use, etc. I have seen a house or two that I suspect was built that way, but that's not really the best way to do things. There's a lot of work and effort that goes into planning out what you are going to have before you ever get started. God didn't just start kind of creating a few things, throwing it out and saying, 'That looks pretty good; maybe I'll stick something else over here.' Before He ever started, God knew where He was going. He had a great master plan.

It's just like the seven-day week. God didn't work as hard as He could for six days and, finally, at the end of it, He was tired and had to rest. Then afterwards He thought, 'That's a pretty good idea; I think I'll just have everybody do that from now on.' That's not the way it happened at all. It took six days because God determined that it would take six days. He had determined to sanctify the Sabbath because He was illustrating a great master plan. A day with the Lord is as 1,000 years (II Peter 3:8). He had a plan in mind.

The festivals, which were not introduced to the Church until the time of Moses, were nevertheless in mind.

Revelation 13:8, we are told, "the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world." In other words, before God ever started, He had a plan in mind and that included the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Trumpets, and the whole works. God had a plan. He knew where He was going. The first law of success is to have a goal.

There was a little book written for young people back a number of years ago. The title of it was a little catchy title, *If You Don't Know Where You are Going, You Will Probably End Up Somewhere Else*. That's the way a lot of people are. They don't know where they are going, and sure enough, they end up somewhere else. Well, God hasn't ended up somewhere else. He is going to end up exactly where He intended to end up because He had a plan to begin with.

He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. Before He ever got started, He had in mind that He was going to call out firstfruits. That doesn't mean that God had plotted out the genealogy of every human being that would ever be born and every combination of parents that has occurred since Adam and had that planned out ahead of time. No, that's ridiculous. Start thinking through what would have to be done to do that.

God planned out an overall scope and scheme of things. That doesn't mean that predestination means that everything you do is already preprogrammed.

The statement was made of Judas that this betrayal was done to fulfill the scriptures, but woe be to him by whom it is done (Matthew 26:24, 54-56). It was determined that somebody was going to betray Him. That's not hard to predict. You put the right people in the right place and somebody's going to do something like that. God knew that some of these things were going to happen, but He didn't pick out and make somebody fulfill that prophecy against his will.

The Beast and the false prophet are going to arise on the world scene, but God's not going to make somebody fulfill that role against his will. It is a matter that those roles are going to be fulfilled. God has pre-determined and will move things around, but there can be various individuals who, if they got the opportunity, would jump for the chance. God doesn't have to really look too far for volunteers on most of that. It is just a matter of letting the right person get into the position.

I'll use the illustration with the prophecy where it talks about the king of the South. God wouldn't have to look very far for volunteers. Saddam would like to volunteer. If God is taking volunteers, he has his hand up. He'd like to be the one, whether he will be or not. But you know, if he's taken out of the way, somebody else will be there—'Let me be next. I would like to do it.' It isn't a problem. God doesn't have to force somebody into fulfilling a role against his will. It's just that circumstances that are conducive come along, and God allows these circumstances.

God talks about a final stage in the history of the Church that is characterized by a lukewarm, watered-down attitude. That's a part of prophecy, just as much as the coming together of the Beast power. God hasn't picked out you or me and said, 'I am going to make you become lukewarm.' We just live in a society that is conducive to that. God knows that is going to be the tendency. That doesn't mean He has picked somebody out, and it doesn't matter how much you pray and study and fast, you are going to have to be lukewarm because God is going to make you lukewarm. No, that's not what predestination means. It doesn't mean that God is going to make you fit into a role that you don't choose.

But God has predetermined ahead of time that there's going to be a Church. He's outlined a

basic history and development of that Church. He made decisions before He ever got started. Predestination involves firstfruits who would be holy, who would be without blame, who would become His children.

Ephesians 1:7, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins...." We have redemption through Christ's blood.

Verses 11-12, it continues, "in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, that we should be predestinated according to the purpose of Him who works all things out to the counsel of His own will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory."

