

74 YEARS – COMPANION IV

PAUL, KEEPER OF THE MYSTERY AND APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES

A commentary

If we explore and discover what the four main players in our historical carve out said and wrote, it should become clear what economy they represented and what economy informed their perspectives. It is called context, and context is critical to understanding the Word of God. The scriptures are not haphazard, and they are not a tossed salad where everything is indiscriminately thrown together. Cherry picking cherished verses and passages is no way to understand what the Lord is trying to tell us. We must discern the big picture if we are to grasp the Author and His purposes. We can't be cavalier about His Word. Everything we read has its proper place and special purpose. We must be smart about sorting these things, because, if we're not, we'll live in a know-nothing world beyond the ability of the Lord to use us to move His purposes forward. It is a question of being a spectator or a participant. If we really care about joining the Lord in His eternal purpose, we will have to pass the test of knowing His Word. There are no shortcuts. We must pay the price to know how the Word is divided up, what the economies are, who are the main players, and what those players spoke and wrote.

PAUL

Paul's speaking

Acts 9:4-5

Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?"

Imagine having your first words recorded by the Spirit to be these. Paul spent the next 30+ years learning the answer.

9:24-29

Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!"

But he said, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe."

Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian."

And Paul said, "I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains."

After two plus decades of arguing for the Messiah, Paul confidently claims that he "speak(s) the words of truth and reason." Truth and reason are married. Jesus said, "I am the truth." To believe in and defend Jesus as truth is the most reasonable path a person can walk. Paul is proof of that.

13:9-11

Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time."

From the onset of his Christian life, Paul had no use for Satan and his tricks. This hard edge he carried with him to his death.

13:16-41

Then Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: The God of this people [d]Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He brought them out of it. Now for a time of about forty years He put up with their ways in the wilderness. And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land to them by allotment.

After that He gave them judges for about four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. And afterward they asked for a king; so God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And when He had removed him, He raised up for

them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, ‘I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.’ From this man’s seed, according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior—Jesus— after John had first preached, before His coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John was finishing his course, he said, ‘Who do you think I am? I am not He. But behold, there comes One after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to loose.’

“Men and brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent. For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled them in condemning Him. And though they found no cause for death in Him, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death. Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb. But God raised Him from the dead. He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people. And we declare to you glad tidings—that promise which was made to the fathers. God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm:

‘You are My Son,

Today I have begotten You.’

And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus:

‘I will give you the sure mercies of David.’

Therefore He also says in another Psalm:

‘You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.’

“For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption; but He whom God raised up saw no corruption. Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you:

‘Behold, you despisers,

Marvel and perish!

For I work a work in your days,

A work which you will by no means believe,

Though one were to declare it to you.’ ”

Paul, as Peter, makes use of the ancient prophets to undergird his message. At this stage of his life and ministry, Paul is fulfilling his commission from the Lord to minister His name to Israel. (Acts 9:15) His message sounds like Peter’s. At this time, we don’t know how much, if any, he knows of the mystery to come.

13:46-47

Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us:

‘I have set you as a light to the Gentiles,

That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.’ ”

This is the first rejection of Israel. Paul’s default position is to turn to the Gentiles.

14:9-10

Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!"

As a minister to Israel under the kingdom economy, Paul performs miraculous signs.

14:15-17

"Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."

Here is Paul ministering to the other class of people – Gentiles – in accordance with his divine commission (Acts 9:15) He educates the Gentiles to the person of the Triune God.

14:22

strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

When with the Jews, Paul's emphasis is the kingdom, as his commission urges.

15:36

Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing."

Paul's tender care for the saints.

16:18

But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour.

Paul here exercises his authority over the satanic world, just as Peter would have done.

16:28

But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here."

Paul saves a life by exercising authority once again.

16:31

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."

Paul's message to the Philippian jailer results in his and his household's salvation. True to the protocol of the kingdom economy, Paul sees that they are baptized in water.

16:37

But Paul said to them, “They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out.”

Paul forcefully exercises his rights as a Roman citizen. Later in his life this will save his life.

17:2-3

Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.”

This is the message that characterizes the kingdom economy. Had he been there, Peter would have been preaching the same.

17:22-31

Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious: for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription:

TO THE UNKNOWN GOD

Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’ Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”

With the smartest men in Greece Paul is completely comfortable and willing to be a fool in their sight; but after explaining the Creator he does not back away from the resurrection, as wild as that seems to the intellectual mind.

18:6

But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, “Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”

For the second time Paul warns the Jews and commits to the Gentiles.

18:21

“I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing.”

Paul’s behavior is puzzling. After many years of distancing himself from Judaism and the law with all its requirements, Paul intentionally backtracks. Although the Lord uses our free agency to His benefit, that does not explain this decision.

19:2-4

***he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”
So they said to him, “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.”***

And he said to them, “Into what then were you baptized?”

So they said, “Into John’s baptism.”

Then Paul said, “John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.”

The working of the Holy Spirit accompanies repentance and water baptism for salvation in the kingdom economy. Paul continues to minister to Israel under that umbrella.

19:21

Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, “After I have been there, I must also see Rome.”

Why Paul makes this decision we can only guess. He would indeed see Rome but in a way of great suffering.

20:17-35

From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the congregation . And when they had come to him, he said to them: “You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

“And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw

away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ ”

For the first time in the Spirit’s record, Paul brings up the matter of grace. “I commend you to God and to the word of His grace.” This is toward the end of his ministry in the Acts period. His spoken ministry to the many congregations is now finished with these final words to the Ephesians. We are now on the threshold of the mystery.

21:13

Then Paul answered, “What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

It is difficult to assign nobility to these words of the apostle to the Gentiles. The saints around him seem to throw up their hands, shake their heads, and say, “The will of the Lord be done.”

21:37-39

Then as Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he said to the commander, “May I speak to you?”

He replied, “Can you speak Greek? Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?”

But Paul said, “I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people.”

After being rescued from the Jews by the Romans, Paul asks to speak to the crowd.

22:1-21

“Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now.” And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent.

Then he said: “I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished.

“Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ So I answered, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.’

“And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me. So I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for

you to do.’ And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus.

“Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there, came to me; and he stood and said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And at that same hour I looked up at him. Then he said, ‘The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.’

“Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance and saw Him saying to me, ‘Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.’ So I said, ‘Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.’ Then He said to me, ‘Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.’ ”

Once Paul mentions Gentiles, the Jews erupt. What drove Paul to Jerusalem – to share Christ with his kinsmen – blows up in his face. Such is the antipathy of the Jews toward the unclean. Except for the intervention of the Romans, the Jews are ready to murder the apostle. To satisfy the Jewish mob the commander is about to scourge Paul.

22:25

“Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?”

Paul again pulls rank to ward off the attack on his body.

22:26-28

When the centurion heard that, he went and told the commander, saying, “Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman.”

Then the commander came and said to him, “Tell me, are you a Roman?”

He said, “Yes.”

The commander answered, “With a large sum I obtained this citizenship.”

And Paul said, “But I was born a citizen.”

Paul is a smart man and knows when to use what the Lord in His sovereignty gave him, i.e., his Roman citizenship.

23:1-6

Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, “Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.” And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, “God will strike

you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?"

And those who stood by said, "Do you revile God's high priest?"

Then Paul said, "I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.' "

But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!"

Paul does not hesitate to speak his mind when he sees blatant injustice. In this regard he matches his counterpart Peter, who lopped off an ear in protecting Jesus at His arrest. But for the Lord to get done what is needed, He needs men unafraid and aggressive.

24:10-21

Then Paul, after the governor had nodded to him to speak, answered: "Inasmuch as I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself, because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city. Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me. But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.

"Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation, in the midst of which some Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with a mob nor with tumult. They ought to have been here before you to object if they had anything against me. Or else let those who are here themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me while I stood before the council, unless it is for this one statement which I cried out, standing among them, 'Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day.' "

Paul (and Peter as well) suffered greatly for defending the resurrection of Jesus. It was too much for the unbelieving Jews to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, but for them to hear that He resurrected sent them over the edge.

25:11

For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar."

As a Roman citizen, Paul had every right to appeal to Caesar. Some may ask why he didn't trust in the Lord to protect him from the Jews. Who's to say that appealing to Caesar according to earthly laws is not trusting in the Lord? The Lord uses anything and everything to execute His plan. In all this turmoil surrounding the prisoner, Paul was completing his commission to testify before kings. How could that have happened had he not gone to Jerusalem?

26:1-23

So Paul stretched out his hand and answered for himself: “I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews. Therefore I beg you to hear me patiently.

“My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know. They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. To this promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain. For this hope’s sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews. Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?

“Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

“While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ So I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.’

“Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance. For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come—that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.”

This short autobiographical sketch gives us valuable information about the apostle and his interpretation of his life experiences. Most importantly this account establishes the third leg of his divine commission when he was saved by the heavenly Christ – to minister the Lord’s name to Israel, to the Gentiles, and to kings (Acts 9:15).

27:9-10

Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, saying, “Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives.”

The economy of the kingdom is still in force, enabling Paul to exercise signs and wonders which, in this case, includes the gift of prophecy.

27:21-26

“Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss. And now I urge you to take [f]heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.’ Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me. However, we must run aground on a certain island.”

The apostle to the Gentiles takes charge of men, Gentile men for whom he was dramatically saved and commissioned.

27:33-34

And as day was about to dawn, Paul implored them all to take food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day you have waited and continued without food, and eaten nothing. Therefore I urge you to take nourishment, for this is for your survival, since not a hair will fall from the head of any of you.”

Paul exercises the authority given to him by his Lord. True authority benefits others.

28:17-20

And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: “Men and brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, who, when they had examined me, wanted to let me go, because there was no cause for putting me to death. But when the Jews spoke against it, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation. For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see you and speak with you, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.

Paul explains to the leaders of the Jews who were dispersed to the empire following the persecution that arose after Stephen’s death. He is aware that the Judean Jews loudly rejected the message of Peter and the others regarding Jesus as Messiah. Nevertheless, the dispersed Jews have not made their decision as of 62 AD. Now is the time and Rome is the place and Paul is the judge.

28:23-29

So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus

from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved.

*So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word:
“The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to [e]our fathers, saying,*

*‘Go to this people and say:
“Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand;
And seeing you will see, and not perceive;
For the hearts of this people have grown dull.
Their ears are hard of hearing,
And their eyes they have closed,
Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them.” ’*

“Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!” And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves.

This is Israel’s final rejection of the offer of national salvation through their Messiah. It is a solemn moment. They reject their King and the promised kingdom, and subject themselves to Yahweh’s temporary judgment. They will be stripped of their land and their city and their temple and will be dispersed to all the nations of the world.

This is Paul’s final spoken words recorded by the Spirit. Here he completes his commission to Israel and will turn his full attention to the Gentiles. The mystery is at last ready to be revealed in its fullness.

Paul’s writings

A few questions are in order. In taking Paul’s written words, we should do it chronologically, watching for hints as to whether Paul saw the mystery of the body of Christ and of the grace of God in its totality or in fragments, early or late in his ministry, and in concert with the other apostles or independently. Was he free to share what he saw or was he restricted by the Spirit? In our exploration we should discover how Paul fulfills his commission to Israel and to the Gentiles under the umbrella of the kingdom economy, but as he moves along does he lay down truths that pertain to the grace economy to come and not to the kingdom economy in effect at the time? Did the Lord, as Head of the body, expect those kingdom saints, both Jews and Gentiles, to accept what Paul was teaching and run with it? Will we find proof that there is only ONE *ekklesia*, though it passes from one economy to another?

It should be noted that Paul began his written ministry late in a career that started circa 33 AD. He wrote his first letter in 54 AD, so he had labored for around 20 years before committing his words to parchment. If we learn little in this study, I hope at least we see the enormous

enrichment Paul added to the little flock. His divine commission – to minister to the children of Israel – compels him to action; and he is faithful in every way. His first seven letters will reveal a brother driven by the Lord’s grace to edify the saints of a declining economy until it disappears at the national rejection of their king.

Then his last seven letters show the birth and growth of the succeeding economy. Paul, therefore, is the bridge between the economy of the kingdom and economy of the body of Christ. Especially important in the new economy are Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. These three letters form the bedrock of doctrine upon which the body of Christ sits. Everything we need to know concerning the knowledge and practice of the body is found in clear language in these pivotal writings.

1 THESSALONIANS

1 Thessalonians 1:1

Paul . . . unto the ekklesia of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

What Paul says here is typical of all the letters he writes to the many congregations – the meeting in each town, village, or city is singular, is spiritual, and is heavenly. The Lord recognizes this and that is why the Spirit through Paul writes as He does. If a saint lives in a city, he meets with the *ekklesia* in that place. This differs from Peter, James, John, and Jude. Peter writes to the scattered Jewish saints in general, James to the twelve tribes dispersed about, John to individuals and to angels, and Jude to unspecified saints. Never is a city mentioned. Only Paul brings saint and city together.

A biblical *ekklesia* in a city may have several home fellowships, but they are not divided. There is one government, one eldership, functioning under one Head. This is not the case in our world today. Every town has many meetings and many separate elderships (or singular pastors), so Christians can pick and choose like they would at a food court. Because of this our Christian testimony in the world is fractured, compromised, and weak, even scorned. What shall we do about it?

Don’t participate! Find other saints who are eager to know Christ and Him alone and attach to them. Stand with them for the truth of God’s Word and seek His light and practice, practice, practice being one with them and with all the Lord’s people. Remember, there is only ONE *ekklesia* wherever we live. Let us find others who will live in that truth.

Grace is an important theme for Paul and requires a definition. In the Greek language it is pregnant with meaning, a complex of nuances meaning, basically, goodness expressed to another. John says it best when he writes, “And the Word was made flesh and tabernacled among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14) The Father expressed His person and all His characteristics through His Son. Christ is the expression of His Father. He is grace because He is the flowing forth of the Father to humanity. Grace is a wonderful person given to us by Yahweh.

1:9-10

you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

The Thessalonians are primarily Gentiles saved under the kingdom economy. That economy ends with God's wrath poured out on the Earth.

2:8

So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.

Here is the essence of the gospel – the word of truth with self-sacrifice. Typically, Pauline.

2:12

that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

Only context determines what kingdom is in play. Is it God's overarching, heavenly kingdom or is it the millennial kingdom on Earth? The earthly kingdom demands worthiness, so Paul thus exhorts.

2:13

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

Paul does not hesitate to equate his speaking and writing with the Word of God. He must know the inspiration of the Spirit.

2:15

who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men,

Paul is not happy with the unbelieving Jews who are always trouble to the saints. This attitude stays with him to the end of his life.

2:19

For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?

This coming is the second at the end of the tribulation. It agrees with the kingdom economy.

3:13

so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

Again, Paul refers to the second coming. At this writing he is expecting the Lord to come anytime.

4:15-18

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

This is the event they were awaiting. It could happen at any time. The saints at Thessalonica thought it had already happened, so Paul reassures them with the details of the resurrection of the righteous. We know the meeting in the clouds concerns the kingdom economy because Paul mentions a shout from the archangel and the trumpet of God and the Lord returning in the clouds in fulfillment of the angel's prophecy in Acts 1:11 – "This Jesus . . . will come in the same way as you beheld Him going into heaven." All these items concern the kingdom economy, not the economy of grace that doesn't take center stage until after the final national rejection in Rome described in Acts 28.

This is the resurrection of the righteous mentioned by the Lord in John 5:28-29: "Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment." What Paul is talking about is the resurrection of the righteous. Martha mentioned it regarding Lazarus in John 11. The righteous rise to meet Jesus when He descends in His second advent on His descent to save His besieged people at Jerusalem. He picks up the righteous on His way.

I cannot find any other resurrection beyond the resurrection of the righteous, the resurrection of the unrighteous, and the call upward of Philippians 3:12-14. If the saints in the body of Christ fail to attain to the "out resurrection" from among the dead, they will, by default, be taken in the resurrection of the righteous. If anyone has more light on this, I will include it right here.

5:2

For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.

The day of the Lord is the Lord's second coming to Earth.

5:4-9

But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on

the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

In the kingdom economy there is no assurance of salvation. Though the Thessalonians are sons of light and sons of day, nevertheless, they must not sleep, but watch and be sober. They must don the breastplate of faith and love, and the helmet of the hope of salvation. If they don't, they might miss the Father's appointment.

5:23

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul urges the saints toward complete sanctification, toward blamelessness at the Lord's second coming to Earth.

2 THESSALONIANS

2 Thessalonians 1:4-6

we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer;

This is solid proof that Paul is operating under the economy of the kingdom. Commending them for their patience and faith in tribulation, he encourages the saints that they "may be counted worthy of the kingdom (which according to context is the Son's kingdom on Earth). It takes worthiness to be a participant of that kingdom.

1:7-8

and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Obviously, this is the kingdom economy, for we have mighty angels, flaming fire, and the taking of vengeance; all very reminiscent of the Hebrew scriptures and Hebrew history.

1:9-10

These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints

That "Day" of course is the day of the Lord's return to the Earth following Jacob's trouble.

1:11

that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power,

Paul's desire for the saints is that they be "worthy of this calling." What calling? The calling forth unto His kingdom, in which is found His good pleasure and his goodness.

1:12

that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Is this a hint of what is to come? Here we have the mutual indwelling of Christ in us and we in Him, a concept fully developed in Paul's writings after the nation's rejection. Also grace once again appears under the kingdom economy, a harbinger of the full maturation of this golden truth.

2:1-4

we ask you not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled . . . as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

Paul's explanation of the Antichrist who appears at the midpoint of the final seven years. Some had misled the Thessalonians into thinking the day of Christ had already come, but the apostle sets the record straight by drawing heavily upon Daniel's writing (as did John in writing the Revelation).

The Antichrist appears at the midpoint of the tribulation of seven years by assassinating the two witnesses and by prohibiting the temple sacrifices. He sets up his image in the temple and forces worship. It is an abomination and makes the temple desolate.

Three and a half years later the Lord returns to Earth and deals with this man of sin, this son of perdition.

The Lord does not come until all this transpires. We should keep in mind that neither Paul nor the saints were thinking this was a long time in the future. John had already written and sent out his Revelation to prepare the congregations for the Lord's soon coming that would succeed the final seven years of purging and preparation. To comfort the saints, Paul teaches the day of Christ has not come yet, but it is imminent.

2:7-9

For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders,

This is a tough passage, not helped by the English translation. We probably think the "he" in the first line is Christ, and that He is restraining evil; but consider this: the one who now restrains, rather "holds fast," is Satan. He is holding fast the Antichrist in the abyss, waiting to release him

with signs and wonders at the three and a half-year mark of the tribulation. Never forget that Satan also has his trinity, even as Yahweh does. The Antichrist, or Beast, is the second of the trinity, and the False Prophet is the third. The Beast is revealed miraculously at the midpoint, and when the Lord comes, He will consume this Beast with the breath of His mouth.

John gives a detailed account of these events in Revelation 11, 12, and 13.

2:15

Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions (precepts) which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.

Paul urges the saints to do their part regarding these teachings, showing again the nature of their economy. They must fulfill their obligation of devotion to Christ.

1 CORINTHIANS

1 Corinthians 1:4

I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus,

Paul's signature theme is grace.

1:7-8

so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Spiritual gifts (healings, speaking in unknown tongues, speaking the word of knowledge, prophesying, etc.) characterize the kingdom economy because the nation of Israel is not convinced by the Lord without signs and wonders. The Corinthians, like the Thessalonians, await the revelation of the Lord (His coming to Earth) in His day.

1:12-13

Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

Paul apparently worked in concert with Peter and Apollos in Corinth to build this little flock congregation under the economy of the kingdom.

1:14-16

I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas.

Paul baptizes with water according to the requirement for salvation in the earlier economy. This is in accordance with his commission to minister to Israel (Acts 9:15). In this mixed congregation he could minister to both people groups – Jew and Gentile.

1:22-24

For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Paul has no easy task. He is thrust into the Gentile world with the work of bringing Jewish and Gentile believers together in one congregation. Only the death of Christ can kill all the differences between them, and only Christ as the power of God to the Jew and the wisdom of God to the Gentile can bring them together.

1:30

But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—

Paul teaches what he knows: Christ is wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption to the believer. His responsibility is to get the saints to realize this and live by it.

This is the first mention of the believers' spiritual position in Christ, placed there by the Father by virtue of our eternal salvation. This hints of Ephesians 1. It is up to the little flock saints to exercise themselves in the spirit to bring their everyday condition into conformity with their heavenly position.

2:4-5

And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Paul knows that what he is will be what his hearers become; therefore, he is careful to live and teach by the Spirit.

2:7

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory,

Paul's first mention of the mystery, or secret, of which he hints in his early letters and fully develops after the rejection in Rome.

2:11-12

Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

The Spirit to Paul is not the outward, demonstrative agent sent by the Father, but rather the indwelling One who enlightens the believer to what he has in Christ. This is an example of the depth of Paul's experience that enhances his ministry.

2:13-16

These things we also speak . . . which the Holy Spirit teaches . . . But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God . . . But he who is spiritual judges all things . . . For "who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

Paul is not shy to equate his speaking to the teaching of the Holy Spirit, even to declare that those who are spiritual have the mind of Christ. Paul is here bold, even audacious, but he knows whereof he speaks. He is truly a unique vessel.

3:10-11

According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Paul's first mention of the Lord's building which he develops in Ephesians in reference to the body of Christ. Peter's treatment of the building drew upon the temple in the ancient scriptures.

He boldly calls himself a "wise master builder" who lays the foundation; then describes the foundation as being Jesus Christ. To claim to be laying down Jesus to build upon shows Paul's confidence in what he is doing. He knows his calling and how to execute it.

3:12-13

Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.

Two things here prove that Paul is working under the economy of the kingdom: fire, which doesn't exist in the Lord's dealing with the body of Christ; and the Day, which is the coming of the King to Earth.

3:14-15

If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

Rewards and punishments are typical to the kingdom economy because there is no assurance of salvation. Reward for faithfulness is participation in the kingdom (Matthew 25:23); punishment is outer darkness (Matthew 25:30).

3:16-17

Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.

“God will destroy him.” Such a severe warning is typical of the kingdom economy.

4:1-2

Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.

The second mention of the mysteries, of which Paul is a steward with the responsibility to be faithful.

4:15-16

For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me.

The difference between instructors and fathers is the matter of organic life imparted into the believers. Only fathers give life, and Paul is their spiritual father imparting the Father’s life into them. As he lives according to that divine life, he urges the saints to imitate him in living by that same life.

4:20

For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power.

Through context we can conclude that this kingdom is the Son’s to be revealed when He comes.

5:6-8

Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? . . . For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast . . . with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Keeping the feast must be the Feast of Unleavened Bread immediately following Passover. Apparently under the kingdom economy, the Jewish festivals are meant to be kept by the remnant congregations, of which Corinth is one. This is not a requirement of those of us under grace in the boy of Christ.

6:10

nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

Again, the kingdom of the Son is the saints’ inheritance.

6:11

And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

Believers are washed in the blood of the Lamb by repentance, and sanctified, or set apart, by baptism by water. This is how they are justified under the kingdom economy.

6:15

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?

A stunning, new teaching – the first of its kind and a harbinger of things to come. Development of this theme will take center stage after the rejection. This is a hint of the great mystery the Lord entrusted to Paul. Paul himself may not have known how this game-changing truth would develop.

6:17

But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.

Being a member of Christ becomes a spiritual reality when we connect with Him in our spirit, and with each other as members.

7:19

Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God

Little flock congregations are obligated to keep the commandments, at least the main ten upon which the law is based.

8:12

But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

Here Paul further emphasizes that the brethren ARE Christ. He learned this truth at his conversion when the Lord Jesus asked him, “Saul, why are you persecuting me?” Paul knew he was persecuting Christians, and yet the Lord identified with them. This is an amazing truth unknown before Paul, and still mostly unknown to modern Christians.

10:16-17

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.

The verses refer to the Lord’s supper instituted the night of His arrest. The new covenant the Lord established was with the believing remnant of Israel. It is completely fitting that they participate in this new institution established just for them under the economy of the kingdom. They are many but they are one bread. Put plainly: the so-called Lord’s supper or Lord’s table was instituted as an outward ceremony of remembrance for the remnant believers meeting as the one *ekklesia* in Corinth. This ceremony did not extend beyond the rejection. It was suspended and will be reinstated at Israel’s final seven years of the kingdom economy (Great Tribulation).

12:8-11

for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of

spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

This passage should remove any doubt that Corinth was a little flock congregation under the economy of the kingdom. These gifts are signs to Israel, and signs are prominent throughout the book of Acts. By so teaching, Paul is fulfilling his divine commission to Israel, to the Jewish members of that congregation.

12:12-14

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many.

Although we don't know when the Lord revealed the "mystery" of the body of Christ to Paul, this passage makes it clear that he knew something about it at the time of writing. Some argue that this body is a mere metaphor; however, when Paul says "so also Christ," he embarks on a path never taken by Jesus or the twelve. This is an unprecedented description of the Lord that links him organically to His members. True, Paul is advocating for unity in Corinth by using this picture of a human body, but it feels like he is putting forth new truth that only he understands and that he will develop thoroughly in the coming years.

12:25-26

that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

Paul uses a human body to emphasize the need for unity and care of all the members. This shows his deep concern for the Corinthians' divided condition.

12:27

Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

The importance of this new truth cannot be overstated. It will dominate Paul's ministry after his arrest in Rome. Paul will use the rest of his life developing this truth. To this day we remain in this development.

12:28-30

And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

Meanwhile, Paul strives for order in the assembly by showing the hierarchy of the remnant under the kingdom economy.

13:8

Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.

Paul assumes the position of a prophet, knowing that signs and gifts will pass. Does he know that the revelation of the mystery is close at hand? We can speculate, but we can't say.

13:11

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

What is Paul saying here? Is the plethora of gifts practiced by this congregation mere child's play? Does he know that he is becoming a man (or has become a man) about to put away all these outward gifts for the superiority of something else? Is this a prophetic word?

14:22, 24, 40

Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe . . . But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all . . . Let all things be done decently and in order.

Paul seems exasperated at times when the saints persist in practicing signs like tongues, especially when those tongues are spoken among believers. Here he sets the record straight – prophesying (proclaiming forth in an understandable language) is superior to speaking in unknown tongues. His admonition implies there is chaos in the meetings. He is dealing with childish adults.

15:1-2

I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you.

The gospel preached under the kingdom economy can save, but it requires a holding fast.

15:3

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

Paul departs from Peter's insistence that the Jews murdered the Lord and need to repent and be baptized in water. He initiates a different take. *Christ died for our sins*. This makes His death very personal to every one of us.

15:9-10

For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

Paul denigrates himself because of his past behavior, but he then extols the grace of God, establishing the foundation of what will come in the next economy.

15:21

For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

Paul will develop this theme in Romans. Without Paul, we would know very little about the purpose of the Lord's death.

15:25

For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.

Paul understands well the importance and impact of the Lord's death.

15:45

The first man Adam became a living soul; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

The last Adam is Christ. He put an end to the old race fathered by Adam. Now Christ, the life-giving Spirit, is living in us. This statement shows just what an extraordinary vessel was the apostle to the Gentiles to see and grasp such concepts as this.

15:51-52

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

We must remember that Paul is operating under the kingdom economy at this time; so, the resurrection he is describing applies to believing Israel. That this is for Israel and Gentile converts is evident by the trumpet, an instrument used extensively in Hebrew history. This is the resurrection of the righteous, the same described in his earliest letter to the Thessalonians (4:16-17).

2 CORINTHIANS

2 Corinthians 3:5-6

but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

The new covenant belongs to the little flock congregations, not to the rebellious nation of Israel. Paul may have been the only one to understand this because of his vast experience countering the killing letter (the law).

3:16-18

Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding

as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Paul knows well the liberty that comes by looking into the face of the Lord. After all, he grew up in the law and its requirements, plus he fights with the legalists every step of his ministry. He sees the bondage of keeping the law, but he also knows the liberating Spirit of the Lord and how He transforms those concentrating on Him.

Paul knows the Lord's death was the last sacrifice of the law's demands. *When Jesus died, He fulfilled the law.* From an outward set of requirements to the inner law of life in the spirit, the Lord moved on from the now defunct economy of law to the economy of the kingdom.

4:6

For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Paul's heart can study the face of Jesus. How? Was it miraculous, or something attainable by practice? How can we experience this? Perhaps in prayer and in the study of His Word and in fellowship with others.

4:7

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.

The glory of the Father in the face of our Lord is our treasure contained in our spirit. Is there any more personal and precious truth than this? To know and grasp this reality requires a strong inner man focused on Christ.

These precious truths from the pen of the apostle reveal how extraordinary was this vessel in the Lord's hands. Without him we would know none of this. If we don't know this man and his writings, how can we know Christ?

4:10-11

always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

Paul sees far more in the death of the Lord than anyone else. Not only is Jesus the incarnation of the Father, but also, we are the incarnation of Jesus. Paul mentions "our body" and our "mortal flesh." Why not refer to our soul, or spirit, instead of our bodies? *Because His manifestation in us is for others, and others cannot see our soul or spirit – the origin of behavior.* The body demonstrates behavior, which people see. If they see Christ, then Christ is incarnated in us, in our mortal flesh.

5:9-11

Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the

things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men;

The congregation in Corinth is a part of the little flock of believers under the kingdom economy. The judgment seat of Christ is necessary to determine the faithfulness of the believers and to reward or punish them accordingly. The body of Christ believers under the coming economy of the mystery are saved by grace and have no judgment seat in their future because of that grace.

5:15

He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

Only Paul sees the fact that when Jesus died, we died with Him; therefore, we have no excuse living for ourselves and not for Him.

5:16

Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer.

This is a repudiation of those who would use their acquaintance with Jesus to accumulate status among and influence over the saints. This pushes back against any kind of hierarchy among the Lord's people.

5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

All things are now different. No longer is the Messiah among the people, but the believers in Him are now "in Christ," making them a new creation. What is this new creation but the little flock congregations, the remnant of believing Israel? This is the departure from the old nation of law and tradition.

When the believers assume their position in their exalted Messiah, they are spontaneously a new creation. Though daily life may argue otherwise, the reality is the believers' position in Christ. That is transcendent victory over anything that afflicts a believer's human life. The problem is how can a believer ascend over his circumstances and live in the reality?

5:20-21

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

An ambassador represents the government, in this case the Father Himself. The way the Father reaches humanity is through officials under His charge. He poured Himself into His Son, who, in turn, poured Himself into us. Now we have the responsibility to carry out our official duty as His representatives to bring people to Him and bring Him to them.

The Father made the Son sin for us. This took care of the negative in us so that we could become the righteousness of the Father in Christ. As we move about as His ambassadors, we are the righteousness of the One we represent. This is second-stage incarnation – first Christ and now us.

6:4-10

But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings; by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

Paul represents himself and his team as worthy ministers of God the Father because of all they passed through for the gospel and by what means they were able to do it. Nothing negative or positive could deter them from their mission. This wealth of experience gave them their authority as apostles.

6:16

And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

***“I will dwell in them
And walk among them.
I will be their God,
And they shall be My people.”***

The little flock of believers is the temple of the living God. They are the reality and fulfillment of the ancient type of Yahweh living in a tent among His people. His use of Hebrew scriptures shows he is operating under the economy of the kingdom.

7:5-7

For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more.

Paul and those with him were not angels, but real men walking on a troubled Earth. As such they received the Father’s comfort through a brother like themselves. This is incarnation – the Divine expressing Himself through flesh. In this instance, Titus is the conduit bearing and conducting true life unto others.

7:13-16

Therefore we have been comforted in your comfort. And we rejoiced exceedingly more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. For if in anything I have boasted

to him about you, I am not ashamed. But as we spoke all things to you in truth, even so our boasting to Titus was found true. And his affections are greater for you as he remembers the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him. Therefore I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything.

This is nuts-and-bolts incarnation – God in the flesh of men dispensing Himself into other men. This account of Titus is heartwarming and enlightening. It is not hard to imagine the joy in the fellowship these dear brothers enjoyed together.

8:9

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

Paul knows firsthand the destitution of the saints at Jerusalem, and he continually coaxes the congregations of the empire to give a gift to them. His greatest argument is the Lord Jesus Himself. Here is another facet of the Lord's death seen by Paul.

8:16,23

But thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus . . . If anyone inquires about Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you.

Paul has deep regard for his Greek brother and entrusts him to collect the pledge from the Corinthians. Titus is a no-nonsense brother, but earnestly cares for the Corinthians. From this and other passages it is evident that Paul considers him to be an indispensable asset to the ministry.

9:8

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

Paul's pitch to the Corinthians is a statement of fact that he knows through personal experience.

10:3-5

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,

Paul knows where the battle lies, and it is not far away; rather it is in his mind producing arguments against the truth. He knows whereof he speaks, having spent his youth studying Judaism and using it as a club against the *ekklesia*. The mind is the key to victory, but it takes tremendous discipline and much practice to bring every thought into captivity. It requires us to practice thinking on those things which are above where Christ sits on the right hand of His Father. This insight is unique with our apostle.

11:2-3

For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

Many Christians of this dispensation claim these verses prove we are the bride of Christ. But remember, Paul is here dealing with a congregation of little flock saints under the economy of the kingdom. Believers from Israel are indeed the bride of the Lamb. The Hebrew scriptures are full of references to the wife of Yahweh. She strays and He woos her back to Himself. The Song of Solomon is a beautiful poem of the relationship between Israel and Yahweh.

Christians of the economy of the body of Christ must leave off robbing Israel of what belongs to her. John the baptizer said that he that has the bride is the bridegroom, and he was referring to Jesus, the bridegroom. Paul's work with the Corinthians involves betrothing and presenting a chaste virgin to Christ.

12:2-4

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

This event makes Paul unique among all men, including the twelve of the Lamb. None had ever ascended to Paradise to “hear inexpressible words” as Paul did. What was it he saw and heard in paradise that he couldn't share? Was it the headship of Christ over His body to come? Was it the combination of Jews and Gentiles in the one body of Christ? Whatever it was, it explains why Paul brought so much truth and light into the period of Acts, from 30 A.D to 62 A.D, that had never existed before. The Lord poured Himself and His purpose into this willing vessel and has enriched humanity ever since, especially those of us who are members of the body of Christ. That treasure entrusted to this earthen vessel was to Peter “hard to understand,” but he, nevertheless, acknowledged that what Paul wrote was inspired scripture.

12:7-9

And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Reading the end of this letter leaves the distinct impression that the Jewish zealots were a serious and nagging problem to Paul. You can sense his fatherly distress in his words to them, especially when he alludes to those religionists who come in to confuse his message and to destroy the faith of the saints. It makes an onlooker consider whether these evil Jews were the thorn he had to

bear, galling as it was. We can imagine him calling out to the Lord to remove the distracters and destroyers and hearing the Lord's solution – "My grace is sufficient for you."

13:5

Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?

Paul's final word to the troubled saints. Two things bothered him greatly: the foot-dragging regarding the gift to the Judean saints, and the listening ear given to the wicked religionists. The first he easily corrected; the second is a terrible ordeal he must negotiate. The Lord knew this, of course, but allowed it, nevertheless. It reduces Paul to complete dependence upon the One.

13:14

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The triune God is Paul's only comfort in dealing with the weak and unstable Corinthians. It is no mistake that grace leads the way, and the love and fellowship follow. Without grace there is no hope. With it comes the Lord in His intimate fullness.

GALATIANS

Galatians 1:3

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,

Paul leads with grace, his custom, and with a much-developed perception of the Lord's death. His death was the result of our sins, from which we are delivered, and it delivers us from this evil age. This is a transcendent view not shared by the twelve.

1:6

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel,

No niceties here. Paul writes to rebuke the Galatians for turning from what he taught them to the troubling words of the Jewish zealots who promoted the law of Moses at the expense of Christ. His exasperation is thinly veiled as it should be. After all, the Lord's death ended the law.

1:11-17

But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia and returned again to Damascus.

Paul presents his credentials, and they are impressive. He was saved by an encounter with the risen Christ, and his gospel came directly from Him. The twelve disciples of Jesus had nothing to do with it. Everywhere he goes, and where he went for the past two decades, he has had to fight for this experience with the risen One. Paul, above all, knows the surpassing excellence of his Savior when compared to the law and all its traditions. No letter shows the fire in Paul like Galatians. It is Paul at his fiercest.

2:1-2

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me. And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation . . . Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.

This was the council to determine how to deal with the Gentile believers regarding circumcision. The Jewish zealots in the congregation at Jerusalem demanded the Gentile believers be circumcised. Paul absolutely stood against this demand. And to defy the requirement, he brought along an uncircumcised Greek, Titus, and the Jews knew his status. Paul forced the legalists' hand. What would they do? Paul was ready to fight and fight hard for the freedom that is in Christ.

1:7-9

when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

At least in this conference Paul could relax. The Jerusalem elders placed no restrictions or demands upon the Gentiles. In fact, in Peter's last recorded words he explained what happened to him at Cornelius' house. He ended by asking a very pertinent question: "Now therefore why do you tempt God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the (Gentile) disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" This pushback created some space between the legalists and Paul's ministry. But the fact that he had to write this letter proves their duplicity did not end.

2:11-13

Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

Though Peter had spoken such a poignant word to the council, he still fell into hypocrisy – so deep was Judaism and its traditions in his soul. Encapsulated in this episode was the struggle Paul faced every day of his ministry. He can't be happy recounting this confrontation with a brother whom the Lord chose to be the leader of His disciples and keeper of the keys of the kingdom.

2:15-16

We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

Here is a summation of Paul's argument for Christ and against the commandments of the law. This is the battle the Lord commissioned him to fight, because He knew how deeply embedded Jewish traditions were. It is not surprising that Peter fell here and felt the sting of Paul's lash.

2:19-21

For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."

The key to escaping the grasp of the law is through the death of Jesus. When He died, we died with Him, and a dead person cannot be held by something of the Earth. When He arose, so did we. We are in Christ and the law has nothing over us. This is Paul's message spoken and written repeatedly, that his hearers might be set free from religion and the world.

3:3

Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?

Paul is thoroughly disgusted with those who peddle the law to the believing Gentiles. Will the flesh (keeping of the law) perfect you who were saved by the Spirit? The fight never seems to end for Paul.

3:13-14

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Only Paul would say such things. The twelve, especially Peter, regarded the Lord's death as a deliberate murder of which Israel was culpable in every sense. This perception formed the basis of his preaching to Israel at Pentecost and beyond. Paul saw way beyond this and deemed the Lord's death as vital to the advancement of the truth. In the above instance, His death bought us back from the condemning law unto Himself and into the blessing of Abraham.

3:21-25

Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

Paul explains the benefit of the law to the confused Galatian saints especially the Gentiles among them. Although it condemns sin, and everyone sins, and though it has no life to give those willing to keep it, it does protect them from evil. And it will protect until it is replaced by faith in the One who wrote it and kept it perfectly. The law then acts as a tutor, but for a reason – to bring its adherents to Christ. Once the Galatians receive Christ, the law expires, having served its purpose.

3:26-29

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 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. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Paul here presents truths that he will develop in his later ministry. What are these truths? We are sons of the Father when we believe in His Son. We are baptized into Christ and put Him on, or, better, we sink into Him and let Him enwrap us. In Christ there are no distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, man and woman, because we are all one in Him. For the apostle to share such truths as these, he must have had revelation. The truths are too transcendent and must have come from the exalted Jesus.

Although mentioned before, this is the most thorough explanation to date of our position in Christ. As believers we have no distinctiveness regardless who we are. Without differences we are left with oneness, the one condition that will fulfill His eternal purpose for us.

4:3-7

Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

The law gives no life, but the Son does. When a person becomes a believer, he receives another life – the eternal life of the Triune God. This makes a believer a son, one born of life. And as sons, then heirs. Heirs of what? Read carefully. Heirs of the divine Father. He is the inheritance.

4:17

They zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them.

Paul despises the legalists who want to bring the new believers (Gentiles) into bondage to the Jewish law, especially regarding circumcision.

4:19

My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you,

Paul takes the position of a birthing mother waiting for the development of Christ in the saints. His tenderness for them is evident in “my little children.” It’s an appropriate metaphor because no bond surpasses that of a mother and her children.

4:22, 24-26

Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. . . . For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar—for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children—but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.

This is a bold stroke against the Jews who continue to promote the law. From the beginning of their history, Jews have always understood that they are Isaac’s progeny and have nothing to do with Hagar and her son Ishmael. But here Paul turns the table on them by equating them and their city Jerusalem to Hagar and Mount Sinai where the Lord gave the law to Moses. Paul considers the law with all its requirements as bondage, the equivalent to Hagar the bondservant.

These are surely fighting words to the legalists who follow Paul around trying to upend his ministry to the Gentiles. There is no doubt they consider Paul’s words as blasphemy, and it explains their visceral antipathy toward him. In essence Paul calls the Jewish law keepers Ishmael, son of the bondwoman; Ishmael, son of bondage. The seriousness of this charge cannot be overstated. It is a stinging rebuke to those who trouble the Galatians with Judaism and try to remove them from Christ.

4:30-31

Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.” So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.

Paul is saying for all to hear, cast out Judaism and the law and circumcision, for these are not to share any space with Christ. To the brethren he says in essence: unbelieving Jews are Ishmael, son of the slave woman; you believing Gentiles are Isaac, son of promise. Nothing Paul could say could be more inflammatory and offensive than this salvo.

5:1-4

Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised,

Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

The yoke of bondage is anything the Jewish legalists demand of the believing Gentiles, and what they demand most is circumcision. If the Gentiles think that circumcision is anything other than a physical operation done by hands, then Christ will profit them nothing. They will be indebted to keep the whole law – animal sacrifices, festivals, countless rules for individuals, families, society, etc. The legalists promote the law as the way of justification, of salvation. If the Galatians obey this false teaching, then they will fall from the grace that originally saved them. Since under the economy of the kingdom salvation is not secure and demands some human works (repentance and baptism, etc.). their fall from Christ could be permanent. No wonder Paul fought so hard for these believers.

5:7,10,12

You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? . . . he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is. . . I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!

Paul's contempt for those troublers is palpable. He likens them to a foreskin in need of disposal.

5:16-18

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

But Paul does not leave the believers with no hope. The way through the warped teachings that plague them is by walking in the Spirit and by allowing the Spirit in their human spirit to do the warring against the flesh. In this case, the flesh is the religious entanglement of Judaism.

5:19-21

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

If the Galatians are unwilling to throw off the legalists and then succumb to their arguments, then they enter the realm of the flesh, and their condition will degenerate into gross behavior. This is Paul at his toughest.

5:22-25

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who

are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

If the Galatians return to the truth of Christ and oppose their detractors, then they open themselves to the realm of the Spirit where all His positive attributes are at their disposal. It is noteworthy that fruit is the product of life; in this case, the life of the Triune God in them.

6:1

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

Paul does not exhort without doing. How many assemblies in Galatia are under his chastisement through this letter? I suspect the legalists have overtaken many, so Paul, their spiritual father, is attempting to restore them. He expects them to do the same for each other.

6:7-10

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

On the matter of giving goods or money to the saints, Paul holds nothing back. They need to know the truth and they need to be encouraged to help each other at every opportunity. This is a vital part of doing "good to all."

6:18

Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

Paul's final word to the dear saints. Spirit and grace. These will save them and deliver them into Christ and freedom.

HEBREWS

Hebrews 1:1-2

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;

Why would Paul abandon his normal salutation and launch right into his argument? Perhaps because he is still reeling from his recent experience in Jerusalem and the temple.

Prior to his last visit to Jerusalem to deliver the gift to the needy saints, he had taken a vow and shaved his head. There may be a good explanation why the apostle to the Gentiles did this, but I have not read it. After railing extensively against Judaism and its law for more than two decades, his behavior in this instance is uncharacteristic, indefensible, and even counterproductive. It

causes such a stir in Jerusalem that he must be rescued by the Roman soldiers to save his life, and he is brought to the coastal city Caesarea far away from Jerusalem. From this place he visits with various kings, but when one of them threatens to send him back to Jerusalem to stand trial for the allegations brought against him by the Jews, Paul, as a Roman citizen, appeals to Caesar in Rome. He knew he would never survive Jerusalem.

Paul has two years in Caesarea to wait for transport to Rome. It is here and now that I believe he wrote Hebrews, looking back on the debacle in Jerusalem where Jewish saints practice the law, and where Jewish zealots tried to kill him. He also wrote the letter to the Romans, looking forward to his much-anticipated visit. These are the last words he would write during the period covered in the book of Acts.

It makes sense that he would not begin with his name, given the animosity he had created. He lets the Lord speak for Himself.

It's good to be reminded that whatever the Lord does, He does through speaking. The Son as the Word is the expression of the Father. He is also the Creator who spoke matter and the material universe into being.

1:3

who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

Paul's appreciation of the Son is informed by his conversion experience when the exalted One met him and enlightened him. To Paul Jesus' death was not murder but was salvation from sin.

1:13

But to which of the angels has He ever said: "Sit at My right hand till I make Your enemies Your footstool?"

Paul knows his audience well; after all, He is a Hebrew as they. He knows the veneration angels enjoy in Judaism, but he also knows the Christ and His superiority.

2:1

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.

Little flock saints (those under the kingdom economy) are in constant need of warning and exhortation, for their salvation is not a given. They must exercise diligence.

2:3-4

how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?

Here is proof that salvation comes through the speaking of the Lord. This speaking brings with it

signs and wonders and miracles and gifts to impress and convince Israel.

Paul leaves no hope for those Hebrew saints who neglect their great salvation.

2:6-8

“What is man that You are mindful of him, or the son of man that You take care of him? You have crowned him with glory and honor, and set him over the works of Your hands.”

There is a man in the glory! Can we grasp such a truth in its fullness like Paul does? Christ the Son of God became a human being in the man Jesus. This man learned early on to live by the life of His Father and because of this He never sinned. This qualified Him to be the Lamb of God who suffered death that we might be forgiven and saved. Now this One sits at the right hand of His Father. Wow! Let’s dwell on this.

2:9

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

Paul is extraordinary because of what he sees and shares. The little flock would not have seen these things had the Lord not captured Paul. He understands Jesus and His all-inclusive death and His heavenly position and honor.

2:10-11

or it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,

Paul here lifts the eyes of the saints into the heavens where resides the “captain of their salvation.” Does this herald a truth about to come? Think about it. The highest aspiration of the little flock saints is the earthly kingdom of Messiah, and yet Paul directs their attention to the heavens. This is a body-of-Christ truth still to be revealed. And yet if we read John’s Revelation, we see Israel, the bride of Christ, as the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city – brethren of the Lord as sons in glory. Nowhere in the law is there such a concept, so Paul labors to bring them up, up to where the exiled Messiah is.

2:14-15

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

Without Paul we have minimal knowledge about the death of our Lord. Was He simply murdered? Far from it. Here we have the destruction of the devil in fulfillment of Genesis 3:15. This is but one aspect of the Lord’s all-inclusive death that Paul explores and shares in his written ministry to enrich us, little flock and body of Christ alike.

2:17

Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

How is it that Jesus could be the High Priest, having been born of the tribe of Judah? The answer is up ahead.

3:1,2,6

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful . . . but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

We are reminded once again that the little flock had an obligation “to hold fast.” They enjoyed no guarantees regarding their eternal status.

3:7-8

“Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tested Me . . .”

I’m convinced that Paul considers what he is telling the saints to be the Lord’s word to them, and that word comes as a warning to them to not replicate the behavior of their ancient fathers. They risk angering the Lord, for they are not under grace.

3:11

So I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest.

To those under the kingdom economy this is a very real possibility. The “rest” is the Messiah’s kingdom, and it requires faithfulness and diligence to enter it.

3:12-14

Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end,

Paul warns the saints at Jerusalem about “an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.” In their pride in keeping the law and in their attempt to kill him, he accuses them of being hardened. If they want to partake of Christ, they must hold steadfast to the end. If they fail, they will be cut off as their fathers were in the wilderness. Obviously, this is the economy of the kingdom with its unrelenting demands.

4:1

Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.

The Father’s rest is the Son’s kingdom. The remnant saints through their belief in the Messiah

and water baptism have the promise of participating in that kingdom. What is left to do? Fear of coming short of it. This is not the economy of grace but of faith/works. The fate of the unbelieving Israelites who were saved from Egypt and baptized in the sea failed to enter the promised land (the Father's rest) because of unbelief.

4:2

For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.

The little flock believed the word spoken by Peter and they repented and were baptized in water. They were, in essence, saved out of Egypt. What would they do now? Would they continue in their faith in the Messiah, or be sidetracked by adherence to the law? Would they mix the word with faith in the exiled Messiah and His coming kingdom?

4:11-13

Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

Paul gives another call for diligence because he knows without it saints can fall just like their ancestors did. The Lord, through His servants, has spoken and is still speaking, and that word is the Living Word (Christ) and the written word of scriptures. Because of the nature of this living and powerful Word, everything is "open to the eyes of Him." He knows who qualifies for the kingdom and who does not.

4:14-16

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

The Word is also the High Priest and He sits on a throne of grace. The grace is there for strength for their daily living, for maintaining diligence, for holding fast, for their entrance into the kingdom. They need to come boldly to it. That is their main obligation and focus. This is the only way to victory.

5:5

So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him:

Paul knew well the law and the Hebrew scriptures, so why would he refer to Christ as the High Priest when Jesus was born of the tribe of Judah and not the priestly tribe of Levi?

5:5-6

"You are My Son, today I have begotten You." As He also says in another place: "You are a

priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

This answers the question. Melchizedek came to Abraham with bread and wine, the same elements Jesus offered the disciples the night he was betrayed. Melchizedek was the pre-incarnate Christ, the High Priest of heaven.

5:7-10

who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by God as High Priest “according to the order of Melchizedek,”

This describes Jesus the man agonizing in prayer, suffering in death, and exalted far above all. “Having been perfected” refers to His exaltation in the heavens. From this position He is the High Priest and “the author of eternal salvation.” He is not High Priest according to the priesthood of Aaron the Levite; He is High Priest of the order of Melchizedek.

These are transcendent concepts revealed to the faithful apostle by the Father. This is vintage Paul ministering to Israel according to his divine commission (Acts 9:15).

6:1-2

Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

Paul’s desire for the saints is that they “go on to perfection,” to maturation and completion. It is not a matter of haggling over doctrines and practices, but a pursuit of Christ in all His fullness.

6:4-5

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.

Christians who do not divide the different economies (law, kingdom, and body of Christ, for example) find themselves in a big hole right here. Trying to explain these verses and maintain eternal security of believers at the same time is to do violence to logic and to contort the language. If we grasp the truth that the little flock saints under the kingdom economy have no assurance of salvation, then these verses make perfect sense. It is a strong warning to the Hebrew believers in Judea to forsake their traditions, and to pursue their risen Messiah.