Verses 13-14, it talks about being sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise and the guarantee (KJV, "earnest") of our inheritance.

God gives us His Spirit, and He likens that to being the earnest of our inheritance. That's the guarantee that He is going to ultimately change out mortal bodies from flesh to spirit. Jesus Christ is described in the book of Colossians as the firstborn from the dead (Colossians 1:18). None of us has been born from the dead yet. Christ is the firstborn from the dead. Now, if He's the firstborn, that means there are others who will be born later.

I Corinthians 15:50, "...flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption." We are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. God gave us His Spirit, and we are ultimately going to be born into His very Family. Not a physical birth, but a spiritual birth. We are sealed, set apart and authenticated as genuine, and that is the guarantee of our inheritance. It is the proof that we are going to be born into His very Family.

Just like if you are going to buy a house, you put down earnest money, which tells the owner that you are going to come back and pay for it. God gives us a little bit of His Spirit; that's the earnest of our inheritance. We haven't received that inheritance yet, but we have the guarantee because God is going to fulfill what He says.

There are many scriptures in the book of Ephesians that relate to the Day of Pentecost. I am going to come back and tie in with that.

The book of Ephesians probably relates to, expounds and explains the spiritual significance of Pentecost more than any other single book in the New Testament. In many ways, you could correlate it with the book of Ruth in the Old Testament. We will notice the correlation of a tie-in with the book of Ruth.

Ephesians 2:1-3, "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you

once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who [which] now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.”

We were a part of the world; we lived like the world. We fit in with the world and were comfortable with the world. We shared the world’s values and priorities and we fit in with that. We were as good as dead because of sin. God has had mercy and has given us the opportunity for life. When we walk according to the course of this world and not in the paths of righteousness, the course of this world is motivated and determined by the prince of the power of the air, Satan the devil. He’s the same spirit that works in the children of disobedience.

Verses 4-5, “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).”

Verses 8-10, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” It’s not a matter of you earning your salvation. “By grace are you saved...we are His workmanship.” God is making something out of us. He is transforming and changing us.

Verse 11, “Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—” The Church that Paul is addressing here is a Church that was primarily Gentile.

Verse 12, “that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” He reminds them of their state. You were cut off; you didn’t have connection. You were without Christ and were outside of the physical commonwealth of Israel. You were not a descendant of Abraham; you were not an heir of the promise. You were outside the scope of what God had promised. You didn’t have any hope; you didn’t know God.

Verses 13-14, and yet, “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near

by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us.”

In the temple, there was a wall of partition, a wall that separated the court of the Israelites from the court of the Gentiles. Unless the Gentiles were circumcised and had undergone the conversion rite of Judaism, they could not enter into the area where sacrifices were made. They didn’t have access to God. Jesus Christ has made peace. He’s made both Israelites and Gentiles one. He broke down the middle wall of partition between us, the things that made for separation in the spiritual sphere. Other statements in Colossians and Galatians make similar statements.

Colossians 3:11, “where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.”

Galatians 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Obviously, we still are male and female in the physical sense. We still are whatever our ethnic origin or economic status in the physical sense, but those things, in terms of our relationship to God, don’t have relevance. Whether you are a man or a woman, whether you are Gentile or Israelite, rich or poor, these things only have meaning and significance in the physical realm—in the physical society and community. But in terms of the Family of God and in terms of being a part of God’s Kingdom, those distinctions don’t have any relevance to our relationship to God. Whether you are a male or female—regardless of any other physical factor—we can all have the same access to God. There was a court of the women in the temple. The court of the Israelites, if you wanted to be technical, was the court of the Israelite men. You can go back and you had the varying distinctions that were made. The point Paul is making here is that access to God no longer has physical distinctions. Physical distinctions don’t have any bearing in terms of access to God.

Ephesians 2:15-18, “having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man, from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through

Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.”

We all have access to God through Christ. It doesn't matter how much money you have or who your ancestors were; that's totally irrelevant to our access to God. We all have to enter (our access to God) through the same One, which is Jesus Christ. Paul is stressing this.