6:11-12

And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience

inherit the promises.

“Until the end.” This is always Paul’s word to Jewish believers. They cannot hear it enough, because their eternal state depends on it. The Lord has promised them participation in the kingdom and in the bride of Christ, but it requires faith and patience to inherit what He has promised.

6:13-14, 17-20

For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, “Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you” . . . Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.

This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

There is a Man in the glory! This Man is the hope of Israel according to the unchangeable promise to Abraham. Because of what He did on this Earth in obeying the Father, in suffering the redeeming death, in resurrection, in ascension, and in exaltation, He has “become High Priest forever.” Though of earthly Judah, Jesus, through obedience in suffering, earned His position as High Priest “according to the order of Melchizedek.”

7:1-3

For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated “king of righteousness,” and then also king of Salem, meaning “king of peace,” without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually.

Paul gives us the singular and definitive word on this mysterious man Melchizedek. The details of this description form the basis of Jesus’ priesthood. With Melchizedek, Jesus has the right and status to be the great High Priest to the little flock.

7:4, 9

Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the [a]spoils . . . Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.

Paul’s argument to the Hebrew believers is that Jesus is superior in every way to Judaism and its law and its traditions and its history. Even Levi, the tribe of priests, paid tithes to Melchizedek, upon whom Jesus based His priesthood.

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7:15-16

And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life.

Jesus is not of the tribe of Levi so He cannot be priest according to the law. He passed through His human life without flaw, died as the Paschal lamb for the sins of the people, rose from the dead, and sits above in the heavens possessing an endless life. He is in the likeness of Melchizedek and is the High Priest after his order.

7:23-25

Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

The little flock saints had never heard of such good news. That Jesus the Messiah is now their great High Priest in the heavens interceding for them is unprecedented. This must be a great encouragement to them.

7:26-27

For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.

Jesus is not only the High Priest, but He is also the final and conclusive sacrifice of Judaism. He is everything and He is available and accessible to the remnant saints.

Paul's words here are higher than anything they have ever heard. His desire is that they realize this and forsake their old religion and enjoy the riches of this Christ as they wait for Him to return and establish His kingdom in their midst.

8:1-2

Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.

There is in the heavens a true tabernacle and a true sanctuary, the model for what Moses built on Earth. Now there is a true High Priest, Jesus, seated on His Father's right hand.

8:6, 13

But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises . . . In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

Paul reminds them again that they are under a new covenant that Jesus brought in the night He

was betrayed. The law is terminated but the old religion that carries it is growing old and about to vanish, which it will in 70 AD when the city and temple will be destroyed. Hence his urgency for the dear saints.

9:11-14

But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Obviously, Paul feels strongly about Christ being the High Priest to the little flock saints, not because of His earthly heritage, which would have disqualified Him being of Judah, but because of His heavenly status being of Melchizedek. And not only is He the High Priest, but also, He is the High Priest offering His own blood as the eternal sacrifice without spot.

If the saints can grasp the import of Paul's teaching regarding their glorified Messiah as High Priest to them, they will never again be troubled by Judaism and with their tendency to return to their traditions.

9:23, 26-28

Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these . . . He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.

The Father demands a blood sacrifice to deal with sins. His own Son, His precious lamb, appeared on the Earth "to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. How can any Jew resist this? It appears to all men that they murdered Him, and of such Peter accused them; but the Father offered Him "once to bear the sins of many." This is why the Hebrews can "eagerly wait for Him" to "appear a second time." Christ alone is their hope.

10:11

And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God,

Christ is like no priest that ever served in the tabernacle or temple. They had to offer endless sacrifices, but He only one, and that Himself. They had to stand and minister day after day, but He only once and then sat down. How superior He is!

10:13-14

from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

What great encouragement is this for the little flock! What need is there of priests and sacrifices and, indeed, of the temple itself? Once and for all, Paul is offering them an escape from their old religion of ceremonies, regulations, and traditions.

10:19-25

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

After his long argument that Christ is far superior to any aspect of the old religion of Moses, Paul makes his pitch to the saints on what they are to do from now on. Individually, they are to enter the Holiest and draw near with sprinkled heart, holding fast the confession of their hope. Corporately, they are to stir up one another to love and good works as they meet for exhortation, waiting for the day when the High Priest (Messiah) returns to Earth. How can they resist such a compelling admonition?

10:26-27

For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.

Words to Hebrews are never complete without the warning. Israel always needs a warning, and the little flock is no exception. The willful sin is to ignore or dismiss Paul's teaching concerning their great High Priest and His work on their behalf. It also includes forsaking meetings together for whatever reason. For these willful sins there is no sacrifice. There is no running to the temple with a lamb. The sacrificial system is over and done. To dismiss the One who ended it is to invite judgment and the Father's fiery indignation. After all, there is no assurance of salvation for the believing Jew who disobeys. All that remains for the disobedient is a "fearful expectation of judgment." Such are the conditions under the economy of the kingdom.

10:29, 31

Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? . . . It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

To not come to Christ and to all He has done is unthinkable to Paul. The Hebrew saints are guilty of zealously returning to the law despite the accomplishments of their High Priest. Doing this in ignorance or through poor leadership is one thing, but doing this after being enlightened is tantamount to trampling underfoot the Son of God. The Father does not take this lightly, and He will act.

10:32-33

But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated;

They had done so well in the past. They had hung together under fierce persecution for believing in the Messiah, even becoming companions to others similarly suffering.

10:34

for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.

This is personal with Paul. He knows these saints and his heart aches for them. He saw their trials and what they endured and can't stand that they would retreat to Judaism from Christ, for whom they had suffered so much.

10:35-39

Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:

“For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.”

But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

Paul cannot be more compelling. For the saints to move forward in Christ “has great reward,” if they endure in doing the will of God. If they draw back willfully, they will lose favor with the Father and go into perdition. Paul cannot bear the thought, so he includes them with “those who believe to the saving of the soul.”

11:1-3

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony.

By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

Chapter 11 is a list of “those who believe to the saving of the soul” (10:39). They all have one thing in common and that is “faith.” What is it? Faith requires invisibility, for something seen requires no faith. How did these faithful demonstrate faith? And what did Paul expect the Hebrews to do with this truth?

Faith is an elusive truth, but vital for a viable life with the Lord. To understand what it is, we need to understand where it came from.

In his letter to the Romans Paul wrote this: “For faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the

word of Christ” (10:17). As we know, Christ is the Word of the Father – the expression and explanation of who the Father is – and this Word is to His people Israel. Without Him they wouldn’t and couldn’t know the Father personally, or know His reason for creation, or know how they fit into His purpose for them. But the Word came to Israel, ministered to them through much understandable speaking, died among them, rose and ascended, and believing Jews now have Him! Because of this glorious work, the little flock has faith.

Faith is the foundation, the ground, the rock upon which things hoped for rests. What does the little flock hope for? They hope for their continued obedience to the truth they have heard from Him and from His apostles. They hope they can stand firm during the 7-year tribulation period that ushers in the kingdom. They are hoping for the return of their King from His exile. They hope to see the establishment of His millennial kingdom on the Earth. They hope to participate in that kingdom.

These items are not seen, but they are not questioned because they come from the speaking of the Lord in the scriptures, and they have seen them and embraced them when they believed in the Messiah.

Faith also makes evident, or real, the unseen things as if they were seen and felt and applicable. The King is no longer seen and known in the flesh, but they know Him because He is with them through their belief in Him. His kingdom is not yet established, is unseen, and yet their faith makes it as if it were imminent and tangible. Faith makes these unseen things demonstrable and real. Why? Because the Lord and His disciples and others have spoken the Word of God to them regarding these things, and remember, faith comes by hearing.

The confluence of the unseen and the seen in the realm of faith is something the child of God must understand to walk with Him. The little flock, especially, had been accustomed to the outward, visible evidence of the Lord among them; but now are faced with the exercise of faith to negotiate the unseen realm. To help them Paul gives creation as a prime example of how the two realms relate.

The remnant saints knew from their scriptures that creation happened because of the word of Yahweh even though He was invisible. Visible was produced by the invisible. It is no stretch for them to grasp the invisible King and the invisible kingdom. Their faith in the unseen rests upon the Word of God and they know they can access and enjoy the invisible King while awaiting His invisible kingdom.

11:4

By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.

Abel knew the speaking of Yahweh, the foundation of his faith; so he offered what the Lord required of him.

11:5-6

By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, “and was not found, because God had taken him”; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Enoch was the eighth generation from Adam, so he was a witness of the increasing decadence of humans. When he and his wife begot Methuselah, whose name meant “when he dies, it (the deluge) shall come,” Enoch must have been greatly concerned because he had no idea when that day of judgment would come. But he had faith – a foundation upon which rested his relationship with Yahweh – and began walking with Him, knowing that a terrible day of judgment was coming. This pleased Yahweh and He took Enoch before death.

Paul interjects here a profound truth concerning a believer’s relationship with Yahweh. By faith the little flock was to come to invisible Yahweh believing that He is, and that He rewards them who diligently seek Him. The apostle is trying to wean them from the outward signs so loved by Israel and deliver them into the realm of faith.

11:7

By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

Noah had faith because he heard the word of Yahweh, the source of faith. Though the divine warning produced nothing visible, Noah responded by building an ark, a structure never seen in the ancient world. Noah’s obedience to Yahweh’s word made him an heir of righteousness.

11:8-10

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

The pattern here is the firm connection between faith and invisibility, with faith being the hearing and obeying of the word of Yahweh. Abraham did not know where Yahweh was calling him to go, but he obeyed. When he got there, he dwelt in tents because he knew his ultimate destination was the eternal city, New Jerusalem. This was, of course, invisible, but nevertheless made real by his faith.

11:11

By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.

Sarah saw no hope in conceiving a baby because of her age. It was invisible to her, and yet faith in the One who promised brought the visible and invisible together. She heard the promise and laughed, and yet she believed and made the invisible (the impossible) real and visible.

11:13-14,16

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland . . . But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

Though these did not visibly see what their faith had laid hold of before they died, they knew they were destined for the heavenly New Jerusalem. They believed in Yahweh's word to them, and He identified with them who identified with Him without seeing Him.

11:17

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.

This was the ultimate test for Abraham. Having received the promised son Isaac after the debacle with Ishmael, Abraham is commanded to sacrifice him. Only Yahweh's word pulled him through this test. He could not see the end of this trial, so his faith concluded that if Yahweh demanded Isaac, then Yahweh would raise him up.

11:24-36

By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

Because faith is based on the word of Yahweh, did Moses' faith come from a spoken word? Nothing is recorded; however, Moses knew the Israelites were the people of Yahweh and that he belonged to them. He studied history in the palace, and that history included an Egyptian hero who saved Egypt from death by famine. That man was Joseph the Hebrew, and who knows how much Joseph contributed directly to that written history? It surely revealed how instrumental was Yahweh in preserving the Egyptians. This knowledge in Moses' mind was Yahweh drawing him to Himself and His purpose.

11:27-29

By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.

Moses was truly a man of faith. While in the wilderness for forty years, He learned who Yahweh was and knew His voice. Knowing Yahweh's word, Moses had faith in those things he could not see or understand, such as the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, and the passing through the Red Sea on dry ground.

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11:31

By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.

Regarding Rahab's faith, did Yahweh's word come to her directly? We don't know, but her faith is undeniable. She was a harlot, so maybe she knew the latest buzz going around Jericho. No doubt they had heard of the Israelites on the move toward Jericho. When the spies came in and confirmed the news, Yahweh's word came loud and clear to her. Though the future was invisible to her, she committed to a life as an Israelite.

11:39-40

And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

None of these saints received the promise of the kingdom. It was invisible to them, and yet they had faith because they believed in Yahweh's word to them however, He delivered it. His speaking made the difference, because on His word He came. When He makes Himself known, all things are possible, even if invisible.

12:1-2

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

This is Paul's gospel to Israel in a nutshell. Israelites of faith have gone before and lead the way to Jesus who died despising the shame and now sits in exile at the right hand of the throne of His Father. It is up to the Hebrews to lay aside sin and run the race with endurance.

12:3

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

"Consider Him." Think on Him, think about Him, set your mind on Him. This is Paul's solution to weariness and discouragement when trying to live for Him.

12:5-6

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?

Dealing with a little flock of Hebrew Christians, Paul encourages them to endure the chastening

they are undergoing. The implication is that a son who refuses correction is cast aside.

12:8-9

But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?

Paul takes the Lord's chastening to another level. If the Lord does not chasten, or if His child does not take it, then he/she is not a son. There can be a loss of sonship. How much better to be in subjection to the Father and live.

12:12-15

Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed. Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;

Paul urges the saints to move beyond the mere endurance of correction into an active pursuit of the Lord, into the experience of His holiness and grace. As they obey Paul's exhortation together, they will become aware of any of their companions in the faith who are falling short and can come to their rescue.

12:22-24

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

This little flock has seen much persecution by their own countrymen, even to the point of returning to the temple and its sacrifices. In this whole treatise Paul urges them not to, and here, in the most positive terms, he presents what they have as believers if they raise their eyes above the Earth and peer into heaven. This is what faith is all about – seeing what is invisible by hearing the word of Yahweh. Here Yahweh speaks to them through the apostle.

12:25-26

See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven,

The word of Yahweh brings faith to the hearer. Without faith there is no hope. Thus, Paul's warning.

12:28-29

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by

which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.

From grace to fire. The economy of the kingdom embraces both. Obedience to the Lord's word will issue in grace, reverence, and godly fear; failure to endure ends in fire. The personal choices of the Hebrew saints are life-changing and irrevocable – either positively or negatively.

13:7-8

Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Certainly, Jesus spoke the words of God to this little flock. So did Peter and the others, especially Paul. He encourages them to follow their faith, “considering the outcome of their conduct.” What is that outcome? Is it not Jesus Christ Himself? Why else would His name follow Paul's exhortation?

13:12-13

Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.

Paul's treatment of the Lord's death is much more developed than that of the twelve disciples. To them He was murdered; to Paul He was the Lamb of God bearing the sins of the people. He is also the scapegoat released into the wilderness (Leviticus 16:7-10) to bear away the sins of the people. The Lord is far removed from the religion of the Jews, so Paul encourages them to “go forth to Him” apart from every distraction to their simple and pure faith which they once enjoyed.

13:14-15

For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.

The city sought by the remnant believers is the same Abraham looked for – the New Jerusalem, described in John's Revelation as the bride of the Lamb. Paul's reference to the sacrifice of praise is undeniably Israel's.

13:17

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

A true leader of saints watches out for the souls of his people. In other words, how are they doing in the Lord? Are they moving forward? Do they need help? What kind of help? No one better exemplifies this attitude and practice than the apostle Paul.

13:20-21

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

So we don't forget the audience, Paul uses the term "great Shepherd of the sheep," to describe the Lord Jesus. Sheep is one metaphor used of Israel in the Hebrew scriptures, so used here eliminates any mistake as to whom he is writing. Gentile believers are never called sheep.

Yahweh's covenant with Israel – that they are the people of the Messiah's kingdom, and are the bride of the Lamb as seen in the New Jerusalem – is eternal, made so by the shed blood of His Son and His subsequent resurrection. On this basis the little flock is to practice "every good work" by allowing the Lord to work in them. They work and He works in tandem with them – the beautiful coordination of the Lord's will and human agency.

ROMANS

1:1-5

Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;

This is a critical treatise because it bridges the chasm between the economy of the kingdom and the economy of grace and of the body of Christ. It anticipates the body of Christ coming forth after Israel rejects her Messiah. It lays an unshakeable foundation for the epistles written from Rome after that great rejection; the epistles written specifically to the body of Christ – Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus. As we dig into the depths of the letter, we'll see how foundational it really is. We should be impressed with the ability of the first century Gentiles to receive these truths. Christians in the present have a hard time grasping the teachings presented here, and that is after nearly 2000 years of scrutiny by scholars. This speaks more about Christians' lackadaisical attitude toward the Word of God and those expounding it than of Paul's ability to transmit these timeless truths.

When was Paul's calling to be an apostle? Surely at his conversion. Paul describes this in Acts 26:17: "Selecting you from the people and the Gentiles, unto whom I now send you."

What about his separation unto the gospel? Bullinger notes three stages:

Birth – Galatians 1:15,16 – "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's

womb, and called me by his grace to reveal his Son in me that I might preach Him.”

Conversion – Acts 9:15 – “. . . he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.”

Ministry – Acts 13:2 – “As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.’”

Jesus, the incarnation of the Triune God, was and is a man. This man lived a pure life drawing upon the eternal life of His Father. After bearing away our sins through death, the Father declared Him divine, designating Him Son of God, by raising Him from the dead. Now there is a Man in the glory possessing both humanity and divinity.

Paul’s grace from the Lord and his apostleship are based upon the fact of resurrection. His thrust is now toward the nations (Gentiles) that they might be obedient to the faith.

1:8-10

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you.

Paul is unique in his relationship to the Lord. His service to Christ comes from the deepest part of him – his spirit. It is from this part he is seeking “a way in the will of God to come to you.” Whatever does that mean? Can Paul exercise his own will while walking in the will of God? Is he not carried along by the will of God mindlessly? Apparently not. Is he aligning his will with the Lord’s will? Yes!

1:11-12

For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established—that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

This is a precursor of the body of Christ. Paul desires to impart something of the Spirit to the saints that they be mutually encouraged in the faith. Both benefit when one dispenses life to another.

1:16-17

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”

Faithful to his commission to the children of Israel, Paul puts them, fittingly, in first place ahead of the Gentiles. After all, this is still the economy of the kingdom because the great rejection has yet to come.

However, salvation is offered to everyone, Jew or Gentile, and faith receives it. The believing recipient is made righteous and is expected to live from then on by the faith that saved him.

1:18-20

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,

This begins Paul's philosophy of the way things are on this Earth. God is in heaven, invisible to be sure, but not unknown or unknowable. Man is on Earth armed with human agency to choose to know God or dismiss Him. Man has no excuse because the Lord has made Himself known by what He has created by His speaking. Faith in what the Lord spoke into being at creation makes the invisible real. Creation displays the invisible attributes of God clearly and distinctly for man to take unto himself.

If we want to know about a person, look at his/her place of work and the work itself. Character comes through vividly in a person's activity, behavior, and creativity. No one's behavior is hidden from those seeking it out. What a person makes proclaims what kind of person made it. The same with the Lord.

1:21-25

because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened . . . Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever.

When evil humans deliberately turn away from the Creator, He gives them up and they descend into wickedness, into a irretrievable pit where they think futile thoughts, sport foolish and darkened hearts full of lust, practice homosexuality, and worship creatures.

1:26-27

For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.

Paul tells the truth about homosexuals, so he forfeits his place in the modern world. It would stagger him to see how much further down sin has carried modern society. The deprivation makes homosexuality seem mild by comparison. But to Paul this sin leads the way in the perversion parade. Not to overstate, but Rome was the epicenter of empire decadence.

1:28-32

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness,

sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

To underscore the seriousness of his argument regarding the depravity of humanity, Paul three times uses terms of appalling finality: “God also gave them up” (:24); “God gave them up” (:26); and “God gave them over” (:28). There is a line that a human being must not cross in any economy, even the economy of grace. When the conscience is cauterized, it cannot function and is forever lost. This is where deliberate sin inevitably leads.

2:3-4

And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

Paul brings his general indictment of the first chapter down to the practitioners of sin, especially to hypocrites who judge sin and yet practice what they condemn. No one hides from Yahweh or his servant Paul. They are guilty of despising the Lord’s “goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering.”

2:5-6, 9, 11

But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who “will render to each one according to his deeds” . . . tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; . . . For there is no partiality with God.

By practicing sin and hypocrisy, people become hard and impenitent, inviting the wrath and righteous judgment of God upon them. And it does not matter who you are or who you think you are. The righteous judge knows every heart.

2:12-13

For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified . . .);

Whenever “Jew” is mentioned in scriptures, it is natural and almost automatic to associate them with the law of Moses, for it is this that distinguishes them from all other people. Does this matter to Paul? Not a bit, for it was the Jews who murdered their own Messiah thinking they were doing a service to Yahweh according to the law. They did not keep the law, so they have no standing with Yahweh. They are no different than Gentiles who have no law.

2:16

in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

There will be no credentials presented at that day (the day of the Lord's return to Earth), because the Lord will judge secrets, and secrets of evil men condemn them.

2:17-20

Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law.

Here are the Jewish credentials, and they are impressive. No other people group can boast of such honor in the history of humanity. Truly the Hebrews are the Lord's chosen people and recipients of His law. But they are proud, and the Lord hates pride.

2:23-24

You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," as it is written.

The question is rhetorical as the following verse reveals. The people with the one God and the law of Moses are noxious to Gentiles. Paul proves here that all are guilty, law or not. Those who follow the law are guilty of murdering the Prince of Life.

2:25, 28-29

For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. . . For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.

After struggling against Judaism and its regulations and traditions for decades, Paul isolates the one pillar of the Jews' religion that involves the human flesh - circumcision. This nagging requirement they tried to foist upon Paul's Gentile converts from day one. This forces Paul into an extraordinary and controversial position of declaring that only the remnant saints of Jews and Gentiles who have believed in Jesus are the true Israel. They are the "inward" Jews whose fleshly nature has been cut from their hearts by the work of the Spirit.

3:1-2

What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.

A word to the Gentiles in the assembly in Rome: The Jews are the people of the Word of Yahweh and no one else. This alone makes them special. No Gentile can argue against this fact.

3:9

What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.

A word to the Jews in the assembly in Rome: Are the Jews then better than the Greeks? Paul has already shown that both are under sin, one no better than the other.

3:19-20

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Yahweh gave the law to Israel to expose sin and human weakness in trying to keep it. Therefore, Paul can say that all the world is guilty before God. Keeping the law (or trying to) does not justify men in the Lord's eyes. Gentiles who have no law are guilty of sin; Jews who have the law are guilty of sin. It makes no difference. Both are in great need.

3:21-22

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.

What then is the answer to sin's dilemma? Is it in keeping the law as the Jews sought to do? What about the Gentiles who had no law? The simple answer is the "righteousness of God."

Sin is wrong, the opposite of doing right. Righteousness is doing the right thing, and that's the big problem. No one is righteous, not one. . . . except. Except Jesus, the incarnation, the expression, and the embodiment of the Triune God. He is the answer to sin's dilemma. So how does a sinful person approach a perfect Man seated in the heavens to appropriate Yahweh's righteousness for salvation? It requires faith in what is not visible to make it real. As Jewish and Gentile believers, the little flock in Rome exercises faith in the righteous One they wait for and He becomes righteousness to them. Only He is the solution to the sin problem.

3:23-25

For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness,

There is no difference between believers – Jews with their law or Gentiles without it. All are sinners saved and justified by Yahweh's grace because of the redeeming work of Jesus, the Lamb of God who, by shedding His blood for the sins of humanity, demonstrated His Father's righteousness. He did the right thing, and our faith makes Him and His work real to us personally.

3:26

to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

The Father is bound by what His Son did. He is bound to do the right thing by us who believe and have faith in Jesus. Yahweh cannot do otherwise because He always does the right thing, is always righteous. He is "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." There is no difference here between Jew and Gentile. Yahweh justifies both if they have faith in His Son. He

cannot do otherwise because He always does the right thing.

This is amazing insight by the apostle. The Lord's death was the watershed moment of opening Yahweh's vast storehouse of attributes, not the least of which is righteousness.

3:27-29

Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also,

After seeing all this about Jesus, should the Jew boast in the law as if keeping the law and all its requirements means anything to Yahweh? Absolutely not! The Jew should boast rather in the law of faith. Whatever is that? Aren't these – law and faith – diametrically opposed one to the other? No. Think of the law of faith not in terms of the Mosaic tablets but as something that can never change. A law cannot change. The law resident in an apple seed can never produce anything but an apple tree. Faith in Jesus and His work can only produce His eternal attributes in our lives. This fact transcends any economical (dispensational) parameter. It is universal – for the little flock and the body of Christ to follow. Our faith in Him, though He is invisible, makes Him and all He has done real to us.

4:1, 3

What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? . . . For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."

Jews always trot out Abraham to make their case for human works and for keeping the law, claiming him as their father, which he is. Paul isn't buying their argument. Before circumcision Abraham believed God and that belief God accounted to him as righteousness. This totally undermines the Jewish argument that the law is vital to salvation.

4:5

But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,

When the Lord called Abraham out of Babylon, Abraham did nothing but believe and obey the Lord's speaking. He didn't seek circumcision. He didn't follow the law (he couldn't follow something that didn't exist.) He didn't kill a goat as a sacrifice. He did nothing but have faith and believe. And sure enough, the Lord counted that faith as Abraham's righteousness.

4:9-10

Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised.

How fitting that this argument comes from the divinely appointed apostle to the Gentiles. Paul's readers had to be ecstatic, whereas Paul's Jewish legalist detractors must have been despondent. But the record is clear – uncircumcised Abraham believed the Lord's word of promise and that belief by faith constituted righteousness in him.

4:11

And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also,

We shouldn't forget who Paul's recipients of this treatise were. They were the little flock in Rome consisting of Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus awaiting the long-promised kingdom. Paul's ministry to the little flock congregations was riddled with problems between the two groups. Jews clung to the law and its requirements, specifically circumcision; and the Gentiles didn't know what was going on. They only knew that they had been pagans worshiping idols, but that Jesus had saved them outright with no strings attached. Here Paul is educating them, introducing them to Abraham, their father in faith, who had believed and was considered righteous before Yahweh before he was ever circumcised.

4:12

and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.

And Abraham is, of course, the father of the Hebrews (the circumcision) who have believed in Jesus by faith, in the same way Abraham had by faith believed Yahweh while uncircumcised.

4:13, 16

For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith . . . Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all

Abraham is the father of both Hebrews and Gentiles. His faith made him father of the Gentiles while uncircumcised; his fatherhood of Jews while circumcised. The law was nowhere to be found at that time. Only faith and belief in Yahweh's word could and did produce righteousness in Abraham.

Yahweh promised Abraham that he would be the heir of the world through his progeny, including the circumcised Jews and the uncircumcised Gentiles who believe in His Son Jesus. This belief in Jesus makes them the children of faithful Abraham. It has nothing to do with the law of Moses, which came much later and was only a tutor to the people until the Messiah came.

4:19-22

And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the

promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore “it was accounted to him for righteousness.”

Abraham didn't just waltz into faith as if it were no challenge to him and Sarah. Consider: he was 100 years old; Sarah was not far behind, but way beyond childbearing years, with no kids, much less the promised seed. But Abraham didn't waver in his faith, believing Yahweh would perform what He had promised. He had faith in Yahweh's word regarding something invisible.

4:23-25

Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.

As the father (Abraham), so the children (little flock saints). Faith in the Lord's work – slain for sins and resurrected for justification – causes righteousness to be credited to the saints' account just as it was to Abraham's.

5:1-2

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

This is a far cry from 1:18, the beginning of Paul's exegesis on why humanity is the way it is. After Noah's flood human rebellion had thrust humanity into hopeless darkness and despair, forcing the Lord to give them up. Amid this miserable condition, Yahweh intervened and spoke to Abraham a promise of a land and a seed. Abraham's faith in Yahweh's speaking, even though he saw nothing visible, resulted in his acquiring the Lord's righteousness apart from any kind of law keeping or human works.

Now we come to the apex of Paul's argument, and it involves so many positive points. Justification. Faith. Peace. Access. Grace. Hope. Glory. These seven glorious items are made possible and applicable to the little flock by the work of the Lord Jesus, the fulfillment of the promised seed of Abraham.

5:5

because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

The work of the Lord Jesus results in this. He is not just the exalted One sitting on His Father's right hand, but He is the Spirit residing in the heart of every believer. What could be more heartening to the saints in Rome than this?

5:6, 8

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly . . . But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The eternal fact that transcends every economical (dispensational) boundary is this: Christ died for sinners. We deserved what He endured.

5:9-10

Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

Paul sees so much in the death of the Lord Jesus. Without his writings we would be infants in highchairs. Just imagine being in the assembly in Rome and hearing these words! Not only are the saints saved by His death and reconciled to the Father, but they are also recipients of His life. In that life are His many virtues and characteristics brought to us by the Spirit poured into our hearts. This is the “much more” salvation. Not just saved from sin and perdition but saved by His life. Even as Jesus lived according to His Father’s divine life throughout His human experience, He expects His kingdom children to do the same with His life.

A word about “His life.” In the Greek language the word “life” has three primary meanings; one is physical life (*bios*); two is psychological life (*psuche*), and three is spiritual life (*zoe*). Being saved “by His life” has nothing to do with the physical life (biology) of our bodies. The physical body obeys the dictates of the soul (mind, emotion, will) as the psychological life. But humans are made up of three parts – body, soul, and spirit. If we are proper Christians, we live by the inward spiritual life from the Lord (*zoe*). Being saved by His life means that the Holy Spirit, who resides in our spirits, has control over our soul – our thoughts (mind), our feelings (emotion), our decisions (will). In turn our bodies obey the soul, so ideally the Lord in our spirit regulates our thinking, our feelings, and our decisions, that then regulates our behavior. By this proper alignment we are saved daily from the negative things from our fallen nature – anger, lust, hatred, selfishness, etc. – by His life in us.

In that life are all His virtues, characteristics, attributes, all He accomplished in His incarnation including His perfect human life, His comprehensive death, His burial, His resurrection, and His ascension. This is the Person who saves us, not just eternally from sin, but daily from our human frailties and evil tendencies.

All of this is a foundational truth from the apostle, one on which he will continue to build.

5:15, 17

For if by the one man’s offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many . . . For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

What did Paul know and when did he know it? Three times in two verses he uses the word “grace,” the word used to describe the coming economy following Israel’s great rejection. The present treatise is destined for the assembly at Rome, but it is written near the end of the kingdom economy. Did Paul know this? Was he setting the stage for what is to come? Is he preparing the saints for “grace,” for the total elimination of human works regarding salvation? We’ve seen before that the treatise is foundational to what the apostle wrote after Israel’s final rejection. It is the basis of the letters written exclusively to the body of Christ. Perhaps this is why Paul is liberal in his use of “grace.” It signals things to come.

5:19

For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous.

The one Man Jesus undid all that Adam did when he sinned. Paul’s regard for the death of Jesus is unparalleled.

5:20-21

Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The purpose of the law was to reveal the Giver of the law. He is perfect in His holiness and no person can approach Him because of sinfulness. Only the sacrificial system provided some relief until Yahweh’s Lamb came to Israel as the ultimate sacrifice.

The Lord’s sacrifice *is* abounding grace, and grace *is* the Lord coming to fallen people who can do nothing to earn it. It can only be received with gratitude. This reception makes the believer righteous as Christ is. Through Him the believer has eternal life, and there’s not one thing the believer must do. Truly grace is king reigning over the believer!

6:1-2

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?

In this chapter Paul deals with the Gentile portion of the Roman assembly. He confronts them with sin, plain and raw sin, which, as newly saved heathen, is at the forefront of their lives. Thus, he asks three penetrating questions that he will answer in this chapter.

6:3-4

Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Paul takes the Lord’s death to the next level by including the saints. When a person believes in Jesus, the Spirit baptizes him/her into His death. Not only so, that believer is buried with Him

and is raised with Him as well. What is this? How can this be?

The Lord's death is expansive and all-inclusive, much more comprehensive than we can imagine. Yahweh laid upon His lamb every offense from the beginning of creation – all of Lucifer's rebellion and insurrection, every sin ever committed, the world system, and the evil nature of every human being. Everything! His death included everything and everyone. We were in Him when He died; we were in Him when He descended into the realm of death; we were in Him when He resurrected; we were in Him when He ascended to His Father. Having gone through this with Him, what shall we do? Paul expected the saints in Rome to "walk (live) in newness of life." And why wouldn't they, having so much at their disposal?

6:6

knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

Our old man is our fallen nature that we inherited from our first parents. Because Yahweh laid on His sacrifice everything evil in creation, the saints' sins and sin nature were included. And not just slain, but also disposed of. How rich is Paul's understanding of the Lord's death.

6:7-9

For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him.

Believers died with Christ. What a monumental concept, and not just a concept but a fact! Being dead we are freed from sin and all that goes with it. Not only so, but the believer has also been raised from the dead with Him. Imagine how far the apostle has brought us since chapter one. From abject hopelessness to being in Christ raised from the dead!

6:11

Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We have nothing to do but to reckon ourselves dead to sin; that is, to live our lives according to this fact. We have nothing to do; indeed, we can do nothing. His grace has done it all! This is our victory, even as it is victory for the little flock in Rome.

6:12-14

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

The little flock (and we) can do this because of our place in Christ. Yahweh put us in Him. Think of it. Not only did the Lord crush the head of the serpent according to Genesis 3:15, but He included us in His death and in His resurrection. How can these things be?

Being in the physical realm, it is hard to think in terms of spirit. In the spirit there are no

limitations of time and space. Although the Lord was a man dying a physical death, His work of destroying Satan, destroying sin, destroying evil human nature, destroying the world system He did in the Spirit. Otherwise, how could we be included in His death and resurrection in the first century when we weren't even born? His death is comprehensive throughout all time and space, so it can include the rebel angel and us at the same time.

This is why Paul urges the saints in Rome to live and move victoriously as those raised from the dead. Sin is destroyed and has no dominion. This is grace! It is devoid of any human involvement and only requires acceptance.

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 leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?

Purely by grace the Lord has done everything for a believer to live a righteous and holy life. Now it is time for the Roman saints to do their part. To whom shall they present themselves as slaves to obey – to the Lord Jesus or to Satan? It really comes down to that, because Satan controls the fallen human nature, the world system, and the spiritual realm above the Earth. The Lord has destroyed all that and made abundant provision for every saint, but how a believer exercises his will is beyond His control.

6:17-18

But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

The Romans chose wisely. They exercised their victory and became slaves of righteousness. That they obeyed the apostle's teachings from the heart had to encourage him immensely.

6:22-23

But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Once enslaved to sin and now set free to become slaves of Yahweh. From one slavery to another. This is glorious slavery and true freedom! Before the Lord called us, we spent our lives in service to sin and earned wages leading to death. After Christ, the Father's priceless gift to us all, we enjoy eternal life.

7:2-4

if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.

In this chapter Paul deals with the Jewish portion of the Roman congregation. As we would

suspect, their biggest obstacle to Christ is the law. To the Gentiles it is sin; to the Jews it is the law.

Paul sees clearly that the law, though given by Yahweh, has become an idol to the Jews that displaces the reality of the Messiah/Savior. For nearly three decades he has had to confront the troublesome Jews over the law.

He likens the law to a dead husband who no longer has any power over his wife. But Israel cannot give him (the law) up to death but keeps him around to revere and consult. This becomes a negative factor in the lives of too many saints, so Paul reminds them that by being included in the Lord's death, they are now dead to the law and can dismiss it. If only it were that easy. Paul hammers away.

Because the saints are dead to the law, they can now marry Christ and bear fruit to Yahweh. This is a wonderful prospect for them if they would take it.

7:6

But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.

No one was better trained in the law than the apostle, and yet he is fighting against it, trying to rescue Jews from its clutches. Only transformation can explain this. Only Christ living and abiding in him could affect such a change of heart. Once its most stalwart defender, and now the most indefatigable opponent. How can this be?

To the apostle, knowing Christ is supreme, not the ancient document that was only a child tutor to protect Israel until her Messiah came (Galatians 3:24). But, alas, Israel decides to embrace Moses and the law instead of her Messiah, and not only embrace but to bitterly defend it against Paul's gospel. They fight for the oldness of the letter (law), and Paul for the newness of the Spirit. It is small wonder that the unbelieving Jews hated Paul, to them a traitor.

7:7

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet."

The law is not bad. How can the word of Yahweh be bad? Impossible! Why then is Paul teaching against it?

The altogether holy law exposes what sin is, but having done so, it is powerless to do anything about it. A person is left condemned by failure to keep the commandments. The law says, "you shall not;" and if you do you will die. People in that situation had only sacrifices to maintain their lives. But then the ultimate sacrifice comes to them and dies for them, but they still grip firmly that which condemns them. They cling to what is meant to bring them to Christ but reject Him!

7:8, 10, 12, 14

But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead . . . And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death . . . Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good . . . For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.

The apostle isn't teaching something that he hasn't experienced. He had his own set of struggles against the law. He was such a devoted advocate of it, he ended up persecuting those he felt were violating it. When the Lord confronted and saved him, he surely had a lot of thinking to do and a lot of baggage to offload. Here he was faced with the thou-shalt-not commandments that had guided him for thirty years, and now comes the ascended Christ. So, he reflects on his experience of the law.

Human nature is utterly depraved. The law comes prohibiting certain behavior, so what does human nature do? It immediately considers doing the opposite. It is a knee jerk reaction for which every human being is guilty. Paul is no different. He admits that the law is of the Spirit and is holy, just, and good; after all, Yahweh spoke it. But he is not of the Spirit but of the flesh. He can't help himself.

7:15

For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.

Paul's experience is not unique. Every sinner goes through the same thing. The saints in Rome understood.

The law tells the people what not to do and they eagerly agree and set out to practice the commands. And fail. Miserably. Even Paul could not understand what was going on in him. He would urge himself to do good but would practice the opposite. What he hated he would do. Monstrous dilemma!

7:17-20

But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

In all his struggles to do the right thing and fail, Paul concludes that the blame lies with something apart from him. He wants to do good and practices evil. He makes up his mind to avoid evil and sets his will to do the right and good thing, but practices evil. What is this? How can this be?

In his flesh sin dwells. Like he says, "I know that in me (my flesh) nothing good dwells." This is not some vague force floating around messing with him; this is a person who dwells in him. This is key to understanding ourselves as human beings brought forth from our original parents. They fell into sin through disobedience, and that resulted in Satan embedding himself in their flesh, even in their DNA. He is irrevocably indwelling the flesh of every human being and influences

his or her thoughts, feelings, decisions, and behavior. Without a stronger force to counter this influencer, a person can do nothing but sin.

7:21-22

I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.

A law is something that is consistent. It never changes and makes the same demands repeatedly. An orange seed has a law in it with a set of rules that cannot deviate from the world of orange. When planted, that seed will only produce an orange tree. It can do nothing else.

In Paul there is a law in his inward man that agrees with the law of Yahweh. It makes him determined to do good. So what happens?

7:23

But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

There is another law associated with the sinful person in his flesh (members) that can do nothing but sin, and this law wars against the law in the mind that agrees with Yahweh. This law in the flesh has a rule that it must bring the person into captivity to sin. It can do nothing else but this. This is despairing to the apostle.

7:24

O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Though wretched and defeated, there is a way to victory. Another person arrives on the scene – Jesus Christ our Lord!

8:1

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

How far the apostle has brought us! In chapter 1 the Lord gave up on humanity, and here in we are in Christ Jesus! This does not mean we are to be passive and think He will do it all for us. No! He expects us to walk, or live, according to the Spirit. This is within the grasp of every believer, not just seasoned ones.

8:2-3

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh,

Here is another law, a great and powerful one, that, according to definition, never changes, never deviates, and can only do what the Spirit does. This strongest law frees the Roman saints from the fixed law of sin and death in their flesh.

The law of Moses could not help the believer because it relied upon their human strength for obedience and cooperation. But they were weak because of the law of sin in their flesh. The gracious Father sent His Son in incarnation as a man to die, and that death condemned sin in the flesh of the saints.

8:4

that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

By walking according to the Spirit in the strength of Christ's wonderful work, the saints no longer fear the condemning law of Moses that they cannot keep. They have the much stronger and far more superior law of the Spirit in Christ Jesus. In fact, by living by the Spirit they spontaneously fulfill all the righteous requirements of the law of Moses without giving it one thought!

8:5-7

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

Here is victory! In all economies, this is the sure victory – where do we set our minds? What do we think about? We must take control of our thoughts and set them, nail them down, pin them to the mat and make them think about spiritual things. This is the way to life and peace. But it takes effort and a lot of practice on our part. If we do it and do it consistently, we are guaranteed life and peace and victory over sin because of what Christ did on Earth for us.

8:9

But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.

We know the Spirit dwells in us, so our position in Christ is in the Spirit. This is a fact that can never be taken from us.

8:10-11

And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

These are eternal facts that we own for eternity. Christ is in us and, in spiritual reality, our body with its law of sin and death is dead. This is our position right now! Not only so, but the resurrecting Spirit dwells in us and will give our mortal bodies life both now and when He calls us up.

The question is, how do we make our condition match our position?

8:13-14

For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

Here is our responsibility: put to death the deeds of the body. In the deeds of the body are the law of sin and death that will drag us down every time. It can't do anything else. But we have the Spirit in us to do the work. He will lead us as we set our minds on Him and on spiritual things and on the Word. This divine/human cooperation will be our victory.

As those led by the Spirit, we are His sons because of His life in us. He has fathered us, not in a mechanical way, but in an organic sense. We truly possess His life.

8:15-17

For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

Here is a glorious future. Whether this applies to the true Israel – the little flock saints, the remnant of Israel – and/or the body of Christ saints is hard to tell. Though we are both (Jew and Gentile believers) the Father's children, are the body saints heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ? Or is this an intrusion into Israel's blessing? We must be careful not to rob from Israel what does not belong to us. Christians are notorious for that.

Or will the remnant saints become the body of Christ saints? I believe this was the Father's will for them. Their kingdom future had been taken from them by their leaders in the rejection. The Lord would not leave them floundering, so He would, through Paul, lead them to higher ground.

8:18-19, 21

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God . . . because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

The ramification of being a son of God is far beyond believers' personal salvation. Creation itself waits eagerly for the work to be completed. This word from the apostle is a call for devotion and submission to the Lord for His work upon and in us.

8:26-27

Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Is the interceding Spirit exclusive to the remnant saints and the kingdom economy? In Paul's epistles written after the final rejection to the body of Christ saints, there is no mention of this work of the Spirit. Intercession for Israel is what the ancient high priest did for the people in the inner chamber of the temple once a year. The apostle may be explaining the fulfillment of that beautiful picture to a remaining remnant congregation.

8:28-30

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

This famous promise is often taken out of context. The context follows: the Lord foreknew who would be His and He predestined them to be conformed to His image. Does this mean that human agency plays no part in this? No. Foreknowledge does not mean coercion. Saints are never forced to violate the exercise of their will. He knew in eternity past who would accept of His offer of salvation. What's wrong with the omnipotent One knowing the future? And if a person accepts salvation, is it somehow coercive if the Father predestines that believer to a process leading to glorification? Not at all.

This wonderful process is His purpose into which He calls believers. Foreknowledge – predestination – conformation – calling – justification – glorification. All of this is that believers would be conformed to the image of Christ. This makes them His brethren and Him the firstborn among many brethren. It seems that this transcends any economical (dispensational) boundaries. He wants this for all His saints.

Therefore, the “all things” that “work together” are the milestones in this divine process, and they are all good. The process is good; the result is good.

8:31-32

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

Here is another reference to “all things.” How guilty are believers to diminish the meaning when they assign the episodes in their mundane lives as referring to the “all things.” We need an upward view! The “all things” are the items in the process (vv. 28-30). Because of Christ's work in life and death, the Father eagerly puts us in the process that leads us to glorification. He is altogether for us!

8:35

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

Enjoy this thoroughly! Remember when humanity was given up in chapter 1? But through the Father's persistence we are brought here as conquerors through Him!

8:38-39

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What a precious and priceless word to the saints in Rome! This is the summation of eight chapters of brilliant thought by our apostle. After all that has been revealed, how could any believer doubt that nothing can separate them from the love of the Father that He demonstrated in His Son? We are truly blessed creatures!

9:1-5

I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.

Rome was the cosmopolitan capital of the empire. Probably Jews and Gentiles in equal numbers populated the *ekklesia*. Because of the ancient animosity between the two, there were problems that concerned the apostle; mainly, they just didn't get along. Jews, because of their training, regarded every uncircumcised Gentile as unclean and to be avoided. Gentiles detested this attitude and had a natural aversion to the condescending Jews. Yet in this little flock congregation they had to meet, so Paul sets off to make things right. He is about to take both groups to the woodshed.

Paul just spent eight chapters explaining the utter depravity of every man and woman, and how, in the Lord's sovereignty, He addressed the problem by selecting a nation through whom to redeem hopeless humanity. Yahweh knew that for a remnant to arrive at the triumph of Romans 8, He had to intervene via incarnation. In other words, He had to become a man, live on this Earth flawlessly, die as a substitute for every human being, and lift humanity to divine status. He sent His Son through His chosen nation to accomplish this great work. He had to. How else could He have come? Gentiles needed to see and understand this and appreciate the Jew; and Jews needed to drop their unfounded pride and condescension and embrace their fellow saints in Christ.

Paul lets the Gentiles see why the Jews are so important. They possess the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the law, the temple service, the promises, and were the passage for the incarnated Christ, the blessed God, to this Earth. They are highly valued and worthy of deepest respect. Gentiles are warned to back off their negative attitude toward the people Yahweh has used over the centuries.

Paul silences the complaining Gentiles regarding Israel, the very people who say Paul is a traitor to Moses and the law. Rather, he takes his divine commission to Israel seriously (Acts 9:15), even up to the sunset of the kingdom economy that he must know is coming soon. Why does he switch gears from the high exposition of chapter 8 to dealing with the Jews and Gentiles in the next three chapters? Because they don't respect one another, and that is intolerable in the remnant *ekklesia*.

Paul is always the economist in the true sense of that word. Economy is the anglicized version of the Greek *oikonomia* that means the management of household affairs, stewardship, and administration. The Lord is hands-on, not a distant Creator uninterested in His creation. He

created for a purpose, and He reserves the right to manage, to intervene, to make sure things go as planned. The eternal architect has every right and reason to insert Himself into the affairs of humanity. And what affairs were going on here in the Roman *ekklesia*?

9:6-8

But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, “In Isaac your seed shall be called.” That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.

But, the Gentiles protest, do we have to accept every Jew, even those who hate us? The answer to that protest is extremely important in understanding how Yahweh regards His chosen nation.

Who is the seed of Abraham that Jews so persistently claim to be and so recklessly flaunt? How can Paul preach a gospel that indiscriminately calls both Jews and Gentiles to salvation in Christ without any provision for their promises made to Abraham and the fathers? Can we not claim by descent only that we are the children of promise having come out of Isaac? Paul’s answer is clear and lethal to their traditions and pride. They are only Israel who are the children of promise. Only the children of promise are counted as Abraham’s seed, as the true Israel, as the only Israel.

9:10-11

And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls),

Isaac is the chosen son only because Yahweh willed it so. As the Creator of the situation, He has the right, even a foundational right, to make this call. No one can withstand it. Israel cannot say that because they have done this and that – keeping the law, for example – they are the chosen seed. Yahweh has a purpose; He made His selection; Isaac was the seed. Period. Did Isaac do anything? No. Not one thing. The Lord chose him and that was it.

9:14-16

What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.” So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

Yahweh’s sovereignty cannot be unrighteous. He is the divine architect and can do whatever He pleases, and He answers to no one. To save humanity He had to become a man to do it. That decision forced Him to intervene in the affairs of creation. Is that a problem? Of course not! Can creation tell the Creator what He can and cannot do?

The incarnated man could not pop out of nowhere and do the job of redemption. He had to meticulously proceed through humanity in a carefully crafted process to fulfill Yahweh’s promise to Eve and to His enemy:

“I will put enmity between you and the woman; between your seed and her seed; it shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.” (Genesis 3:15).

Yahweh needed a people to work with to accomplish His plan. He chose Israel and accomplished the incarnation. There is not one thing unrighteous in this. Can any other nation make a claim against this selection? No, because ultimately, every nation not chosen will benefit from Yahweh's choice of Israel. The fact is, without the incarnation there was no hope for humanity, and without the selection of one nation to serve as a conduit there would have been no incarnation. There is absolutely nothing unrighteous with this arrangement!

9:20-21

But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?

Some people don't like the arrangement and complain about its fairness. Paul's answer is simple: get used to it. True justice would have every man condemned and destroyed by a righteous God. Who is mere man –sinful man at that – to question the Creator? He built the universe; it's His house, so quit carping. He can do whatever He pleases, and, ultimately, it is for the benefit of everyone.

Jews, even believing Jews, didn't appreciate that Gentiles were included in the Lord's salvation. They regarded only themselves as recipients of the Lord's blessing on them through their father Abraham. To them, the Gentiles are unwelcome interlopers. The Jews are probably the complainers in Rome, forcing Paul into an unassailable argument in favor of the Gentiles. They are included because Yahweh in His sovereignty opened the door to them through their apostle.

9:23-24

that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

Vessels of mercy are Jews and Gentiles who believe in Jesus, who know the riches of His glory. Once they believe they come into the realization that they were "prepared beforehand for glory." Were they forced to believe? Of course not. Were they prepared beforehand? Yes. How can we explain this? We can't. Does this arrangement violate man's free will? No. He had to make his choice to believe. In H.A. Ironsides' illustration, the pilgrim walks along a path and comes upon an arch with a sign at the top: "Whosoever will may come." He makes the choice to believe and passes through the arch. Looking back, he reads another sign attached to the arch: "Chosen in Christ from the foundation of the world." Is there any problem here? No. Emphatically, no! The sovereign Lord makes His choice, and the sovereign man makes his.

9:25-26

As He says also in Hosea: "I will call them My people who were not My people, and her beloved who was not beloved." And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' there they shall be called sons of the living God."

This word is to the Gentiles in Rome to give them relief that they are indeed chosen as the Lord's people. This is earth shattering! To make the Gentiles the same as Jews is a huge change in the way the Lord is dealing with the two groups. He chose Israel to accomplish incarnation, but now

that the Lord is seated on the right hand, He must be found by faith, not by sight. The Jews have long enjoyed outward signs and sights, but no more. The invisible realm must be accessed and enjoyed by faith, and faith is no respecter of persons.

This concept that the Jews hold no superior position and the Gentiles no inferior is the basis for the body of Christ. Paul is looking ahead to the next economy.

9:27-28

Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved. For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth."

To the Jews Paul emphasizes the remnant. Not the nation, but the remnant. Only the believers in the Messiah are the true Israel, and that includes believing Gentiles.

Here is proof that the Lord indeed works on Earth. He is *not* passive!

9:29

And as Isaiah said before: "Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been like Gomorrah."

At this point true Israel is reduced to the little flock comprised of Jewish and Gentile remnant believers. All favor toward one group, Israel, is gone. There is no distinction. This is a huge economical change.