Verses 19-22, “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.”

What we have is a spiritual unity, which is in direct contrast to this so-called two-church doctrine that was being promulgated—the idea that there was the one set of rules for the Jews and another set for the Gentiles. Paul is making plain that we all have access to God through one Spirit, through Jesus Christ. Our access is not based on these physical distinctions. Our access is based on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Nobody had a “leg up” or “down.” We are all on the same “leg” when it comes to that.

Ephesians 3:1-2, “For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you.” It was because of some of this that there had been so much enmity stirred up by some of the Jews in Jerusalem. Not the converted ones, but others who really resented the teachings that Paul had. Remember the original charge they had against him was that he had brought a couple of Greeks into the court of the Israelites at the temple, which he had not done (Acts 21). It was ultimately because of Paul's teachings in these areas that “trumped-up” charges had been brought against him.

Verses 4-6, “by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.”

Verses 9-12, “and to make all people see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to

the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.”

Verses 14-21, “For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”

He talks about a mystery, which has to do with the fact that all human beings (Jew and Gentile) may, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, become begotten children of God to ultimately be born into the Family of God. That is something the world does not understand.

Verse 6, “...fellow heirs and partakers of His promise....”

Verses 3-4, he mentions “the mystery.”

Verse 9, “...the fellowship of the mystery....” – Things that haven't been understood.

Verse 17, “that Christ may dwell in your hearts....”

Verse 19, “to know the love of Christ....” We have a covenant relationship that is brought out here.

The Church is being built up as a spiritual temple.

Ephesians 2:20-21, “having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.” The prophets were the writers of the Old Testament; the apostles were the writers of the New Testament.

Verse 22, “in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.” God is carrying out a vast construction project. The physical temple was to be built according to a certain specified way. The reason why it

was so important to follow the instructions is because all of those physical specifications were representative (illustrative) of the spiritual plan that God is working out. We have this description that is brought out here.

In Ephesians 2:15, we commented earlier on how Christ had abolished in His flesh the enmity, the law of commandments contained in ordinances. In other words, He abolished the things that made for artificial separation between Jew and Gentile, the artificial separation in spiritual matters. In terms of access to God, He abolished the things that made for artificial separation and distinction. In terms of access to God, it was illustrated by this partition in the temple that separated those who were circumcised and those who weren't. Christ abolished that.

He abolished the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. It came down at the time He was crucified—at the time He died (Matthew 27:51). It was symbolic of our direct access to the Father. It is through Jesus Christ and His sacrifice that all of us share access to God.

This was one of the great issues of the early New Testament period and why circumcision kept “cropping up.” The whole issue had to do with how you gain access to the presence of God. It is ultimately the presence of God that is the source of holiness. What makes us a holy people is the indwelling of the presence of God. This matter of the basis for access to God was a difficult concept for some to grasp.

I mentioned Ruth. We have explained in sermons and Bible studies that the book of Ruth is the book the Jews traditionally read at Pentecost. Ruth is the story of a marriage between a Gentile and an Israelite. Ruth was a Gentile; she was a Moabite, which meant the same basic family of Abraham. The Moabites were descendants of Lot who was Abraham's nephew. But they were not circumcised. They were not heirs of the promise to Abraham.

They were Gentiles, therefore, outside of the covenant even though it was a similar family and came from the same basic stock. Lot followed Abraham when he left Ur of the Chaldeans, but God didn't make the covenant with Lot. Lot's family—even though they were related, a kindred people—were still outside the scope of God's promises and outside the scope of the covenant. The covenant did not apply to them. The same thing with Ishmael; Ishmael is a descendant of Abraham. He was a son of Abraham, but the covenant didn't apply to him. It only applied to Isaac. Isaac was the son of

promise. Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau. But the covenant didn't apply to Esau. He was outside the scope of it. It only applied to Jacob and his 12 sons. That's part of God's election, God's choosing.