This is a bedrock principle defining the body of Christ, so it's no surprise that this letter to the Rome congregation comes at the end of Paul's commission to the children of Israel. It won't be long before the dispersed of Israel will add their verdict to the Jews of Jerusalem and Judea and reject the offer of the Messiah and His kingdom (Acts 28:28). As the day approaches, Paul is more at liberty to introduce elements of the body of Christ. He must expect this little flock to readily transition into the new economy of the body of Christ. They have no other course open to them.

9:30-33

What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. As it is written: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, and whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."

This is a clear statement of just how much the Lord values faith. Faith demands that its object be invisible, or it is not faith at all. What is invisible here? The Messiah is invisible and has been for three decades. To believe in Him, to be His follower, to forsake the world and its lusts, to be part of a little flock congregation, a believer must exercise faith that the Messiah is above, waiting to return to establish His kingdom. This faith is open to *all* people, not to Jews only.

Jews cannot boast in keeping the law anymore if they are believers in Messiah. The law is outward, tangible, visible, and requires effort, not faith. Gentiles have no law to keep, so faith in the ascended Christ is easier for them. Jews have trouble because they are used to an outward religion. The invisible Christ causes them to stumble. Not so the Gentiles.

10:1-4

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Paul's heart aches for his brethren, the Jews. He has tried for nearly thirty years to reach them with the gospel of Christ committed to him at his conversion. But no matter what he said to them, they refused to let go of the law, thinking that keeping the law was the way of the righteousness of God. It was not. It only stumbled them miserably. They refused to see that only Christ was the "end of the law for righteousness," but belief was predicated upon faith alone, not on the work of keeping the law.

10:5-8

For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, "The man who does those things shall live by them." But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' " (that is, to bring Christ down from above) or, "Who will descend into the abyss?" " (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach):

Those who adhere to the law must live by all its precepts, an utter impossibility. Only Jesus did it and no one else. But opposing the law is the righteousness of faith that requires nothing of human work, even if that work is to ascend into heaven or to descend into the abyss in search of Christ. No! Human work must stop! Christ is the word, and that word is near us. All that is required now is to whisper the name of Jesus and let Him occupy our hearts.

This is a radical departure from the gospel to the circumcision delivered by Peter and the eleven. This simplicity will carry over into the coming economy of grace and the body of Christ.

10:9-13

that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

It is readily apparent that the kingdom economy with its salvation requirements is about to be laid aside. What Paul shares here with the *ekklesia* in Rome is the very basis of salvation for the body of Christ. Grace requires nothing but faith in the finished work of Christ that exposes the

total incapacity of people to do anything for their salvation. Again, he emphasizes that there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles when it comes to salvation by faith. In this realm Israel is not preferred above any Gentile. The Lord is rich to all who call upon Him!

And salvation could not be made any easier. This is pure grace completely devoid of any human effort. This is hard for Jews to grasp having been raised with law and all its requirements, but to the Gentiles it is simple, easy, and wonderful! We can almost feel the ecstasy in Paul's words, unveiling as he does the whole new world of grace.

10:14-15

How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!"

Paul exerts his authority over these saints in Rome by reminding them that without him they would not have become believers. It was through him that the word was preached and heard and believed. He was, in fact, sent to them. What he says to them is well worthy of their attention and obedience.

10:16

But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?"

Even though salvation could not be easier, Israel, as a nation, remains as they were in Isaiah's day – stubborn and disobedient.

10:17

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

There is no faith without the word from God. If He does not speak to us, we cannot believe. This is why the Bible is so vital to every believer. It is the word of Yahweh passed through the writings of men according to the principle of incarnation: the Son of Yahweh becoming a man. The writers of scripture allowed Yahweh to use them to write His speaking so He could flow from heaven to Earth like He did in Jesus.

I have no doubt the Lord can speak in many ways (He once used a donkey), but I prefer to stay with the Bible, the written Word of God. Other means of speaking to humans can be spotty and misinterpreted, but the written words are more likely to be heard by the heart and understood by the mind, especially by the one who is hungry for the truth. Once a person hears the speaking, he immediately believes, though he sees nothing with his physical eyes. That is faith born by the hearing of the word of Yahweh.

No people have had more opportunity to hear the word of Yahweh than the Israelites. Throughout their history Yahweh has made Himself known by His speaking, but the nation, generally, has turned a deaf ear. This was especially true during Jesus' ministry and continues here as Paul struggles to convince them in Rome to obey the gospel by faith.

10:19

But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says: “I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation, I will move you to anger by a foolish nation.”

Of course, Israel knew. Yahweh had made Himself known every step of the way from Egypt to the present. They had no excuse, and now they were being set aside in favor of a “foolish nation” – the Gentile believers. Did Paul know what was coming upon Israel? This letter is, after all, the last word Paul would write to the remnant believers and it precedes Israel’s great rejection (Acts 28:25-28).

10:20

But Isaiah is very bold and says: “I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me.”

It must torment the apostle to have to write these words to the Jews. But he is the apostle to the Gentiles and does not allow his emotions to interfere with his instruction to the saints. He is very aware of the truth of Isaiah’s words. The Gentiles never sought the Lord, but through grace the Lord himself is known to them and they received Him by faith. This is an historical change from one economy to another.

10:21

But to Israel he says: “All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people.”

For nearly three decades Paul has fought with the unbelieving Jews and even the believing Jews who want to bring the new Gentile converts into bondage of the law and circumcision. Repeatedly he has had to protect the little flock assemblies from these damaging false teachings. Now the eternally patient Yahweh has had enough. He lays them aside for a time. Paul must have cried writing these words. He would never see his brethren (his nation) come to Christ.

11:1-2

I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew.

This is a question directed at the Gentile saints in Rome. It again emphasizes that Israel is the Lord’s people as opposed to any other. The little flock of Jews and Gentiles had to agree on this or there was only estrangement. The Jew had received the promises of Yahweh in Abraham and nothing Israel could do would change that fact. The Gentiles simply had to live with it, tough as it was.

11:2-3

Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, “Lord, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life?”

So protest the Gentiles against Israel. Do they have a case?

11:4-5

But what does the divine response say to him? “I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

The Lord’s response through Paul is airtight. “There is a remnant.” So long as there is a remnant, there is an Israel, the Lord’s favored nation. The Lord reserves for Himself seven thousand men out of Israel, men who have first reserved for themselves the God of Israel. In the present day the little flock saints are the seven-thousand-man remnant.

The Gentile balks. But is this fair? On what basis can there be a remnant? Fair or not, the divine answer is “according to the election of grace.” Grace saves Israel through a remnant; grace, not works, saves the Gentiles from sin. No one has the right to complain about the other.

11:6

And if by grace, then it is no longer of works

Yahweh reserves the right to perfect His purpose through grace. He doesn’t care what humans think, He can act according to His own grace, regardless of what the recipient does or doesn’t do. The Gentiles are raw pagans saved from sins by grace; the Jews are equally guilty before Yahweh and their law must cease in the presence of grace. Grace is everything to both peoples. It is the order of the day for the little flock.

11:7

What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded.

The elect are the Jewish believers – the little flock – and they have obtained grace unto salvation. The rest of the nation is blinded because they reject their Messiah. They seek salvation through human effort in trying to keep the law. It never works. Christ has done everything and offers it to Israel by grace. But they are blinded.

11:8

Just as it is written: “God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day.”

Did the Lord arbitrarily blind their eyes and stop their ears? No! They did it first, just as Pharaoh hardened his own heart before Yahweh hardened it. The Lord never violates human agency. People choose, the Lord acts. The Lord fulfills His purposes upon the multitude of human decisions. He does not coerce! The verse says that Yahweh gives them a “spirit of stupor,” but not before they turned away from Him to their own devices.

11:11

I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.

Is Israel's stumbling and fall permanent? Absolutely not, else why would the Lord use their fall to provoke them to jealousy because of the Gentiles? Obviously, He is not done with them; however, the Lord's attention at this time turns to the salvation of the Gentiles.

11:13-15

For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them. For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

This proves conclusively that Israel will rise again even though for now they are "being cast away" so that the Gentile world can be reconciled to Yahweh. Once they are accepted back after their temporary setting aside, it will be as if they are resurrected from the dead.

Paul knows something is coming that will change everything, and he writes in anticipation of it. He writes prophetically of the nation's rejection of the offer of the Messiah and His kingdom, which is not a surprise seeing how he suffered extensively for so long at the hands of the Jewish antagonists. The inclusion of this prophecy leads me to believe that Paul wrote this letter very near to the final rejection by Israel's leaders, perhaps from Caesarea before his transport to Rome.

11:16-21

. . . and if the root is holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.

Paul warns the Gentiles to mind their ways and not disrespect Israel. They are in their current condition and status because many branches in Israel have been broken off by their mistreatment of Messiah, thus allowing Gentiles to be grafted into the olive tree where they enjoy its fatness. Gentiles must be careful because they are where they are, not by anything they've achieved, but by Israel's disobedience. The root supports them, not the other way around. Best to keep your mouths shut and fear what the Lord might do. If He spared not Israel, His chosen nation, why would He spare even one Gentile?

Paul presses against both parties to show respect. If this little flock congregation is to take its place among the assemblies of the future body of Christ where there is no distinctions between saints, they must begin now to practice the principles that will guide them later. This shows how prescient is this final letter from Paul's ministry to Israel in the Acts period. Major changes are afoot, and he writes accordingly.

11:22

Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.

We should never forget the context. Paul is writing to the remnant congregation in Rome, not to the body of Christ that will come later. This little flock belongs to the economy of the kingdom, not to the body of Christ. Under the kingdom economy is it altogether possible to be cut off; that is, to lose salvation. Salvation to the saints in these congregations depended upon faithfulness and endurance to the end. The body of Christ saints had no such constraints.

11:23-24

And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

Still speaking to Gentiles, Paul explains how Israel is the natural branches of the cultivated olive tree. Their unbelief in the Messiah and His message has broken them off from the tree and allowed the wild Gentiles to be grafted in unnaturally as replacements. These wild branches benefit from Israel's disobedience and rebellion. But if Israel repents and embraces their Messiah, they will be restored again to their own olive tree. This shows the fluidity of Israel's salvation. Unbelief brings judgment and a cutting off; repentance and return brings restoration. The kingdom economy demands faithfulness and endurance to the end.

11:25-27

For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins."

Again, Paul speaks prophetically about "that blindness in part has happened to Israel." Of course, he has been dealing with the blindness of the nation in general and the leaders in particular all during his nearly three decades of ministry. So what does he mean when he writes "until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in?"

This is a key point in understanding the Bible and especially the New Testament. The rejection of Messiah by Israel allows the inclusion of the Gentiles into the Lord's eternal purpose – the body of Christ composed of Jews and Gentiles without any distinctions. If then the nation rejects their Messiah, when will "all Israel be saved?" And what is the "fullness of the Gentiles?"

After the body of Christ economy is implemented when Paul is incarcerated at Rome, it will persist through centuries while Israel is laid aside in judgment. Once the Lord finishes His work upon the body, He will remove it from the scene and the history of Israel will proceed to its completion after seven years of tribulation, the final week of Daniel's seventieth seven (Dan. 9). Once this tribulation runs its course, the Lord Jesus will return to Earth, judge the nations, build

His temple, and marry His bride. In this process Israel will be pressed in by the armies of the Antichrist and will nearly be destroyed before the Righteous Judge will appear and save His people. This will finalize the Messiah's covenant with His covenant people.

When Israel came under the Lord's judgment in 70 AD, the Gentiles destroyed Jerusalem, the temple, and dispersed the nation from her land. She lost her city, her temple, and her land. In the middle of the 20th century, the United Nations in 1948 granted Israel her land, and in 1967 she conquered her city. Gentiles had had jurisdiction over Jerusalem since the brief respite under the Maccabees from 167 BC to 37 BC. Since that time, Gentiles were in control. The Six Day War in 1967 ended that. All that remains for Israel is the temple. The fulness of the Gentiles ended when Jerusalem came back under Israel's control. The Lord has done the preliminary work for the wrap up of Israel's interrupted kingdom economy.

11:28-29

Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

Here is a strong word regarding Israel. Paul calls them "enemies for your sake." Enemies of whom? As we have seen throughout the book of Acts, they are enemies of Messiah and His gospel and all who would take His name. This enmity leads the nation into a position and condition of divine suspension from the purpose of Yahweh. Because Yahweh is never without His witnesses on the Earth, He called out the Gentiles through Paul. This does not mean Israel is lost forever, for "they are beloved" because of Yahweh's covenants with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with his sons. The Lord's promises can never fail; Israel will rise again.

11:30-31

For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy.

Israel disobeys Yahweh and releases the Gentiles for salvation. In turn Israel observes the mercy shown to Gentiles, repents and returns to Yahweh to find His mercy, thus completing the circle.

11:32

For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.

The final word is this: All have sinned and committed disobedience, both Jew and Gentile; but Yahweh, in His circuitous way, shows mercy upon them all.

11:33-36

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?" Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?" For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

Paul's explanation of the interaction between Jew and Gentile and the Lord's ways of dealing with them leads him to an exalted proclamation of the Lord's unsearchable mind and ways. How

the dear Yahweh extracts from two errant people groups a remnant that cares only for Him and His purposes is reason for Paul to exult in his Lord and His ways.

12:1-2

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Who are these brethren? The very ones Paul is teaching through his letter to the Rome assembly the foundational principles of the body of Christ. You read that right – the foundational principles of the body of Christ. Isn't that a bit premature since Israel has not yet rejected the offer of the Messiah and His kingdom? That could be argued, I suppose, but at this late stage of Israel's waning opportunity to repent, Paul takes the liberty to lay the foundation of the next economy – the economy of grace and of the body.

Why does the apostle tell the saints to present “your bodies a living sacrifice” instead of their spirits or hearts or souls? Our bodies are controlled by our souls – mind, emotion, will. If a saint allows the Lord to take residence in his/her heart, then behavior (body) will follow and express Christ to the world. Behavior does not lie. Our body – our behavior – is open for all to see and evaluate. Intrinsic to behavior is speech, and words reveal what we are on the inside.

Sacrifice implies death. How then can a person be a “living” sacrifice? In chapter six the apostle stated his case clearly that we died when Christ died. Our position, our status is fixed – we are dead with Christ. Our evil nature has been neutralized by His all-inclusive death. Therefore, to be a living sacrifice is to live as if dead to sin, dead to this world, dead to Satan's overtures. We are one with the ultimate sacrifice and are dead; and yet this ultimate sacrifice resurrected. He is alive! And so are we! When we live according to chapter eight – by the Spirit – we are alive; that is, a living (resurrected) sacrifice!

Not only so, but we are also one living sacrifice. The saints in Rome, being many individuals positionally dead in Christ, are one living sacrifice being alive in Christ. The goal is that the many saints practice being the one corporate living sacrifice. One living sacrifice *is* the one body of Christ. This is the foundational principle of being the one body of Christ, and practicing dead-but-living reality is the most intelligent way forward for these and all saints. To live as if dead and yet alive together in Him is altogether the most rational path for the saints in Rome. If they grasp and practice this exhortation by the apostle, they become equipped to avoid conformation with the world system that seeks to enslave them. This kind of daily practice will continually renew their minds, i.e., they will be thinking about Christ and about their fellow saints. With their thoughts occupied with the many attributes of their Savior, and with praying for their companion saints, their lives together as the congregation in Rome will prove the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God.

12:3

For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

If verses one and two are a bit ethereal, this verse brings everything into the practical realm. If a saint wants to be changed by a continually renewed mind, this teaching will bring all spiritual theories crashing down, and will expose the heart. “Not to think of himself more highly than he ought.” This is tough for every person, because we naturally think about ourselves most of the time. But if the Lord is to realize His eternal purpose, He needs those saints who think of Him, His purpose, and His many saints around him every day.

12:4-5

For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

Here Paul departs from his constraints regarding the body of Christ. Though he is dealing with the little flock in Rome under the kingdom dispensation, he knows that economy is rapidly coming to an end. So, he reveals what is to come for all people – Jews and Gentiles as the “many members in one body.” Though individuals, they are “members of one another.” This is priceless! The point of being “a living sacrifice” is for the body of Christ!

This is new ground, and Paul treads boldly upon it. Paul is under no illusions that the nation will repent of its treatment of Messiah. To his thinking at this late date in their economy, Israel has forfeited their promised blessings, though that will finalize in Rome in Acts 28:28. Paul surges forward in a brand-new economy, one in which the Lord is not an exiled Messiah, but the glorified Head of His body.

In search of that point in which the body of Christ began, we may have found it! Certainly, this answers Paul’s urgent desire for the saints to have proper behavior toward one another. We will see if what he writes in the rest of this letter confirms this proposition that here begins the body of Christ.

12:6

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us,

The head of the body gives every member an abundance of grace. For what? For the building up of the body. This is vital. We have a lot of work to do and we do it “according to grace,” not according to our good ideas and fallen strength. This does not mean we should run here and there trying to figure out what exactly our gifts are. That’s a fools’ errand. Rather, look around at the needs of the saints and meet them! Don’t over think! We have the Giver of the gifts. Live according to Him and get to work “according to the grace” He gives embodied in His life in us. He is grace, the greatest gift of all.

12:9-13

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.

Paul here gives us a lineup of what he means by using our gifts. It’s not that someone has more

than another, or greater than another. No! Every saint can conquer this list and do every one of the items Paul mentions here. Our endless introspection in search of the unique gift we have of the Lord is nonsense and counterproductive. Look again at this list. Every one of us can do every one of these urgings by the apostle. We have Christ! We can do it all!

12:14-16

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.

The list continues. Again, nothing here is out of the reach of any member of the body.

12:17-21

Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. Therefore, “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Nothing here is above or beyond even the weakest saint. This is a wonderful litany of grace works that will build up the body and make it a beautiful expression of our gracious Head.

And it's not a matter of checking off boxes to make sure we've done them all. No! The answer is in chapter eight and setting the mind on the Spirit and living according to the inward Christ. Then all the items will be spontaneously accomplished without even one thought on our part. We take care of Him in our spirit and soul, and our behavior will follow spontaneously.

13:1-2

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

This is a very difficult word to swallow, especially for Christians living at the present time under various forms of corrupt government. Nevertheless, here it is. Do we take it at face value, or rationalize it away by citing extremes like Hitler's Germany or China's Communists?

The context here reveals the basis of Paul's words. The Romans conquered the Grecian Empire by brute force and ruled the same way. At least that is how it has come down, but reading the gospels and the Acts leads one to conclude that the Romans weren't micromanagers. They adopted much from Greece including language, law, and architecture. They let Jesus perform His public ministry without interference. The antagonists were the Jewish elite in control of Jewish society.

But what was happening in Rome that compelled Paul to lay out these principles? It was probably the fault of the Jews, even those Christians in the assembly. Jews hated the Romans and

proved to be a rebellious people. It is true that they were promised an earthly kingdom. In 1 Samuel 24:20: “I know well that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand.” But as that kingdom is future, Israel chafes under Gentile rule. How the nation’s rebellion surfaced in Rome is not apparent, but it was serious enough to bring Paul to bear. He has not yet been to Rome to see firsthand what the Jews were doing, but he knew how obstinate unbelieving Jews were in general.

Central to Paul’s doctrine is “the authorities that exist are appointed by God.” This is a galling word to those living under evil governance, but if we believe in the Bible as the Word of God, we cannot ignore these words. It proves once more that our battle is not with earthly powers, but with spiritual wickedness in the unseen realm.

The counter argument against subjecting ourselves to devious and malevolent authorities is Peter’s reaction when told to stop preaching in the name of Jesus. He said, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” But Peter didn’t say this in defiance, but in humility. His attitude was correct. It should be noted that these authorities were the Jewish leaders, not Roman, which makes Peter’s attitude even more commendable.

So, there are limits. If government demands of us evil as in violating the Lord’s Word, we are free to resist, but with a very careful attitude that forbids a rebellious spirit.

13:3

For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.

Paul writes these words while Nero is the Caesar of the Roman Empire. The same Nero who torched Christians on poles to light the way to his palace. The same Nero whose wickedness qualified him to be the anti-Christ, and whose death at 30 years of age matched our Lord’s. What is our responsibility then? We are not responsible for what rulers do or don’t do. At some point we must let the Lord protect us against tyranny. Our responsibility is to “do what is good,” nothing else. Our citizenship is in heaven where Christ is. When do we really believe this? When we have no other recourse? Perhaps, or maybe when we set our affections above and not on the things on the earth. This is a very ticklish issue and one that severely tests a believer. Jesus never resisted the Roman authorities but sometimes did what He had to do to protect Himself from the Jewish fanatics.

13:4

For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

Some things are simply not under our control, like authorities, for example. Government should have our best interests at heart, and we in turn should be good citizens. That much we can control. If a person chooses to disobey the law, the authorities in a proper government will “execute wrath on him.” What happens if authorities are evil? We can’t control that. So long as they don’t demand of us evil actions that violate the Lord’s word to us, we must live with what we’ve been given. Not to promote passivity, but we have to trust the Lord for our welfare.

13:5-7

Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

Fear of authorities' wrath should not be a motivation to a saint; rather conscience should lead. Why would Paul need to write this? What was happening in Rome to elicit this response from the apostle?

Only a deep dive into historical accounts would answer this, but we know from the New Testament that Jews hated the Roman government and knew how to manipulate them to advantage. They knew how to frighten lesser authorities with the threat of rioting to get their way. But Paul puts an end to that kind of activity with "they are God's ministers." This strikes at the heart of every secretly (or not) rebellious member of the body of Christ. If an evil government does not require evil of its Christians, we can only submit and trust the Lord for the rest. He knows how much we can stand, and maybe He wants to push His people to the limit to perfect His purpose with them and in them.

13:8, 10

Owe no one anything except to love one another . . . Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

To the law-loving Jews in the congregation, Paul narrows it down to its essence – love one another. It is a debt no member can ever pay off, and gladly so, because love will build the body and benefit everyone.

13:11-14

And do this . . . awake out of sleep . . . cast off the works of darkness . . . put on the armor of light . . . walk properly . . . put on the Lord Jesus Christ . . . make no provision for the flesh,

In chapter 8 Paul enjoined the saints in Rome to set the mind on the Spirit where there is life and peace. Being physical beings unaccustomed to our heavenly position, we wonder what life and peace looks like in practice. Paul spells it out with lists of manifestations, this being the latest. And what does it take? Effort. Human effort in collusion with the divine life in our spirit. Essentially Paul encourages the saints to "wrap yourselves in the armor of light and wrap yourselves in the Lord Jesus Christ. Wear Him like a blanket." This takes thought and prayer to imagine ourselves enclosed by our Savior, but this is Paul's exhortation. He wants this to be the experience of every saint, and if it becomes so, the victory in chapter 8 will pervade the assembly.

14:1, 3-4

Receive one who is weak in the faith . . . for God has received him . . . for God is able to make him stand.

As the Lord's congregation, we have no right to refuse any believer apart from sin or divisiveness. It doesn't matter the believer's condition – strong or weak – if the Lord, the Head of the body, receives a brother or a sister, we must do likewise. This was a strong word to the

congregation at Rome, filled as it was with Jews and Gentiles. Historically they hated each other, but in Christ it did not matter. They weren't allowed to divide into factions and had to find a way to co-exist, and not only so, but to co-exist compatibly as a proper testimony of their Head.

We know the context of the assembly at Rome. Living under Nero, a raw, unhinged pagan, they are comparatively new to the Romans who had been pagans for decades, having been influenced by the idol worshiping Greeks with their silly mythologies. These heathens have no use for Jews in general, and even less for these Jesus-believing Jews who are acquiring converts from among the Gentiles. As Paul writes, both groups feel the sting from their own people, even more reason Paul advocates for oneness among them. Whether they like it or not, they need each other much more than they know.

14:7-9

For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

Everyone belongs to the Lord and, by extension, to each other. Here Paul makes it abundantly clear that distinctions are over. Religion, culture, personalities, opinions, politics, traditions – all are subsumed in Christ and He alone remains. He is the Head directing every motive and action of the members. It is a new day! Christ is now Lord of His new people.

14:10-14

But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God." So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.

Paul attacks the problem in Rome with the specter of Christ's judgment seat where we shall all give an account of our actions. The Roman saints may not like each other, but the least they should do is not stumble others and make them fall. Civility might just lead to love.

14:15-17

Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died . . . for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Jews have strict eating requirements with many prohibitions. Gentiles do not, even eating meat sacrificed to idols. Food cannot bring or keep these two groups together; in fact, food can even grieve others. If Gentiles eat idol meat, the Jews grieve; if Jews eat meat without blood, Gentiles may be offended. Paul says the fault does not lie with the grieving one, but with the insensitive one who doesn't care. This is a very practical example of keeping the oneness of the body in love.

What is the kingdom of God mentioned here? To the little flock it is the kingdom of Messiah on Earth. To the body of Christ, it is the kingdom of the Father overarching Earth and the heavens, that realm formerly occupied by Lucifer and his administrators. To whom, then, is Paul writing?

This letter to the Roman congregation seems to suggest that the nation of Israel's rejection of the kingdom offer is a reality even though not finalized until Acts 28:28. In chapters 9-11 Paul wrote as if Israel had already been broken off to allow the Gentiles in. If we think it through, the unbelieving nation forfeited its promised blessings and was cut from the cultured olive tree, and the believing portion, the remnant assembly, was grafted in with the believing Gentiles, and had persisted for almost three decades. But Paul knew something was afoot. He had already mentioned the "one body in Christ" in chapter 12 after dealing with the breaking off and grafting in of the branches. He continues his efforts to mingle two antagonist people into one body. He is not naïve about the task ahead of him.