Why are you in the Church and your neighbor isn't? Because God decided to call you and decided that He wouldn't call your neighbor right now. Why did God make His covenant with one group of people and not with another? Because He chose to! It's part of the sovereignty of God. God is Sovereign of the Universe and has the right to make choices, and He does. He chose to call you and me now and not our neighbor, friends or relatives who may be just as good, maybe a better person, than we are. It's not a matter of what you deserved. God made the choice because He decided to. He has His reasons and He doesn't have to explain them to us.

Do you know why, exactly, He chose to call you right now? I don't know why He chose to call me right now. I would like to ask that someday. I'm glad He did. I can look around and think of a lot of people He could have chosen. But He didn't choose to. God has the right to make choices, and that's what “election” is all about. “Election” is what we think of as one man, one vote. This is one Man, one vote in the literal sense. God has the only vote. That's the way the election is—God electing or choosing. The term “election” simply means “choosing.” The “elect” are those who are “chosen.” God has chosen us as His people.

The story of Ruth is the story of a marriage between a Gentile (one who was without the promises of God and outside the covenant and election) and a prince of Israel. She was married to Boaz who was a prince of Israel. Because of the marriage, Ruth became an inheritor of the promises to Abraham. The Jews have traditionally read Ruth at Pentecost. Pentecost is representative of the covenant, of the marriage relationship, between Old Testament Israel and Christ, and later on, between the Church (New Testament Israel) and Christ.

Ephesians 2:22 explains Gentiles become part of spiritual Israel through the power of the Holy Spirit.

If you read Ephesians 2 with the story of Ruth in mind, you find that was Ruth's category and situation.

Verses 11-12, “Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being

aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.”

She made the choice.

Ruth 1:16, “...‘Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.’”

She embraced the covenant of God. She married Boaz and actually became an heir of the throne of David and of Jesus Christ. In that way, that story was read at Pentecost to symbolize the fact of God calling His people out of the world, joining them into a marriage covenant with Him through which they could become heir of the promises. There was a symbolism that the book of Ruth illustrated.

The book of Ephesians explains the spiritual significance of the story of Ruth. The Jews could read it and understand it was a nice story, and they could see a few parallels to God calling Israel and the marriage covenant at Sinai, the Old Covenant. But Ephesians 2 explains the spiritual significance. It was really a type of the relationship of Christ and the Church because all of us were, at one time, in this category.

Ephesians 4:1, as we come on back through the book, “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling [KJV, “vocation”] with which you were called.” Being a Christian is a full-time job.

Verses 3-6, “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord; one faith; one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”

There are not two churches. There’s not a Jewish and a Gentile church with different sets of rules. There is one body and one Spirit, and we are to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Verse 8, “...‘When He [referring to Christ] ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.’”

When did Christ ascend on high? The Catholics work up quite a deal on this. I know a number of you were Catholic prior to coming into the Church. According to the official Catholic teaching, Abraham and David and all the patriarchs of the Old Testament—none of them went to heaven. Did you know that? The Catholic Church doesn’t teach that any of them went to heaven. They went to a compartment of hell. But it wasn’t the bad part of hell. They claim there are a lot of parts of hell and they went to a part called “*limbus potrim*,” which is

limbo—this vague existence—the limbo of the fathers.

Their teaching is that when Christ was in the grave (or his soul in hell), they believe that He went down there; then when he ascended up to heaven, he took Abraham and all the others with Him. He led them out and *limbus potrim* is empty now because He emptied it out. They had been held captive, and He took them up to heaven. This is their explanation of that. That’s incorrect. That’s not what happened. The simple proof text is in the book of Acts.

Acts 2:29, 34, days after Christ had finally ascended to heaven and taken anybody He was going to take, Peter said, “‘Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day...For David did not ascend into the heavens...’” That didn’t mean Christ had forgotten him. What is the ultimate captivity? Death!

I Corinthians 15:54-55, “So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?’”

The point of Ephesians 4:8 is it refers to Christ’s activity on the day of the wave sheaf, the day during the Days of Unleavened Bread. He was resurrected at basically sunset at the end of the Sabbath, three days and three nights after He was buried. Early the next morning, prior to the time the wave sheaf was offered in the temple, He was seen by Mary Magdalene, but He didn’t allow her to touch Him.

John 20:17, He said, “...‘So not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father...’” Later on that day He allowed the disciples to embrace Him because He had ascended to the Father (Matthew 28:9). He was the wave sheaf, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (I Corinthians 15:20), the firstborn from those who have died (Colossians 1:18). He ascended to the Father to be accepted as the first of the firstfruits. When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men.

I Corinthians 15:54 tells us about a time when death is swallowed up in victory.

I Corinthians 15:55-57, “‘O Death, where is your sting? O Hades [Grave], where is your victory?’ The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” We are given the victory through Jesus Christ. We

read here about death being swallowed up in victory.

Romans 6:16, “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness.”

Verse 23, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.”

John 8:32, “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

Verses 34-36, “...‘whoever commits sin is a slave to sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.’”

Ephesians 4:8, “...‘When He [Christ] ascended on high, He led captivity captive....’” He triumphed over death.

I Corinthians 15:54, “...‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’” Death is the ultimate captivity from which no one can escape.

In the early decades of this century was a very famous magician, Harry Houdini. He was the Amazing Houdini, the great escape artist. He could escape from anything. This was his “thing.” He had debunked a lot of fortunetellers, mystics and all this sort of thing. He was always intrigued by that and wondered if somebody could come back from the dead. Shortly prior to his death, he had a private conversation with his wife. He gave her a secret code or signal, and he told her he had never met anything he couldn’t escape from. If it were possible to escape from death (the grave) he would do that, too. He was sure a lot of these fortune tellers were going to try to claim he had come back, and this code was going to be a way that she would know that it was really him. And, of course, Houdini never escaped. That was the captivity that he couldn’t get out of. He had escaped a lot of captivities, but he couldn’t escape that one. That is the captivity that nobody, not even the great escape artists, could escape from.

But Jesus Christ “led captivity captive [He triumphed over death], and he gave gifts to men.” Why did he tell the disciples it was expedient for Him to return to the Father? –So that He could send the Comforter, the Holy Spirit (John 16:7).

What are the gifts?

Ephesians 4:11-12, “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping [KJV, “perfecting”] of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” This is why there is a ministry.

“Perfecting” is the fully furnishing of the saints. “The work of the ministry” is serving God’s people. “Edifying” is the building up of the body of Christ.

Verse 13, “till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” We are not going to totally come into the unity of the faith until Christ returns. We are not going to totally come to understand everything the same way and be totally unified with Christ and with God the Father until Christ returns. But the purpose of having a ministry in the Church is to work towards that end.

Verse 14, “that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive.” –To produce a certain level of stability.

Verses 22-24, “that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness.”

Ephesians 5:1, “Therefore be followers of God as dear children.”

Verses 3-5, he enumerates putting away the various works of the flesh. Then he goes into a description of husbands and wives and the marriage relationship.

Verse 22, wives submitting and adapting themselves to their husbands.

Verse 25, husbands loving their wife.

Verse 32, but he compares that to the relationship of Christ and the Church. Ephesians 5:32 makes plain that Christ and the Church is the model for the relationship of husbands and wives. He goes on to instruct in other physical relationships. Physical relationships are transformed when we come into the Church. They don’t impact our access to God, but we are still physical creatures.

Galatians 3:28, “...there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” –But that’s only in the spiritual sphere. I think we understand that.

Certain homosexuals in San Francisco have tried to take that verse out of context to say that it is okay for men to marry men. People can twist and distort scripture. That’s not what it is talking about. I trust we all understand that.

Physical relationships remain on the physical realm, but it is not a determining factor in terms

of spiritual relationships. Physical relationships are transformed when you come into the Church in the sense that our relationship as a husband, wife, parent, child, employer or employee—all of those physical relationships are transformed in that the fulfillment of them takes on a deeper spiritual implication than we ever contemplated before. We should, as a Christian husband, parent or child, etc., be different than we were. It should make a difference in our lives in the way we fulfill our appointed role in society.