14:18-20

For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense.

The behavior of the believers at Rome is a service to Christ. Why is this? Christ is the Head of the body, so to serve Him is to serve the members. Not judging others; not stumbling others; not eating insensibly – all these practical activities in relation to others is a service to the Head and is acceptable to the Father. If you want to be spiritual, take good care of those around you. Edification of the body is "the work of God," and to be asked to join in this great work is the highest honor we can receive. Let us not allow a base thing like food to divide and conquer us.

15:1-3

We then who are strong ought to bear with the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me."

Paul continues to drill down into the subject of behavior. In none of his writings to this point does he expend so much time and energy instructing the saints about how to treat one another. If the Spirit has now removed all restraints from Paul, and if he is free to engage the saints in Rome as the body of Christ, then his lengthy exhortations make much sense. He regards both Jews and Gentiles as equals and without traditional distinctions. As such, they are to bear the weaknesses and shortcomings of the members with whom they are attached. He urges them to take care of others before pleasing themselves. This is vital to the life of the body and to its edification.

15:4

For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

The Hebrew scriptures were written to teach. What are we to learn? Patience and comfort. How

can stories of the ancient Israelites result in our patience?

Scriptures were written that we might come to an understanding of the Author. Even a cursory reading reveals how patient is the God of the Israelites. They are a selfish and rebellious people (as all are) who continually provoke Him and draw His judgment upon themselves. But He never loses patience with all of them, but always preserves a remnant unto Himself. The stories of Israel reveal the patient One who indwells us.

The scriptures also give us comfort because the Lord so graphically illustrated therein comforts us to the extent we allow. When we submit to our Father and experience His patience and comfort, it gives us hope – hope that we can live at the vanguard of His purpose.

15:5-6

Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Patience and comfort are not virtues to be hoarded but shared. Even as He is patience and comfort, so we should live with minds set upon the Spirit and allow His attributes to spread from us to others. As Head of the body, He wants this of us. If we practice this – allowing Him headship among us – we will “with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

15:7

Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.

If we are the body of Christ, we have no choice but to receive every saint that He receives. Period. Not for race, not for culture, not for doctrine, nothing allows for division in the body. A buffet of assembly choices was foreign to the first century saints. If you found yourself in a town or city, you met with the saints in that town. There was no list of denominations or ministry groups on a billboard outside of town for your personal preference. If you were a Christian, you met with the other Christians under the single eldership of that place. No distinctions. No choices. No confusion.

15:8-9

Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: “For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles and sing to Your name.”

Paul’s final instruction to the saints reveals his deep concern for the two groups. Jesus Himself came to save Israel – the circumcised – by revealing His Father as truth itself. But He did not forget the Gentiles. Though Israel failed in their divine mission to them, Jesus did not, nor did Paul. The Head of the body raised up the chief of sinners to minister to the little flock, which included Gentiles, and to usher the two groups together into a higher calling. Paul wanted them to know that the Lord’s heart was in every way with them. To emphasize this and to encourage

them, Paul uses four verses from the Hebrew scriptures to show the Lord's inclusion (:9, :10, :11, and :12).

15:13

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

One final encouraging word from the apostle and from “the God of hope,” expresses four attributes of the personal Father: joy, peace, hope, and power. Paul never ceases promoting the God who called him from sure perdition unto the freedom of His saved ones.

15:15-16

Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Paul affirms his original calling in Damascus nearly thirty years previous. His primary emphasis has always been on the Gentiles, whether in the little flock congregations where they are secondary to Jews, or in the emerging body of Christ where there are no distinctions. They are Paul's offering to the Father – an offering acceptable and set apart by the Holy Spirit. They are his legacy, the result of his life's work.

15:18-20

For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient— in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation.

Christ truly has accomplished much through Paul. The little flock saints in many places, despite the evil activities of the Jewish religionists, benefitted greatly from Paul's ministry to them. The Gentile believers in those assemblies owe much to the apostle who ran interference for them and cut the way to the Jewish Messiah, to Jesus their Savior. Gentiles outside the reach of the Lamb's twelve heard the gospel of Christ from Paul and were saved. They thrived under his care and concern for them through his visits and letters.

15:23-25, 28-29

But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while. But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. . . . Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain. But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.

Paul's intention is to visit Rome on his way to Spain after he delivers the gift from mostly Gentile believers to the poor saints of Judea and Jerusalem. The Lord dashed those plans.

15:30-33

Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you. Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

This is a very timely prayer request, one that may have saved his life. In it Paul invokes the Triune God as well as the members. He wants the gift of aid to be acceptable to the saints so that he might come to Rome with joy and refreshment. He had no idea what was coming, but for sure his Lord was leading him all the way. We pray for what we think is best for us, but the Lord answers with what is best for Him and His purpose.

16:1-2

I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.

Phoebe tops the list of those on Paul's heart. She is a servant of the saints at Cenchrea, where he had mysteriously taken a vow (probably Nazarite) and shaved his head. We do not know why the apostle to the Gentiles who had long opposed Jewish entrapments would do such a thing. Probably Paul's burden and passion for Israel's salvation drove him to do what he had so long forsaken.

This is the only mention of Phoebe, but the fact that she is first indicates her value to Paul. She is a "servant of the *ekklesia*" and a "helper of many." What a tribute to this dear sister! Can you imagine the honor of being named in the Word of God sporting these credentials?

16:3-4

Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

Not even Priscilla and Aquila come before Phoebe, and these were much involved in the Lord's work with Paul. "My helpers" he describes them and tells how they laid down their necks for him. He did not let their loyalty and courage go unnoticed. He shared their exploits with the *ekklesias* of the Gentiles, proof sure that some congregations laid outside the reach of Jewish influence. They were strictly Gentiles and Paul was their apostle.

16:5

Likewise greet the church that is in their house.

Priscilla and Aquila hosted a house meeting, as did, perhaps, Philologus and Julia (:15). Does this mean that there were unrelated meetings in Rome? No! Absolutely not! There was one *ekklesia* in the ancient world and one *ekklesia* in each city and town. How could that be?

All the saints of the singular *ekklesia* in Rome are one in Christ, meeting under His one headship represented by a singular eldership of plural brothers. It did not matter how many house meetings there were. What mattered is the singular government of elders under the one Head. This is why Paul could write a letter “to all that be in Rome” (1:9) and it would be read by all the saints.

What shall we say about this? That this was for another time and place and that it could not work in the modern world? A shameful excuse. The enemy of us all knows well that oneness among believers destroys his works, so he schemes and devises and puts it into the hearts of ambitious ones to gather about them groups devoted to them and their teachings. They would rather a group provide their livelihood than work for the oneness of the *ekklesia* in every town and city. The result is countless denominations and free groups doing their own thing. The situation seems hopeless until we realize that the Lord recognizes a remnant of those who want to do the right thing.

What shall we do if we see these things? Find some others of like mind and of the same realization and together cling to Christ for His purpose, for His *ekklesia*. We can't forever bemoan the carnage around us; rather we give ourselves to Him and to each other for the building of His body. No name, no man's ministry, no set of pet doctrines – simply Christ and His word, simply receiving all who belong to Him. His purpose for His body has not changed since the scriptures were completed. Society has changed, traditions have set in but His word stands firm. So should we. We owe it to Him who saved us to stand with Him and with each other, no matter how lonely it seems. He is before us beckoning us to follow. How can we not obey?

16:17-18

Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you. Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.

A word of warning. The enemy of our souls never rests. He will do to the Roman Christians what he did to Eve – slither his way in to seduce the saints with poisonous and divisive words. Anything to disrupt and destroy. Paul calls upon the strong ones to oversee the situation and act to preserve the simple members of the body.

16:19-20

For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil. And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.

Paul commends their obedience that has expressed itself far beyond Rome. But be on guard! he urges them. Be wise to the good and unmixed toward the evil. Follow this advice, says the

apostle and “the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.” What a wonderful promise to the believers.

At the end of it all, Paul resorts to that which saved him and caused him to give up his own desires and preferences to suffer for Christ and saints: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.”

16:21-24

Timothy, my fellow worker, and Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my countrymen, greet you. I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord. Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you, and Quartus, a brother. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Paul seems compelled to include all his coworkers in his benediction. It may be to emphasize to this crucial congregation how many they have standing with them in this cause. All of these comprise the one *ekklesia*, of which Rome is a part. One body universal; one body local.

And a second time: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”

16:25-27

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith—to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.

To a casual reader this is a highly unusual passage apparently tacked on to an already completed treatise. To the trained eye the passage revolves around one word: “mystery.” Paul had used this word several time in his earlier letters, but never in this context. The word means “secret,” something not formerly revealed. If we don’t understand why he uses it here, we will never grasp its meaning, and that would be highly unfortunate to a student of the Bible (which every Christian should be). It is indispensable to understanding the Lord’s eternal purpose. Not apprehending this is tragic; grasping it is life changing.

Why does Paul use the term “my gospel?” Is what he preaches and writes unique among the writers of the New Testament? Well, yes, as a matter of fact. Paul’s gospel dealt with the body of Christ; a topic not covered by any other writer in the scriptures. Only Paul had the revelation of the mystery and that made it *his* gospel.

Included in Paul’s gospel is the “preaching of Jesus Christ.” The four gospels are biographies of Jesus, the earthly Lamb of God. They contain His words to His people Israel but have very little to do with Gentiles. The twelve disciples carried only Jesus’ message to Israel, with scant attention paid to the Gentiles. It was left to Paul to reach them, first as proselytes in the remnant assemblies, and then as the primary recipients of the message of the body of Christ. This constituted the *full* preaching of Jesus Christ. It should be remembered that Jesus spoke from Earth to Israel, and from the heaven to Paul. When He spoke from heaven, it was “according to

the revelation of the mystery.” This mystery (meaning “secret”) was kept secret from the beginning of the world. In other words, it was hidden in the Father from the beginning of creation.

“But now is made manifest.” The great mystery (that Paul develops in his next writings) is beginning to be unveiled. Why would Paul choose the assembly at Rome to develop the mystery? Was it because the Spirit had just then made it known? I don’t think so. Paul had already written early on to Corinth about the body in chapter 12 of his first letter to them. Whether he had seen the full truth of the mystery when he wrote to the Corinthians we don’t know. Did he know the fulness of the revelation when he added these final two verses to the Romans letter? We don’t know that either. He says it is “now made manifest,” so we should take him at his word. What we do know is that when Paul gets to Rome and writes Ephesians, everything is unveiled. This is after his narrow escape in Jerusalem, his treacherous journey to Rome, and the final Jewish rejection of their Messiah.

The manifestation is made “by the scriptures of the prophets.” We know that this could *not* mean the ancient Hebrew prophets because they had no hint of the body of Christ. What does Paul mean, then?

Paul was a prophet in both senses of the word. He was able to predict events as we see on his journey to Rome; but much more relevant, he was a proclaimer of the Word of God to all the nations of the Roman Empire. We will see in Ephesians the details that make a prophet in the body of Christ.

Romans is a transition from the kingdom economy to the body of Christ economy. No other writing provides this transition, making this writing vital to understanding the entire Bible, especially the New Testament.

The section containing chapters 1 – 8 is universal. It takes a person from deep depravity to inseparable union with Christ. It is the path that every Christian will travel and will give an account.

The section containing chapters 9-11 reveals God’s choice of Israel as His favored nation, its failure, and the inclusion of the Gentiles in the little flock assemblies of the kingdom economy.

Chapter 12 introduces us to the body of Christ, transitioning from the kingdom economy to the economy of grace. The following four chapters lead the members of the body into proper behavior toward one another.

The book is a complete package, laying the foundation for the emerging body of Christ. The revelation of the mystery will be developed and flower in the letters written in Rome while Paul is incarcerated. His mention of the body in 12:4-5 seems to indicate that the Lord is looking beyond Israel toward the new economy. It won’t be long before Paul reveals the great mystery hidden in the Father from before creation.

EPHESIANS

1:1-2

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, 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.

Here requires a change of thinking. The gospels and the book of Acts deal primarily with the speaking of Jesus on the Earth to His chosen nation Israel. Now that the nation through its leaders has rejected that speaking, consigning their Messiah to exile in heaven, He, as the irrepressible Word, begins to speak from His ascended position in heaven. First, He speaks to His servant Paul in a message of grace and converts him. Then His speaking continues through this faithful apostle. What we read hereafter are the inspired words from our exalted Head through Paul. These are the unambiguous words from the heavenly Christ through the pen of a human vessel.

This is huge. Jesus, the Word, spoke on Earth. Now that He is ascended, He speaks from heaven. This is fitting because Israel, to whom He spoke on Earth, comprise His earthly children. The body of Christ, to whom He spoke through Paul, is His heavenly children.

Paul would only be an apostle “by the will of God” because his will was on the opposite end of the spectrum. He had gone too far according to Jesus in Matthew 12:31-32:

“Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.”

Paul’s persecution of the Lord’s believers was tantamount to blaspheming the Spirit, for which there was no forgiveness “either in this age or in the age to come.” Only the Lord Jesus by grace could remove Paul into the economy of grace and save him.

“Grace to you and peace.” How is it that Paul could convey either of these attributes to the believers? By writing to them. The Lord is the Word and has chosen language as the vehicle to transport what He is to His believers. Paul’s words are the conveyance of the Triune God: “. . . from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” This is a reality of the spiritual realm.

1:3

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,

The letter to Ephesus transcends the Earth and emanates from heaven. There is no more Moses, or law, or temple, or Jew, or Gentile. In this heavenly realm there is only the believer without qualification or distinction. These words are written to the heavenly people – the body of Christ. There is no more haggling about ordinances like circumcision; no more claiming Abraham as

father; no more Moses the lawgiver. This is the realm of freedom in Christ far above all. Here we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ. What does this mean?

1:4

just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,

It starts with being *chosen* in Him before the overthrow of the world. Before the Father judged the Satan-corrupted world with water (Genesis 1:2) He had already chosen us in Christ to a life of separation and blamelessness. This is a huge spiritual blessing from the Father.

1:5-6

having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

Not only did the Father choose us before Earth's judgment and restoration, but He also predestinated us to be His adopted sons and daughters.

Adoption is taking someone who is not related to be your own. Before salvation we did not belong to the Father, but after salvation He adopted us as His own. Though we are adopted we are not attached organically to the Father. Adoption is wonderful, but we and the Father are not connected. We are legally His and always will be, but there is more, much more.

Why did the Father adopt us? Because He is full of grace, glorious grace. He didn't have to adopt us, but His grace drove Him to it. This is a highly important "spiritual blessing in the heavens!"

1:7-8

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence,

The result of this grace leads us to another spiritual blessing – our heavenly spiritual blessings of verse three. In Him we have *redemption* through His blood. This constitutes the nuts and bolts of the Father's practical rescue of sinners. His choosing and predestination and acceptance are precious, but our sins must be dealt with and that is the work of the Son, who also is full of grace. He died for us, in our place, so that we could have the heavenly spiritual blessings. In shedding His blood, He has brought in our *forgiveness* so we could enjoy His presence and experience His spiritual blessings upon us.

Not only has He done the work of our redemption, He Himself as a living, abiding person has abounded toward us. Now we have Him! Not just what He has done for us, but what He is to us!

This results in our living attachment to Him. We are now not just adopted children of the Father, but organic members of His Son's body. We are indeed blessed!

1:9

having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself,

With this divine understanding we see and grasp the mystery (secret) of His will that He makes known to us. What shall we call this spiritual blessing? Maybe *enlightenment*. He has made known to us the mystery of His will. This is momentous! But what is it? What is this that He has purposed in Himself that gives Him such pleasure, such satisfaction, and issues in His benevolence toward us?

1:10

that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.

It is this: in the Father's arrangement and management of time and space, when time is complete, He will gather in one all things in the heavens and on Earth in Christ. Who can possibly know what all this entails? We know that He is the king of Israel on the new and eternal Earth. We also know He is the Head of His heavenly body. Is there a mystical union of the two under Him? We need more light on this. For instance, we need to know what it means to be "in Christ." How are we involved and what is our role? Does Israel have a part?

1:11-12

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

Whatever the answer is, we have obtained an *inheritance* in the heavens, another spiritual blessing. Our Head is our inheritance. The Father's purpose regarding His Son includes us through predestination. We are important to His plan, a plan He designed before the ages began. This determination, this will, this decision drives all His work in bringing His plan to completion. And, best of all, we are a part of it!

"Who first trusted in Christ." These are the Jews, those first believers in the Messiah, the little flock, who transitioned to the higher calling of the body of Christ.

1:13-14

In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,

And now the Gentiles. What mercy! They believed the word of truth in the gospel and were *sealed* by the Holy Spirit promised to believers. Here is yet another spiritual blessing in Christ.

This sealing by the Spirit is merely the beginning of our inheritance, the Lord's down payment of future riches. These riches will come when we as the purchased possession – purchased by His precious blood – will be delivered up.

So both Jews and Gentiles are accounted for in the eternal plan. Both are purchased and both are possessed of Him.

The questions raised in verse 9 are still outstanding. What is the “mystery of His will?” In our quest we have discovered many spiritual blessings, but have we found the answer? The truth is not cheap. We will have to keep drilling down.

1:15-16

Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers:

Here is the apostle’s practical love for the Ephesians, promising continual prayers and thanksgiving.

1:17

that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,

Paul invokes the Father to grant to these saints one of the most profound blessings that He can give. It speaks for itself. This should be a daily prayer for us and for those we pray for. This is a prayer that accompanies the mystery.

That the Father “may give unto you the spirit of wisdom.” True wisdom comes from above, from the Father to His creatures. It transcends the Earth and reveals all the Triune God is to us. This wisdom enables us to comprehend and apprehend the vital truth of who He is.

“The spirit of revelation.” If we want to see divine truth – Christ, the mystery, the Body, our place in it all – we must have light from Him in our spirit. This is indispensable. Our spirit is one with the Holy Spirit. Divine light comes only when we set our minds on the Spirit in our spirit. It is then that the Lord drops truth into our understanding; it is then that we know our place in the Lord’s purpose. Without this supremely important factor, we flounder. But when we see, we thrive.

Knowledge here in the Greek language is *epignosis*, the full, complete knowledge of something. Paul wants this higher knowledge to be the domain of the saints.

1:18

the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,

When the Father answers the prayer of His servant and grants a “spirit of wisdom and revelation,” it results in the understanding acquiring “eyes”; that is, the mind begins to “see,” begins to be flooded with divine light. What does this light produce?

It produces a knowledge of the hope of His calling. What is His calling? Simply put, the body of Christ. What is the hope? That this body will bring us into a glorious and heavenly future where Christ is the Head.

He also enjoys the work of His hands. The one who grants us spiritual revelation and floods our minds with light gloriously possesses us. We are His inheritance, His possession. He may be as excited for the future as we are!

1:19

and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power

With our spiritual eyes we can see and know the “exceeding greatness of his power” to His believers. How can we even define “power?” His mighty power “works.” It is not just a vague force, but rather a living *person* who works. The Father works because He is the mighty one. He doesn’t just set things in motion. No! *He* is the mighty one in motion doing work. What kind of work does He do?

1:20

which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,

When Jesus lay dead in the tomb, the Father exerted His energy upon His Son and raised Him from the dead and elevated Him to His throne. That is power! Not even death, the most powerful force outside the celestial realm, can conquer divine life.

1:21

far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

This energy He exerted toward us is the same that raised His Son to the highest position in the heavenly places and gave Him a name above every other.

1:22-23

And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Not only so, the Father, still working, puts all under His feet. Still more, He gave Him to us to be our Head. From grave to Headship, the Father demonstrates His irrepressible power to us, the *ekklesia*.

The *ekklesia*, His body, is now the fulness of Him who fills all in all. What sublimity! What transcendence! O what a Christ! And here we are right in the middle of it all!

It should be obvious that chapter one is language of the divine, of the heavens. Nothing in any of the writings of the New Testament approaches these unprecedented concepts. They are as high as

heaven is from the Earth. For those who say that Paul usurps the simplicity of Jesus and His message fail to allow the ascended Head of the body to continue His ministry as the Word of God (John 1:1, 14).

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 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.

This verse continues 1:19 because of a long parenthesis starting with “according” and ending with “all in all” (:23). It then reads like this: “*And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us who believe which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*”

The apostle reminds the saints how deep was their depravity before salvation, walking in death; but how blessed in Christ who made them alive who once were dead.

2:4

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,

“But God!” Could there be two more far reaching, depression-dispelling, soul-saving, hope-inducing words? Without Him injecting Himself into human affairs, all would be lost forever. Upon His intervention rides His mercy. We contributed abject despair; He grace and love.

2:5

even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

We were dead in every way but physically. We had no life in our soul or spirit. But He made us alive together with His Son Christ when He was resurrected. We were there with Him! He imparted into us the life that is really life – the divine life containing all the characteristics of the Triune God. What a marvelous gift! One that we did not deserve in any way. He loved us and proved that love through His grace – His flowing out to us in His Son.

2:6

and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

Not only did He impart His life into our spirit by His Spirit, He also raised us up together to sit with Him in the heavens. We were put in Him. What can this mean? What does it mean to be *in* Christ?

In the first chapter we have mention of “in Christ,” “in Him,” “in the beloved,” and “in whom” in the following verses: 1:3, 1:4, 1:6, 1:7, 1:10, and 1:13. What is this except that He is the Head and out of the Head comes the body? All we are in His body comes from Him our source. If we are seated in Him, it is because He is our Head and we are in Him and out of Him. Where He is, we are there. This is how we can be resurrected with Him and sit with Him. The Head and body are inseparable.

2:7

that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Because the Head and the body are organically connected, the Father will display “the exceeding riches of His grace” in this oneness of the Head and body for eternal ages to come. Our oneness with the Head is what pleases the Father. The riches of His grace are lavished upon us in His kindness toward us. He didn’t have to do any of this, but He did.

2:8-10

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

From the deepest darkness to the highest position in Him, we will, we must, acknowledge that we are saved by grace and nothing else. Only faith in the unseen can grasp these things. The Ephesians probably had not seen Him, but they had faith and believed. They received the gift! They could do nothing else. No human works could do such a thing. He did it all and gave it to us freely.

As a result of His work and our faith, we are His masterpiece designed in Christ Jesus for valuable activity. The Head has done so much, and now the body can follow the Head into good works. What higher work can we do than live under His headship and build up His body? This is what the Father wanted of us before the creation. Let’s not be distracted and determine to do what we are created to do.

“Masterpiece” is a translation of the Greek word “poem.” How fitting it this! He is the Word, and He has chosen language upon which He conveys Himself to His creation, and especially to us. All He is in His countless attributes rides upon spoken and written words. Now we as His body are the continuation of His speaking; the expression to any who has an ear to hear what He is saying to His creation. We are His poem – His intimate and refined and beautiful presentation of His heart. We are His carefully arranged words coming from His deepest inward parts. This is honor in the highest order.

A well-written poem is the highest, deepest, most profound expression of language. It demands structure, constraint, beauty, intensity, and intimacy. To be the Father’s master poem is the highest privilege there is for believers. It is fitting that what He began with words (creation), He would end with a poem (the body of Christ).

2:11-12

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—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.

Paul reminds the Gentile saints in Ephesus just how abject they were before Christ – far removed from Israel, without hope, without God.

2:13-14

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought 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 separation,

“But now in Christ Jesus.” The economies have changed. The offer to Israel is set aside and grace reigns and the Gentiles benefit. The blood of Christ shed for Israel exclusively now belongs to the Gentiles as well and it brings them who were once far from the God of salvation near to Him. Now both parties – Jews and Gentiles – lose all uniqueness and distinctions.

“He is our peace.” Not love, not comfort, not righteousness, but peace! Peace suggests former conflict resolved, and that certainly characterizes the relationship between Jews and Gentiles. The Lord doesn’t just give peace as something detached from Himself, but He *is* peace! To have Him is to have peace. No longer is there a wall of separation between the two groups. Now there is only oneness.

2:15

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,

His death abolished the enmity between the former foes. This antagonism expressed itself in the law of commandments and ordinances. The Jews felt privileged because they were chosen; the Gentiles felt disparaged by the Jews because they had no credential and no privilege. The Lord took it all to His death and destroyed it. This eliminated all distinction; all pride and all discouragement. What was the result?

Now we come to the answer to our quest. “What is the mystery of His will?” So far, we have seen that Jews and Gentiles are no longer distinct because of the Lord’s work when He died. The law, the differences, the animosity, the partitions, He destroyed them all. The reason He did this work is the answer to our burning question. “To make in Himself of two, *one new man*.”

Without Paul we would know very little about the meaning of the Lord’s death and all that it accomplished. Peter considered it a murder by the leaders of Israel. John the baptizer saw Jesus as the Passover lamb of the Father to take away the sins of Israel. Only Paul saw all the subtle nuances and the all-inclusivity of His death. This is one important reason to regard Paul’s words as coming from the ascended One Himself.

2:16

and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.

The Lord's death reconciles – brings together again – Jews and Gentiles unto God in one body. He can do that because His death not only liberates, but also destroys. Whereas Peter and the eleven blamed Israel for killing the Prince of Life (Acts 3:14-15), Paul saw and taught that the Lord's death killed every evil element in creation – sin, sins, Satan, and even death itself. Animosity between Jews and Gentiles – obliterated.

2:17

And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.

This proclamation materialized with the Holy Spirit after the ascension.