Ephesians 6:11, “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”

Verses 13-18, he describes the armor.

Verse 15, “...having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.”

Isaiah 52:7, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who bring glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” Maybe you never thought of yourself as having pretty feet.

Ephesians 6:15, this analogy is used, “...having your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” We need to be doing something. We need to be doing the work. This is what is being addressed right here.

Verse 20, “for which I am an ambassador in chains...” The implication is that Paul is in prison at the time he wrote this. The Ephesian Church was very active in their prayers for the Apostle Paul and known for their generosity.

The book of **Philippians** is a shorter book and a book that has several themes. To a great extent, **it is a thank you and an encouragement. It was an exhortation to humility and the avoiding of striving. It was a warning about the circumcision.** In the same way as Colosse, there were individuals who were seeking to undermine the truth of how we gain access to God and how we maintain that access. **It was also a general exhortation on Christian living.** Philippians 1:1 starts out addressing the saints in Philippi with the bishops (elders) and deacons. This shows a very organized, fully-developed and organized Church.

Philippians 1:6, “being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.” God started a work in you and He intends to finish that work. That’s important to realize. He goes on here through the book of Philippians, desiring to see them “filled with the fruit of righteousness” (v. 11).

Verses 12-13, “But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard [Praetorium], and all the rest, that my chains are in Christ.” This is a reference to the court of the Praetorian Guard or Caesar’s Court. The Praetorium was the court of Caesar’s elite guard. Paul, in his imprisonment in Rome, was well known in “high circles.”

Verses 23-24, he talks about the fact that he was hard pressed [KJV, “in a strait”] between two things: having a desire to depart and be with Christ or to abide in the flesh, which was more needful for them. Paul didn’t mean he thought he was going to go to heaven when he died. He knew that if he died, his next split-second of consciousness would be in the Kingdom of God. He was kind of torn “betwixt and between.”

He was in jail. He had gone through a lot of trouble and difficulty. He thought, on the one hand, it would be nice just to lie down, go to sleep and wake up in the Kingdom. He was undergoing a lot of stress and difficulty. From a human standpoint, he looked at it and thought it would be good. He had certain desires for God to just let him go to sleep. And yet, on the other hand, he looked at the Church and the needs of the Church and knew he still had a work to be done.

Verses 27-30, he admonishes them.

Philippians 2:3-6, in terms of humility he says, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery [thought it not something to be grasped or seized] to be equal with God.”

He did not cling to His equality with God and the Godhead.

Verses 7-8, rather, “but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” He divested Himself of that relationship He had shared with the Father from eternity. He did not have this attitude of ego. Some people would never give up something that was prestigious for something that was less prestigious. Jesus Christ exemplified an attitude of service, willing even to divest Himself of the glory of God and come

down and take upon Himself and live a human life.

In Hebrews 2:16 (KJV), we are told that He took not upon Himself the nature of angels but the nature of the seed of Abraham. He took upon Himself our nature. He didn't go down one notch—just kind of move down from God to angel. He took upon Himself the nature of the seed of Abraham.

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

Verses 12-13, Paul admonishes them, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” God is working in you. You need to go forward and to finish up. Allow God to finish in you what He has started.

Verses 14-15, “Do all things without murmuring and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.”

Verse 17, Paul went on and talked about what he was going through and the fact of various difficulties that he was facing.

Verses 23-24, “Therefore I hope to send him [Timothy] at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me. But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly.” He still did not know exactly what was going to be the outcome of his imprisonment, but he still had faith that God was going to release him and let him come.

Philippians 3:1, “Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe.”

‘Be aware of some of these who were stirring up trouble.’