2:18

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

Because of the Lord's work, *everyone* has access by the Spirit unto the Father. Peter's first message after the Spirit fell gave Israel the first opportunity to receive. As a nation, Israel failed, and that failure could have doomed the Gentiles had the Father not had mercy on one Jew – Paul. Through him salvation came to the Gentiles.

2:19

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

That aside, it is a new economy for the Gentiles. They are “no more strangers and foreigners but fellow citizens.” This is Paul's gospel; Paul's good news. They are every bit a saint as any Jew is a saint. They, with them, are the Father's household. This is a brand-new day for them.

2:20

having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,

Not the apostles and prophets of the old economy, but of the new economy of grace. Jesus, the ascended Head of the body, is the chief cornerstone of this new building.

2:21-22

in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

This is not the old temple of the Jews but the new building of saints which is alive and growing. This building is the universal body of Christ and is comprised of all the assemblies of the towns and cities of the believers that are connected by life and grace.

Locally, the Ephesians are organically joined in spirit in oneness and are practically and profoundly a habitation of God in the Spirit. This is heaven's reality carried out on Earth by those seated above in Christ.

3:1

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—

This entire chapter is a parenthesis in the narrative, and what a parenthesis it is! If ever the argument can be made that the ascended Christ speaks from heaven through Paul, this chapter demonstrates it conclusively. In my judgment it is the most sublime chapter in the Bible. And it is written to Gentiles of all people, and by a literal and figurative prisoner, no less.

3:2

if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you,

Gentiles, who for centuries have been shortchanged by an obstinate people given the task of bringing their God to the nations and bringing the nations to their God, are the blessed recipients of the new economy – the economy of the grace of God. Set aside is the kingdom economy of Israel; an economy not to be revisited until the Gentile economy is complete. To this day the Jews still wait.

3:3

if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you,

The new economy comes only through revelation from the Lord. Whether it was by a direct conversation between Paul and the Lord, we don't know. Was it by a trance? We don't know. Did the truth of the new economy dawn on Paul during prayer, or study, or fellowship? Again, we don't know. Paul prayed in 1:17 that the Father would give the Ephesians a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of the Lord. So, revelation is a matter of the Spirit and our spirit in cooperation and collusion. The human intellect is useless in spiritual matters without the guidance of the Spirit, so using the mind to see and grasp these truths is futile. Only by exercising our spirit and allowing it to lead and inform our mind can we apprehend these things.

The gracious Lord unlocks the mystery to his servant. He receives from the Lord what has been hidden in Him from before creation.

3:4

by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ),

The mystery of Christ should be the headship of His body. For centuries He has been known as the promised seed, the Messiah of Israel. But when He came unto His own, they rejected Him and unleashed a secret never known before. The Lord committed this secret to only one man and we get to read his words. May we treasure them through our commitment to study, prayer, and much fellowship.

3:5

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:

And not to Paul only but to those around him with whom he shared the truth and unveiled the mystery. These “holy apostles and prophets” of the economy of grace, not those of old, receive the revelations of the body. What are the details?

3:6

that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel,

That Gentiles are heirs together with Jews in the one body of Christ is the mystery hidden from creation now made known to Paul, to those with him, and now to us. We are partakers of the promise in Christ. Being in Christ is being under the Head in the one body with the saints.

“Of the same body.” The Greek word is *sussomos*, used only here. It means a new, never seen body comprised of Jews taken out of Jews and Gentiles taken out of Gentiles. Neither has any boast or privilege. Both are equal and enjoy no advantage.

3:7

of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

Paul was the first of men or women to be saved by grace and given his background it could only have been by grace because he should have been condemned for what he had done to believers. Instead, because of the Lord’s resurrection power exerted toward the hardened persecutor, he came to Christ and Christ made him a prisoner and a slave.

3:8

To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,

Paul regarded himself the “least of all saints.” Was he hyperbolic in his humility? Far from it. He wasn’t being humble, but factual. He never outlived his regret for what he had done to the believers before his conversion. In fact, it was a motivator to serve the One who had saved him from certain perdition.

With this grace he preached tirelessly to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of the One who saved him. How wealthy is Christ? His life contains every attribute of the Triune God, the very definition of wealth. And this wealth is impossible to exhaust. The deeper we search the more there is to find.

3:9

and to make all 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;

“The fellowship of the mystery.” Fellowship means participation. The mystery is the one new man, the body of Christ, so to have fellowship in this is to participate in the life of the body. The Lord is only slightly interested in our knowledge of the mystery; He wants us to *participate* in it and make it our reality.

Where? “Hid in God” is the genesis of the mystery. When? From the beginning of the world, or before creation, is the time frame.

3:10

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,

Why? That the profound wisdom of the Father would be demonstrated to the angelic hosts inhabiting the heavens, especially to the evil party.

How? By the *ekklesia*, the body of Christ. It would be most interesting to see the reaction of the angels at the inclusion of humans in the heavenly realm. After seeing the damage done on creation by one of their own (Lucifer), they must have wondered at the Creator’s energy to restore Earth and redeem human beings so utterly corrupted. Now to see these humans occupy their place in the Son at the right hand of the Father . . . they will be astonished!

3:11

according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord,

The Father moves forward undaunted by any obstacle. He determined in eternity prior to creation that His Son would have a body comprised of human beings, not angels. And because His Son is the Head of this body and is the creator of time, space, and matter, this purpose is in Him. Without the Son, there is no purpose from eternity past. The purpose is in Him, so He must carry it out through creation, through incarnation, through death, and through resurrection.

3:12

in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.

In this wonderful Christ we can experience, in Spirit, our heavenly access and position.

3:14

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

“For this cause.” Participating in the building up of the body of Christ is the highest, most worthy cause a human being can experience.

3:16

that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,

Paul's timeless prayer for the saints draws upon the wealth of the Father's glory, the richness of His expression through His Son. Jesus' entire life was an expression of His Father's characteristics, prominently His life.

The inner man is our spirit indwelt by the Holy Spirit coupled with our soul (mind, emotion, will).

This is a prayer we can pray for each other and have the assurance of an answer.

3:17

that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

The purpose of the prayer of 3:16 is that Christ would make His home in our hearts. Can there be a more noble prayer than this?

When the Lord settles down in us, He roots and grounds us in love – love for Him, love for the saints, love for the Word.

3:18

may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—

Not just comprehend, but apprehend, to lay hold of. And not alone, not individually, but with the saints. We are in the body where distinctions, personalities, identities, and preferences take a walk. Christ is now everything to us in not just three dimensions, but four. We are used to three, but He is four and He indwells us. We have lots to explore!

3:19

to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Paul would have the saints know the love of Christ that passes knowledge. And we, as the body of Christ, can actually be filled with the fulness of the Father. Really? Can this really be true?

3:20

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,

Only He can make it true. We might think it's impossible and even ask, "Can this really be true?" He is the One able to do "exceedingly abundantly" above our doubts. After all, He has the power to raise His Son from the dead, to bring Him up from the Earth to His throne, and to bring us up to be seated with Him. That is a lot of power, and that power is in us. How so? He is the Spirit and He lives in our spirit. All He is is now in us – in seed form, perhaps, but complete and growing.

3:21

to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

He is the recognized One, honored, uplifted, and worshipped in the assembly of the members of His body. And not just now in the present time, but throughout all generations and all future ages.

In my humble opinion this chapter is the epitome of Paul's ministry and the conclusive proof that the ascended Head is speaking to His body from heaven. Where else can we read such transcendent words? Each verse builds upon its predecessor until we are "filled with all the fulness of God."

4:1-3

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Now the thought in chapter 2 continues. From the end of chapter 1 we are built up as a habitation of God in Spirit, and here in chapter 4 we find out the details of this building. Having been called to the body, we need to live worthily, worthy of such a high calling. How?

By taking care of those with whom we walk; and by taking care of the indwelling Spirit who binds us together in peace. This involves doing our utmost to keep the oneness of the Spirit.

4:4-6

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.

Rather read, "You are" instead of "there is."

Paul here explains in seven "ones" what is the oneness of the Spirit: Body – Spirit – hope – Lord – faith – baptism – God and Father. Seven is the number of complete divine perfection, and it is comprised of three plus four. Three is the Triune God – Spirit, Lord, and Father; four is the body of Christ – body, hope, faith, and baptism. Keeping these is keeping the oneness of the Spirit. Our task is to *keep* the body, *keep* our hope, *keep* our faith, and *keep* our baptism (not of water, but of Spirit).

These profound seven we are to *keep*. Not to develop; not to manage; not to manipulate; but to keep. This will ensure the oneness of the saints.

The key to "keeping" is the Triune God. Every saint should develop a relationship with Him through prayer, through study of the Word, and through spiritual fellowship with other members. If we are faithful in this, we will spontaneously keep our faith, our hope, the body, and be

immersed in the Spirit as our baptism. But it all depends on our solid connection to the Lord. The body will thrive, our faith will grow, our hope will burn, and our immersion will deepen.

4:7

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Of course, we know that Christ is our gift, given by the Father for love of the world (John 3:16); but in this passage the seven "ones" are also a gift, as we have seen. Still there is much more.

4:8

Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts of men."

The Father loves the body of His Son, so much so that He brought Him up from death and up from the Earth in ascension, and this as a man! Not an angel; not a spirit; not divinity alone, but as a man. When this man ascended, He brought with Him a train of vanquished foe. His defeated enemies followed Him in subjection before the Father, like the Roman generals parading their conquered enemies before the Caesar. All believers were in this timeless parade.

Our triumphant general selected from among this number of captives certain ones as gifts for the body. Are these more loved than the others. Not at all. Perhaps they are more gifted, more talented, but certainly not more loved. And it can be argued that each one possesses certain talents and traits unique to the person. But some are more equipped to lead.

What are the details of this profound truth?

4:9-10

(Now this, "He ascended"—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)

This begins the explanation of how these gifts of men and women came to be. In verse 8 they emerge from the captives following in His train before the Father. How did they get there?

First, the Lord had to descend to the lower parts of the Earth. Some interpret that as His incarnation and subsequent humility. I'm not so sure. Colossians 2:15, in speaking of these things, tells of the Lord spoiling principalities and powers. Spoiling means to dust off, to cast aside. I think the lower parts of the Earth are below the surface in the interior, in the abyss where the fallen angels of Genesis 6 wait for their coming judgment. This underworld prison contains every fallen human soul before salvation. We all were imprisoned by the enemy of God, but One descended there and released the prison bars allowing escape to any who would believe and follow the divine interloper. We were the captivity that He led captive from the region of death. As He ascended with His train of vanquished enemies (which we were), the evil denizens clung to Him, trying to keep Him from ascending out of death, but He merely brushed them off. They could not hold the resurrection life!

He ascended far above all heavens to fill all things. I don't know what that means, but I'm sure there is light on this somewhere. In any case, we are in this ascended One and are seated with Him and ready to be used by Him on the Earth for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose, His body.

4:11

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,

In verse 4 there is one body; in this verse before us we have the practical instruction on how to build up that body. The Lord is not theoretical. He is about getting things done in the middle of enemy territory, so, as is His way, He takes the lead.

It took One to lay aside glory, to submit to incarnation, to die a substitutionary death to redeem humanity, to descend into death to release the captives, ascend to the Father to display the captives, and select from among the captives gifted ones to join Him in His work and to lead the saints.

4:12

for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

There is no higher honor than to join with Christ in this glorious purpose. This should inspire us as it does Him. Building the body is the ultimate work: to perfect the saints; to bring them to maturity so they in turn can do the work of the ministry – that is, to minister Christ to the saints to build up the body of Christ. Though there are gifted ones nurturing the saints, they are not revered as a class unto themselves. Their work is to equip the members to achieve maturity in Christ so that they can, in turn, minister to others in this beautiful work.

4:13

till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

The unity of the faith. Faith does not exist without something hidden. The body of Christ is a mystery because we don't see the Head. We have faith in the Head, and the Lord's work is that all the members would have the same faith, the same internal vision of Him. And the more we see, the more we know and appreciate Him. This brings us forward to a perfect (or complete) man. We see our Head and our connection with Him as members. Together we are the complete, full-grown man, a further development of 2:15.

4:14

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 of deceitful plotting,

As with every doctrine there is the practical application. Paul is far too experienced to think perfection falls like random stardust. Humans need taught at every turn. Having heard the truth of the body, the Ephesians need to carry out the truth in their daily lives. If we don't, we remain

children; if we do, we will speak life into the saints. Out of our mouths will flow the life of the Head, and those life-infused words cause the body to grow up into the Head. Not only is this a glorious prospect for the future, but it can also be our reality to some extent right now. There is no higher purpose for a human being than this. And there is still more!

4:15-16

***but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—
from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every ligament supplies,
according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the
body for the edifying of itself in love.***

The whole body comes from the Head. He chose us, called us, redeemed us, indwells us, gathers us, and fills us with Himself. We have nothing without Him. Because of His life in us, He joins us together and completes us through the ligaments of supply who are ever aware of the needs of the body surrounding them. The Lord strategically places them in the body to supply the needs wherever they occur. All of us can be such ligaments attached to the Head and supplying life to the other members. It's our choice. The body is all about attachment to the Head, drawing life from the Head and supplying that life to all the members.

Every part of the body has a measure, has a portion of Christ, has divine content. The life-giving ligaments attached to the Head supply the needs of the body according to the energetic exercise of the content in every part. We have divine life as our content, but how much has that content been exercised? How much do we speak “the truth in love” to each other. The ligaments of supply monitor and supply accordingly. This activity – the work of the life-supplying ligaments and the living content of every part – makes the body increase by building up itself in love.

This is a profound principle. The Lord provides all the ingredients for His body – redemption, gifted ones, divine life, ligaments and parts – but He does not do all the work. He expects the members to attach themselves to Him and supply life to every member. He requires human cooperation to fulfill His purpose. We cannot sit on our hands. We must cooperate and coordinate with Him to complete the work. We should not exaggerate or diminish our value to the Lord. We need Him and He needs us. We should be honored that this is so and not fail Him.

“Speaking the truth in love.” All of the work of building could be summed up in this. He is the Word who conveys Himself with words. Our attachment to Him relies heavily on our prayers (words) and in our time studying His written Word and in our fellowship (words) with the saints. So much of the Lord's purpose depends on our exchange of words.

4:17-19

***This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the
Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being
alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the
blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to
work all uncleanness with greediness.***

Paul reminds the Gentiles where they were before Christ, and the extent of their salvation.

4:20

But you have not so learned Christ,

But they *have* learned Christ. Not just learned about Him, or what others have said about Him, but by personal experience have learned the *person*.

4:21

if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus:

These once pagan, idol-worshipping Gentiles have heard Him, and have been taught by Him, and realize that the truth is in Jesus. What a wonderful thing to be taught! He is truth itself. So how did these once strangers hear Him and how were they taught by Him?

When Paul and those with him, spoke, Jesus spoke. When they taught, Jesus taught. This is the principle of incarnation – God comes in the flesh of human beings. In this economy of grace there is no more speaking in booming thunderclaps from Mt. Sinai. He speaks as the Spirit in the spirit of His people. He indwells His body and speaks as the ascended Head. What He is in His fulness is conveyed on the words of His saints. Paul speaks and writes in language, the vehicle the Triune God has chosen to convey Himself. Our words can be the words of Christ. This is how the Ephesian Gentiles “heard Him,” and “were taught by Him.”

All the hearing and all the teaching leads to one conclusion: the truth is in Jesus.

4:22

that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,

Once we see that the truth is in Jesus, we move forward by laying aside, by denying our old way of life, our old, evil nature. In essence we take off the evil nature like taking off a cloak. But this cannot be done by will power, by determination no matter how strong we are. Rather we put on the new man, the new nature like putting on a coat. We let the coat wrap us, envelope us, cover us completely. By so doing through prayer, fellowship, and study, the old nature is spontaneously, without a whimper of effort, laid aside and rendered inoperative.

This is an ongoing activity and demands our diligence. But if we are faithful, the putting off becomes easier with practice.

4:23

and be renewed in the spirit of your mind,

Our mind is so critical to our spiritual lives. The human spirit is key to everything. It is there that we first encountered divine life when we received the Lord. He, as the Spirit, entered our spirit and enlivened us with the true life of the Father. This life is a reproductive, spreading life and it

desires to conquer our soul in which the leading part is our mind. The Lord's intention is to have the spirit/Spirit take control of our thoughts until it becomes the spirit of our mind.

4:24

and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

The more our minds are brought under the control of the Spirit/spirit, the more we put on the new man, or new nature, created by the Father.

It is a new thought that our new nature comes from the Father. Though we are earthbound, we possess a heavenly element that we can put on and allow it to wrap us up. This is an immortal gift from above.

4:25-31

Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another. "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.

And our part in all this? That these eternal truths be expressed in our behavior. This is what the new man looks like when it controls our behavior.

4:32

And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

On the positive side the new man treats the other members with love and forgiveness.

5:1-2

And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

Without all that has gone before in the previous chapters, this is an impossibility. But the Ephesians have their redemption, the Lord's eternal purpose, the indwelling Christ to make it possible.

5:5

For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

What kingdom is this? It cannot be the millennial kingdom, for that concerns the children of Israel. It can only be the overarching kingdom from eternity to eternity in heaven, not on Earth.

Because of Lucifer's rebellion in ages past, he will spend eternity in the lake of fire with his minions. This leaves a large vacancy in the administration of the universe. The body of Christ may fill that void and assume the leadership of the universe that Lucifer forfeited. This may explain Paul's reference to "kingdom."

5:8

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light

Be what you are. You are light; walk as light.

5:9

(for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth),

Fruit comes from life and growth. When we are attached in the body to the Head, we grow and produce Christ. He is good; we produce goodness. He is righteous; we produce righteousness. He is true; we produce truth.

5:11

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.

Darkness produces no fruit. We should have nothing to do with darkness.

5:14

Therefore He says: Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.

The sense here is rising from among the walking dead, those who will be given over to death because of sin. The charge is to awake from this awful condition and seize the resurrected One. This transaction gives us light because we know Him who is light.

5:16

redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Wasted time is time lost forever.

5:15-17

redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Paul never exhausts his burden to exhort. Though his teachings come from the ascended Christ, Paul knows the weakness of the flesh. So, he constantly teaches, encourages, and compels the saints to walk worthy of the doctrines. The exhortations are like mirrors hung up to expose the discrepancies between knowledge and behavior.

5:18

And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,

Paul reveals the practical secret of a successful life. It involves both our human spirit and the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who fills our human spirit. Our job is to allow the Spirit to fill us. How do we do that?

By setting our mind on the Spirit. By thinking of these things instead of things of the world. If we practice this day by day, the Spirit will fill us with Christ, even to overflowing.

5:19-20

speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

The filling will come out in our speaking and singing. We will express Him who fills us!

This kind of living will make us thankful all the time. Our gratitude will spontaneously flow out of us to the Father.

5:21

submitting to one another in the fear of God.

This, too, is a fruit of the indwelling Spirit. It can only be done properly when it comes effortlessly from a life lived in the Spirit.

5:22

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

This is a tough exhortation to Christian sisters, especially if the husbands do not take the headship of Christ. But there are no conditions attached. The wives just must do it, and the only way forward is to do it “unto the Lord.”

5:23-24

For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

This is the reason for the wives’ submission. Wouldn’t it be nice if the assembly of saints is subject to Christ in everything? That’s the gold standard.

5:25

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,

Husbands have a great responsibility. Paul calls upon them to imitate Christ and His love for His body. Can any man so love? Only by being filled in Spirit. There is no other way.

5:26

that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,

Though we are seated with Christ above, our daily lives are lived on Earth. The Lord's intention is that our condition here would match our position there. Therefore, He is still at work in us, to sanctify and cleanse the congregation of saints. We are a separated people unto Him.

What is the washing of water in the Word? Obviously, it can't mean physical water, so it must be the flowing water of the Spirit found in His Word. Remember, the means of transferring His life into us is by language, by His spoken word and His written Word.

Paul and Peter and John are the only three recorded recipients of the words of the ascended Christ. Peter at Cornelius' home in Acts 10 heard words that introduced Gentiles into His purpose for Israel. John wrote Revelation on Patmos. Paul was converted by the ascended Christ in Acts 9 by grace. Peter represented the expiring economy of the kingdom; Paul's conversion signaled the rise of the economy of grace.

Paul's ministry is a mix of spoken and written words, and these words (by revelation or direct conversations, we don't know) are the Lord above speaking through His servant. In Paul's fellowship, preaching, and writings we can find the living water in the Word for washing and sanctifying.

5:27

that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

The goal of the word is a glorious, honorable, and distinguished congregation universally and locally.

5:28

So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.

In marriage the two become one flesh. This is mysterious, but true. Because this is a truth beginning with Adam and Eve, it reveals the organic union of the Head and the body. As Christ loves His body, so the husband should love his wife. This is a serious responsibility, attainable by the indwelling Spirit.

5:29-30

For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.

Imagine this truth! We are His flesh and His bones. This is the definitive word on the subject. We are *not* His bride; we *are* His body.

5:31-32

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Paul takes from Genesis to show how intrinsically connected are the Head and the body. But even this explanation and this example are inadequate to fully explain this great mystery of Christ and His congregation.

Many teachers will use Paul’s words here as proof that Christians of the body of Christ are also the bride of Christ. This is confusing nonsense. Paul uses the oneness of the husband and wife in marriage as an earthly explanation of the heavenly mystery of the Head and the body. It’s the only thing on Earth that comes close to the reality, and so he uses it. To make this about the bride of Christ is to rob Israel of its prized and promised possession. Paul had no such intention. The whole letter concerns the body of Christ, not the bride of Christ.

5:33

Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

The practical part of it all points directly at the husbands. Do you want honor and respect from your wife, then love her as you would your own body. That is Christ’s way.

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 promise: “that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.” And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

Practical admonitions for family and assembly living.

6:5-8

Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.

Paul does not touch slavery as a political issue. A slave’s responsibility is first to Christ and not to men, even their masters.

6:9

And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

Paul was thrust into the middle of the issue of slavery with Onesiphorus in Rome. His solution: send the fugitive slave back to his owner, the Christian Philemon, in a spirit of repentance and

reconciliation. Paul operates on a higher plane, takes the heavenly position, even in this sensitive matter.

6:10

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

After all these words, the Ephesians *know* how to be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Now it is a matter of *doing* it, of putting these things into practice.

6:11

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

The armor is for the body, for the one new man. Put the body on! This is the only path to personal victory. Individuals cannot stand against the devil; only the body can.

6:12

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Here is the reason we cannot stand alone. Only the body is capable.

6:13

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Not strategize or attack, but stand, and stand together in and with the body.

6:14-17

Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;

All the parts of the armor are aspects of Christ. He is truth; He is righteousness; He is the gospel of peace; He is faith; He is salvation; He is the Spirit; and He is the Word of God.

6:18

praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—

Here is what standing looks like. Praying, supplicating, and persevering for all the saints.

6:19-20

and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

The apostle's personal request of the saints, not for himself alone, but for himself as related to the body. Above everything else in his life Paul is consumed by the "mystery of the gospel."

6:21-24

But that you also may know my affairs and how I am doing, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make all things known to you; whom I have sent to you for this very purpose, that you may know our affairs, and that he may comfort your hearts. Peace to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen.

Thus ends the highest expression of the ascended Christ in all of scriptures. That, of course, is my opinion, but I think very defensible. The combination of the sublime with the practical makes this letter indispensable to the fulfillment of the Lord's eternal purpose – the body of Christ.

PHILIPPIANS

1:1

Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:

Typical of Paul's letters to local assemblies and overlooked by modern Christians is the oneness of believers in the cities and towns where they lived. A believer in Philippi met with the single congregation under the governance of the plural eldership. There was (and is) no ground given to divide off, except to house meetings under the same eldership.

1:2

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul conveys grace and peace to the saints because he is a conduit of Christ through language.

1:3-5

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now,

Gospel means "good news." Good news to the Philippians was that they as Gentiles are now included in the mystery of the body of Christ. So long excluded from Israel's blessings, they now participate in the body of Christ.

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;

The work begun in the Philippians is eternal, that is, initiated and energized by the divine life. Paul's confidence rests in this.

“The day of Jesus Christ.” What and when is this? Is there a day of Jesus Christ in the economy of grace? We know for sure the Philippians are in the economy of grace and the body of Christ. The “day” here is at the end point of that economy, but what does it entail? Paul's writings from Rome don't seem to address it. We Christians are so accustomed to a “rapture” that it has become a junk drawer for every speculation. The famous passage for this concept is 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, but scrutiny reveals a taking up of little flock saints under the kingdom economy.

However, there is a caveat. There is a special resurrection for the body of Christ saints. We will investigate this in chapter three.

1:7

just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace.

Another translation: “You have me in your hearts.” And: “Partakers with me of grace.”

1:10-11

that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

“Things that are excellent” really means in Greek, “things that are different, or discrepant.” What does this refer to? Paul expects the Philippians to figure out the difference between what?

In the first century when Gentiles began to be incorporated into the little flock as subordinate, and in the body of Christ as equals, there was always the Jewish problem of their ancient traditions, their law, and their antipathy toward Gentiles. This was a nagging problem Paul faced from his conversion to his death.