Verse 2, “Beware of dogs...” This is not talking about cocker spaniels and collies. “Dog” was a slang term that was used to refer to “false ministers.” It was a term that had its origin in Hebrew, in the Old Testament. The priests of the pagan temples who practiced the immorality and the things that were generally associated with Baal worship were called “dogs.” There are obvious implications if you give it a little bit of thought. It was a term that the Jews used

to refer to an idolatrous priesthood—the leaders of false religion. This was the term Paul used. Continuing, “...beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! [KJV, “concision”—“cutting”].” –Those who were seeking to invest in circumcision. That was something God had never intended.

Verse 4, he talks about having confidence in the flesh. Their emphasis was on what you could do to guarantee your relationship with God.

The point is that if you could do something to guarantee your relationship with God, why did Christ have to come and die? If you can guarantee your relationship with God through circumcision or by some physical thing—if that's going to gain you access to God—why did Christ come and die? That would have been much simpler. It undermines the full significance and impact of the sacrifice of Christ. That's why Paul emphasized it so much.

Verses 8-10, he talks about knowing Christ and having Christ in us.

Verses 12-13, “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do. Forgetting those things which are behind...”

He's talking about the things that had been his sources of pride in the past, the things that had given him status and were sources of pride in the past. He had forgotten those things. He was not concerned about those things. That had nothing to do with his standing with God. The things he had trusted in times past to give him standing with God—he has forgotten those things, which are behind. The things he mentioned earlier in verses 4-6, the things he had that would have given him status or access, as far as they were concerned, he had forgotten about those things, the things he used to place his trust in.

Verse 13, continuing, “...and reaching forward to those things which are ahead.”

Verse 14, “I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” He was reaching forth for the promises of God and pressing toward the mark.

Verse 17, “Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.”

Verses 20-21, notice, “...we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body...” At the resurrection, we are going to put on immortality.

Philippians 4:1, “Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.”

Verse 4, “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice.”

Verses 6-7, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

Verse 8, get our minds on the things that are excellent and good and positive and uplifting.

Verses 11-12, “Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound....”

Verse 13, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” ‘I can do all these things.’

Verse 19, “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

It is very apparent, as you go through, that Philippians is a very powerful little book. It is short, but it has a lot of strong encouragement. It is a very encouraging book, focusing in on the power of God. We have to realize that Christianity and conversion are not so much what we can do for God as it is what God can do in and through us as we yield ourselves into willing instruments. We yield ourselves to Him, desiring Him to change, shape and mold us, to fashion and form us, to make us conformable to His image. That’s really what conversion is all about. It has to do with a transformation in our values, our priorities and every facet of our lives.

I mentioned earlier the allusion to Pentecost. These books very directly relate to Pentecost because Pentecost has to do with conversion and with God giving His covenant. There are many, many sections—particularly in Ephesians—where you can go through and find it talking about the elect, about being chosen as firstfruits, those who first trusted in Christ. In Ephesians 2, it talks about being called out and made a part of the commonwealth of Israel. It talks about Christ dwelling in us. He talks about the relationship of Christ to the Church as a husband-wife relationship—all these things. The working of God’s Spirit has to do with the spiritual meaning of Pentecost—one of God’s festivals.

There’s an awful lot that’s packed in Ephesians and Philippians. It was clearly written in Paul’s imprisonment. They contain things that are

helpful for us. We only got an overview of it this evening.

As you have gone through and had a chance to study them on your own, hopefully, you have gotten a taste of some of the depth of content that God, through His Spirit, packed into these books. We have tried to hit some of the high points on them this evening. Many of the significant things that Paul wrote he wrote during the time that he was in Roman imprisonment.

Next Bible study, we will go through the book of Hebrews, which was also written during the time of Paul’s Roman imprisonment. An awful lot is packed into the book of Hebrews. I think these things can give us a little bit of depth and insight into, not simply the historic teachings of the Apostle Paul to the early New Testament Church, but principles that each of us need to be aware of and relate to in our lives today because God’s Word is a living Word. It applies to not only the people to whom it was written at that time, but it is preserved for us. It has a message that directly applies in our lives today.