To make sense of all this, Gentiles, now in the body of Christ in Philippi, had to understand that Israel had been living under an economy that would lead to the millennial kingdom under their Messiah King. Their entire history – the slavery in Egypt, the exodus, the law, the kings, their exile to Babylon, their return – was aimed at this kingdom and it was no different after Jesus. But now that Israel had rejected Messiah and His offer of the kingdom, their blessings and privileges were put away for a time. Now the body of Christ, comprised of both Jews and Gentiles, rose up under the economy of grace. When Paul wrote this letter, everything was different than it had been. The saints in the assembly had to see and understand how things had changed. Jews were

no longer first and Gentiles second. There were no longer any distinctions, so they had to work these things out and change their attitudes toward one another. This is the basis of Paul's exhortation. If they took his instructions, their life in the body would be pure and incorruptible, plus they would exhibit the fruits of righteousness.

1:14-16

and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill:

Paul doesn't care how his bonds are perceived so long as the saints preach the gospel regardless of motive. It's hard to believe that some would preach Christ to harm Paul, but he doesn't care.

1:18

What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.

Christ is preached; Paul rejoices.

1:19

For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

Two sources of strength: the prayers of the Philippians and the supply of the Lord's Spirit.

1:20

according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.

This is the profile of a man strengthened. In Paul's body Christ is magnified. What dwells on the inside of a Christian eventually makes its way to the surface. No one can hide behavior. It is the expression of what a person is. For Paul, his behavior magnified Christ because Christ had become everything to him.

1:21-24

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.

Here is Paul's dilemma, though a worthy one. He is on the verge of martyrdom and soon to be with his Lord, but needy saints await his feeding and care. He knows to die is to his advantage. If he is granted more days, then living Christ will be the fruit of his labor. What better way to end our journey than by saying we lived Christ?

In verse 23 Paul says: “I am being pressed out of these two.” What two? He is stretched between dying and being with Christ or staying for the sake of the saints.

He settles on the saints! And we rejoice because of the blessed, priceless letters that follow for our instruction.

1:25-26

And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.

A roar of approval must have accompanied this reading! He would soon be coming to them! Imagine their attentiveness when he arrived!

1:27

Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel,

Paul knows that behavior emanating from the inward Christ cannot be faked. Standing fast in one spirit with one mind leads to behavior that expresses the Christ within, and that cannot be human contrived. This is how the world knows the ascended Christ. “Let your behavior *become* the gospel of Christ.”

1:28-30

and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God. For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.

Such godly behavior convicts the unbelievers, and it could lead to persecution. This is Paul’s path, and always has been; so it is no surprise that faithful Philippians will experience the same.

2:1-2

Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

This, to me, is a poorly translated verse. Why so many “ifs?” We who know Him know full well that there are no ifs with Him. “Since there is, therefore, consolation in Christ, comfort of love, fellowship of the Spirit in the heart, fulfill . . .” Paul is telling them that they have so much in Christ, so now is the time for them to act upon it. Think the same things, have the same love as Christ, as Paul, and be of one accord in one mind. This is a tall order for Jews and Gentiles to practice this oneness, and yet Paul does not regard it out of reach if they practice day after day.

2:3-4

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.

Here is a true barometer of their commitment to Christ and to each other. “To esteem others better than themselves.” This takes a close walk with Him, but certainly not impossible. It takes “lowliness of mind.” Ignore self, mind others. Nothing is more important than what we think about. May the saints fill our thoughts and prayers.

2:5-7

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

We don't have to replicate the Lord's mind. No! We must “let,” to allow, to open wide our hearts to Him. This is the extent of our “work.”

The Lord's mind, whose mind we have, did not seize upon His divinity to lift Him out of His troubles, but lowered Himself to servanthood to become empty as a mere man. In other words, He laid aside His divinity, and took up humanity. No human mind can understand all the nuances of the incarnation.

2:8

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.

Here is a description of a Man who lived by partaking of and incorporating the life of His Father, The result? Humility and obedience even in the face of a shameful death.

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.

So pleasing was His work to the Father that He exalted Him and gave Him a transcendent name. There is a Man in the glory! A Man far above all! A Man to whom all creatures will bow.

2:12

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;

Here is the call to work out what the Lord has worked in. We are saved by grace initially; we are now to allow that salvation to do its inward work. Saved from sin and saved from self. For the

one we do nothing; for the other we work out. Fear and trembling come when we interfere in what He is doing in us.

2:13

for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

Our work is to let Him work.

2:14

Do all things without complaining and disputing,

And yet we must participate! Our life in Christ is *not* a passive one, but active, utilizing all the blessings and privileges lavished upon us. Our behavior must match our inner life. In truth, behavior always matches our inner life. The question is, what inside us is controlling behavior – the fallen flesh or the risen Christ?

2:15-16

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, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

The human expression of the divine life. Paul's rejoicing in the day of Christ – the day we appear before Him – is contingent upon the success of his followers in pursuing Christ. Even to this day his labor is not in vain, as you and I can attest.

2:17-18

Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.

There is no greater joy for Paul than to run the race of faith with the saints. Can we concur?

2:19-22

I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you . . . For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel.

“A son with his father.” Can Paul pay a higher tribute to Timothy? Timothy had been all in from day one, basking in Paul's mentoring spirit. What comfort Paul drew from this faithful brother. To grasp these words is to enter the heart of our apostle. We are indeed privileged!

2:27

Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need; since he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. For indeed he

was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

A sure sign that the old economy of Pentecost with its signs and wonders had ceased. No longer did the Lord or His servants perform miracles as they once had. What had been signs to the Jews to convict and convince them were gone. Very sadly they had rejected their Messiah. It is now a new economy of faith alone, and faith requires things not seen.

2:29-30

Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness and hold such men in esteem; because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.

These few words regarding Epaphroditus are forever etched in the Word of God as a legacy of a brother devoted to the work of Christ under the apostle to the Gentiles. Imagine having it said of our lives: “not regarding his life to supply your lack of service toward me.” What the Philippians could not supply because they weren’t present with Paul, Epaphroditus did. This is no criticism of the Philippians, but gratitude for the companionship of a dear brother.

3:1

Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!

Paul never holds back when it comes to Jewish legalists with whom he has tangled from day one. His language could not be stronger. Dogs, evil workers, mutilators! Paul has endured no meager frustration in trying to protect his flocks from those who would thwart his work with their overbearing traditions.

Calling out circumcizers as mutilators is the edge of Paul’s patience. They have turned a sacred rite of separation into a ritual of division. Innocent Gentiles, who have no background in such things, find themselves in the middle of a religious vortex. Paul will have none of it and lumps them with heathen flesh cutters.

3:3

For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,

Paul, former Jew of Jews, joins the Philippian Gentiles as the truly circumcised who rejoice in Christ and have no confidence in any ritual regarding the flesh.

3:4-6

though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

No Judaizing legalist can match Paul's Hebrew pedigree. This gives him tremendous leverage over them and gives the Gentiles a massive haven of rest and protection.

He lists seven items that formerly gave him advantage as a Jew:

- 1 – Circumcised on the eighth day;
- 2 – Stock of Israel;
- 3 – Tribe of Benjamin;
- 4 – Hebrew of Hebrews;
- 5 – Pharisee;
- 6 – Zealous persecutor of Christians;
- 7 – Righteous according to the law.

These he counted as rubbish because of seven items he acquired in Christ (see 3:9-11, and 20):

3:7-8

But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ

Paul trades his stature and achievements in Judaism with seven replacements in Christ. Though it cost him dearly, he didn't care or shrink back. The Jewish religion was rubbish to him when compared to gaining Christ. Are we of the same attitude regarding the Christian religion? Is it equally as reprehensible to us as Judaism was to Paul?

3:9

and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

Not only "gain Christ," but also "be found in Him." Under arrest in Rome, Paul has found the very safest place of all – in Christ! "*Found in him*" is the first replacement of seven.

3:10

that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,

Knowing Christ goes way below the surface into deep intimacy. Knowing the power of His resurrection is to experience what it took for the Father to infuse life into His dead Son. Being conformed to His death is to be made into the same form, to suffer and die as Jesus did. Most of us can only look on and wonder what Paul is saying here. He is describing what it means to "be found in Him."

The next four replacements are "*know Him,*" "*the power of His resurrection,*" "*the fellowship of His sufferings,*" and "*conformed to His death.*"

3:11

if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

“Resurrection from the dead” here should read “the ‘*out*’ resurrection from among the dead.” This is the only time in the New Testament this term is used. This becomes the sixth replacement of Paul’s Judaism with Christ.

It is this that Paul is attempting “by any means” to attain. This is huge, for Paul is our pattern. We will follow his path if we know what his path is. This “*out-resurrection*” is the sixth replacement out of seven.

Most fundamental Christians believe that 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 describe the “rapture” of Christians from the Earth. But a careful examination reveals that these upward takings are accompanied by a trumpet, a shout, and an archangel. Christians don’t have these things; Hebrews do, so we need to be careful not to rob from Israel.

Added to this, we shouldn’t forget the angel’s words to the disciples when the Lord ascended: “This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). What are present in these descriptions? Clouds and angels – two entities of Hebrew history. Where in the economy of the body of Christ will we find a trumpet, a shout, an angel, and clouds? These miraculous things belong to Israel.

Christians are left with the “out resurrection” as their hope, but what is it? The only way to know is to explore key passages and verses to see if we can find light on this important subject.

Apart from the heavenly calls to earthly martyrs during the tribulation (which would not include Christians of the body of Christ), there are three resurrections. According to 1 Corinthians 15:23 – “But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming” – and Acts 26:23 – “that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead and would proclaim light to the people (Israel) and to the Gentiles.” Christ’s is the first resurrection.

The second is “they that are Christ’s at His coming.” This is called the “first resurrection” in Revelation 20:5-6. On His way from heaven to Earth, He will call up His people – little flock and body saints – in the first resurrection (not counting His). This is “the better resurrection” in Hebrews 11:35; “the resurrection unto life” in John 5:29 and Daniel 12:2; “the resurrection of the just” in Acts 24:15 and Luke 14:14. Partakers in this resurrection are called “children of God, being children of the resurrection in Luke 20:35-36. There seems to be no distinction between Jews and Gentiles, between believers from the economy of Israel and believers from the economy of grace.

The third resurrection is the last rank, or the last of three companies, according to Revelation 20:5 – “But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished.” This is the resurrection of the unjust (Acts 24:15); the resurrection of damnation (John 5:29); the resurrection of “shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2).

We of the body of Christ should not despair that we will have to share a resurrection with Israel. There is a prize awaiting us if we are diligent to pursue it. It is the “out-resurrection,” never known before, just as the economy of grace had never been known.

Paul states clearly that this special resurrection from among the dead is one that *must be attained*. The Greek word is *katantao* and it means to arrive at, as if arriving at a finish line in a race. The line does not come to the runner; the runner comes to it. What happens if the Christian runner does not reach the line in time? The prize goes to those who do. What happens to those who don't? As far as I can tell, those Christians must share the resurrection of the righteous with Israel. I see no other resurrection available in scripture. If anyone has more light, I would love to see it.

3:12

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.

This “attain” is not the same word as in verse 11. It is *labano* – to apprehend, to lay hold of. It shows more aggression, more passion than simply arriving at. To be fair, a runner nearing the end of a close race is focused and passionately exerts his entire strength to arrive at the finish. There is much that goes into arriving.

However, “apprehend” goes further. The Greek word is *katalambuo* and has the sense of intensity, more so than attain. Apprehend is the process of arriving, and it depends a lot on our desire to want it. Again, we're not talking passive here. Nothing is ever accomplished by passivity. We have to want it and do whatever it takes to get it. This was the apostle's attitude and must be ours. Christ Jesus certainly exemplified this when He laid hold of us. Nothing was going to deter Him!

3:13

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,

Paul is not overconfident, but neither is he careless. He knows what he wants and what it takes to get it. It takes a good deal of stretching forth to what lies ahead. What is it that lies ahead?

3:14

I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Cross that goal and the prize awaits. Paul hearkens back to the Greek games wherein a winning runner earns the laurel wreath. Paul's “laurel wreath” is the “calling on high of God in Christ Jesus.” For the body of Christ this is the ultimate reward for faithful service. It is the resurrection from among the dead – a resurrection that leaves many behind still dead and still waiting for the second resurrection, the resurrection of the righteous described in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 and in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52.

When the Lord issues the upward call, this may be what 1:6 is referring to with “the day of Jesus Christ.”

3:15

Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.

“Have this mind” must mean to have the mind and attitude of Paul. May none of us “think otherwise.”

3:16-17

Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind. Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.

Paul encourages those nearing the goal to pursue as he has, to think of these things as he does, to follow hard after his example.

3:20-21

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which 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, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

Our *citizenship is in heaven* is the final of seven replacements in Christ. What Paul was in Judaism has been replaced sevenfold by and with Christ.

We would be remiss if we didn't list them and make them easier to appreciate:

- 1 – Found in Him (3:9);
- 2 – Know Him (3:10);
- 3 – The power of His resurrection (3:10);
- 4 – The fellowship of His sufferings (3:10);
- 5 – Conformed to His death (3:10);
- 6 – The “out-resurrection” (3:11);
- 7 – Citizenship in heaven (3:20).

Paul told us about the privileges and honors of our heavenly citizenship in the first chapter of Ephesians. It is hard for us earthlings to grasp, but the reality is, we are seated with Him in the heavenly places. It is from this perspective we look for our Savior. We don't peer into the sky to find Him; we await His appearing from heaven. Then we shall be conformed to His glorious body and become as He is.

4:1

Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.

“Beloved.” Fault Paul for many things, but not for his love for all the saints.

4:2-3

I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.

Two of his dearly beloved are two sisters at odds. It's sad but it shows Paul's care for the body. Their problem? Their minds. They weren't thinking the same thing. This is always the issue.

True fellow slaves. Paul appeals to an anonymous fellow slave of Christ to help the sisters in their struggle. That Paul has these kinds of companions is the backbone of his ministry.

4:5

Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.

Moderation. The ability to fit into the body. We should all aspire to this, not to stroke our ego but as a demonstration of the love Christ has for His body. This may be the supreme condition and accomplishment of a true saint. To build up His body in a practical way is the highest calling of all.

4:6

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;

Interpretation: "Do not tolerate anxiety; rather pray."

4:7

and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

What does prayer afford us? The presence of God. This is no small thing because it eliminates anxiety arising from a troubled mind. The peace of God keeps our hearts and minds. "Keep" means to guard with power as with a military attachment. We shouldn't think peace is benign and weak; it is, rather, powerful and commanding.

4:8

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

Here is Paul's strong pitch about thinking properly. Our life in Christ and in His body has everything to do with what we think about. Christ is so abundant and available to us. It is a travesty if we are not occupied with Him and His purpose. He is true, honest, righteous, pure, lovely, and of good report. We have so much with which to be mentally and spiritually occupied.

4:9

The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

The Philippians have learned, received, heard, and seen in Paul the blessed ascended Christ. Now he encourages them to *do*, to live, to practice. Obey this, he says, and the peace of God, again, will be with them.

4:10-13

But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. 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. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Paul's gratitude for this wonderful congregation is palpable. Though he knows how to thrive and how struggle, he knows the strength of Christ. But, even so, their care is highly appreciated.

4:18-19

Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Paul acknowledges that everything the Philippians have done for him is an incense, a burning sacrifice well pleasing to the Father. It is not hard to discern the love he has for them.

4:22-23

All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Here is evidence of Paul's effectiveness even in bonds. It sounds as if some of Nero's relatives could have come to Christ, or at least those who served in his palace. Here is proof also that the body is one regardless of geography – Rome and Philippi are joined in Christ.

COLOSSIANS

1:1

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

Written from Rome while under house arrest. Timothy, his faithful servant, is with him.

1:4

because we have heard about your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all the saints—

Faith in Christ must be coupled with love for the saints, for they are part of Christ.

1:5

the faith and love proceeding from the hope stored up for you in heaven, of which you have already heard in the word of truth, the gospel

The hope “laid up in heaven” is the “all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ” of Ephesians 1:3.

1:9

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

Paul’s deep desire is that the Colossian *ekklesia* would be filled with “the knowledge of his will.” To know, really know the body of Christ requires wisdom and understanding from the spirit, not just the mind.

1:10

so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,

“Walk worthy of the Lord” is to believe and conduct our lives according to the reality of the body; that is, to care for the other saints above ourselves. This is how to know the Father for that is where His heart is.

1:11-14

being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that you may have full endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Where the Father is there is strength, power, patience longsuffering, gratitude, and deliverance. If we concern ourselves with His purpose – the body of His Son – He will translate us into the heavenly kingdom of Christ far above all. This is our inheritance.

1:15

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

This Christ is the expression of our invisible Father. He reveals every aspect, every detail of every feature, so that we can know the Triune God.

1:16

For in Him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities. All things were created through Him and for Him.

This Christ is the Creator of all things including the angels, all in fulfillment of His Father's eternal purpose.

1:17

He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

All things in the universe are held together by Him. Without His power, everything would fly apart, all the energy in the atom would escape with catastrophic speed and force.

1:18

And He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning and firstborn from among the dead, so that in all things He may have preeminence.

The purpose of creation. He is the Head of the body, the gathering of believers. We should not minimize our importance, for we are attached to Him. The universe exists because of this. Can we grasp this? Yes, He is the Bridegroom for the bride – Israel – on the new Earth, but we're talking here of heaven, of the heavenly realm. We are His body! He is our Head! And this union is eternal and will never cease to produce new depth and new insight. Being attached and growing with other saints into His actual enlargement is a fact we should contemplate in depth. Eventually this will lead to the Head assuming preeminence in all things, whatever that means. Whatever it is, it is something glorious to anticipate because we will be right in the middle of it!

1:19

For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him,

That His Son should create, should die to redeem His creatures, should be Head of the body (those redeemed), should have preeminence over all things is what gives the Father pleasure. It's as if the Father says, "It is not about Me." Can there be a more profound example of humility and selflessness?

1:20

and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through the blood of His cross.

But these heavenly truths cannot be realized until the Son does the hard work on Earth. He must shed human blood as the supreme sacrifice in order to make peace between His Father and His people. By so doing He changes everything, not just on Earth but also in heaven. The Father is appeased by what His Son has done. What that encompasses requires more light. The blood shed reconciles the people on Earth, but what about the things in heaven? Heaven is the domicile of angels. Were they affected by the Son's death? This is beyond me.

1:21-22

Once you were alienated from God and were hostile in your minds, engaging in evil deeds. But now He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy, unblemished, and blameless in His presence—

Back to the Colossians and the glorious truth – they are reconciled though once enemies and alienated. The body of Jesus died that they might live. And not only live but be holy, blameless, and unproveable!

1:23

if indeed you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope of the gospel you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

Better to read: “Since you continue.” The Colossian saints are settled into the hope of the gospel; that is, the one body attached to the heavenly Head.

1:24

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions for the sake of His body, which is the church.

Did Christ not suffer enough? Or do the members of the body need suffering for the other members to match the Head? Should the Head bear all the suffering and the members none? Of course not. We should suffer for one another through sacrificing our time and resources for them. But what we do for others should never be viewed as a suffering.

Suffering causes the members to draw near to the Head for strength and comfort. This builds the body. Paul wanted a complete portion of the affliction of Christ in his flesh because that is what his Lord endured. This is the highest level of commitment to Christ, one not easily attained.

1:25

I became its servant by the commission God gave me to fully proclaim to you the word of God,

The economy of God that includes the Gentiles has displaced the economy of Israel and the earthly kingdom. It is the fulfillment of the Word of God spoken before creation. It is the word, the determination, that His beloved Son would have a body of human members.

1:26

the mystery that was hidden for ages and generations but is now revealed to His saints.

The word of determination was, before Paul, the Father's secret from before “ages and generations.” It is a secret no longer, and we have the privilege of participating in it!

1:27

To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

This mystery, this secret now revealed, is simple: because of the work of Jesus on Earth as the Son of Man, Christ the Son of God now lives in all the members of His body. Our attachment to

Him is intimate, personal, and eternal. This is our hope of glory, and it is this message we carry to the unbelievers.

1:28-29

We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I also labor, striving with all His energy working powerfully within me.

According to the Lord's active power in him, Paul strives to present every saint perfect, or mature and complete, in Christ. This can only mean that all his effort is directed toward the members of the body. When they are mature, the body is complete, and the work is finished.

2:1-2

For I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me face to face, that they may be encouraged in heart, knit together in love, and filled with the full riches of complete understanding, so that they may know the mystery of God, namely Christ,

Paul would have all the saints in Colosse and Laodicea know with full understanding the mystery of the Father and of Christ. The eternal secret is that Jesus Christ the Son would have a body comprised of human members possessing Him. That we could be a part of this is a blessing without description and without end.

Can we include Laodicea among those little flock assemblies that transitioned to the body of Christ? This verse seems to support that.

2:3

in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

This is our Head! All the treasures, all the wealth of wisdom and knowledge are His and we are attached to Him.

2:5

For although I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit, and I delight to see your orderly condition and firm faith in Christ.

How can this be? How can Paul be absent and yet beholding their steadfastness in Christ? Is he experiencing something we cannot? Being with them in spirit is understandable, but what of his beholding? I rather think that Paul beheld the Colossians through the eyes of his teammates, his fellow laborers, wherever he was not. Their reports were his observations.

2:6

Therefore, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in Him,

A wonderful admonition! Having received Christ in the spirit, so conduct your living in the spirit. Let what is inward become outward in behavior.

2:7

rooted and built up in Him, established in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

Walking (behaving) in Christ will direct the saints in two directions: below the Earth (rooted) and above the Earth (built up). We root into Christ as the nutritious soil and build up the house of God. The deeper we go down into Him, the more nourishment we find and the more strength we find to weather the storms. The higher we build the house the more capacity we acquire to care for and house others.

“Rooted” points to a tree. The roots are hidden and unappreciated, but vital. Our relationship with Christ should be private hidden from view, quiet, tranquil, solid. Yet it is here that we take in His nutrition and develop strength. Here we quietly absorb His characteristics and spread out, adding strength to the tree.

“Build up” points to a house. A house is not hidden but is out in the open for all to see. It becomes a place for shelter, for warmth, for inclusion of those in need.

As the body of Christ we need both experiences – the private exploration of all that Christ is to us, and the outward expression of His care for all people.

2:8

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, which are based on human tradition and the spiritual forces of the world rather than on Christ.

Paul is not afraid of Greek philosophy; he is afraid of Judaism and its requirements and traditions controlled by “spiritual forces.”

2:9

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity dwells in bodily form.

No longer is Christ simply a heavenly deity, but because of incarnation and the earthly accomplishments, He possesses the fulness of the Triune God in a human body.

2:10

And you have been made complete in Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority.

We, as members of His body, are complete because of our connection to Him. Not only is He Head of the body, but over all things angelic.

2:11

In Him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of your sinful nature, with the circumcision performed by Christ and not by human hands.

In Christ our flesh is cut off positionally (in reality) and is being cut off conditionally (in our daily life). Our relationship with Christ cuts away the tendencies and practices of the flesh. This has everything to do with dying to self, with denying our preferences.

It should be noted the extensive use of the preposition “in” used in the previous eleven verses: (:3) in whom; (:5) in Christ; (:6) in Him; (:7) in Him; (:9) in Him; (:10) in Him; (:11) in whom. These seven instances show the completeness, the perfection of our Head and our position in Him.

2:12-13

And having been buried with Him in baptism, you were raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our trespasses,

His journey through death, burial, and resurrection is our own because He has forgiven us and He has made us alive with His own life.

2:14

having canceled the debt ascribed to us in the decrees that stood against us. He took it away, nailing it to the cross!

Our great Redeemer has not only forgiven our sins but has also taken away by His death all requirements and accusations against us.

2:15

And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

When did this happen? When did Jesus strip off from Himself angelic principalities and powers? We must go back to Ephesians 4:9-10 to see that our Lord descended to the lower parts of the Earth. What is there? For one, the abyss, which houses the fallen angels of Genesis 6. It may be a repository for all angelic evil. It certainly is a place of death and may be where all the dead await the resurrection, whether of the righteous or the unrighteous. This realm welcomed the dead Jesus after His death and burial.

But when the Father’s power extended to the depths to release His Son, death and its denizens reacted and tried to prevent His victory by clinging to Him. Jesus merely stripped them off and ascended in resurrection. As the first resurrected human being, He exposed death and death’s minions to the world of the living and publicly shamed them in front of the righteous angels. These truths are unfathomable to us, but they are ours by faith.

2:16-18

Therefore let no one judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a feast, a New Moon, or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the body that casts it

belongs to Christ. Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you with speculation about what he has seen. Such a person is puffed up without basis by his unspiritual mind.

Avoid Jewish traditions and practices. Paul refuses to play cutesy with Jewish religionists.

2:19

He has lost connection to the head, from whom the whole body, supported and knit together by its joints and ligaments, grows as God causes it to grow.

Eliminate the word “lost” and this is a marvelous description of how the body works. As saints connected to the Head, we receive all good things for the body’s nourishment and increase. The joints and tendons hold the body together and nourish it and cause it to increase with the increase of God. They supply divine life and that life, more than any other life, grows.

2:20-23

If you have died with Christ to the spiritual forces of the world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its regulations: “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!?” These will all perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such restrictions indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-prescribed worship, their false humility, and their harsh treatment of the body; but they are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

Once again Paul urges these Gentiles to avoid religious restrictions of any kind, the features of Judaism and paganism. They do nothing but stymie the life of the believer.

3:1-2

Therefore, since you have been raised with Christ, strive for the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

Change “if” to “since.” There are no ifs being in Christ. That being true, then seek those things above. What does that entail? What is there to seek?

Christ sits there on the right hand of the Father. He contains the boundless riches of the Triune God. Is there not an infinite store of wealth and an eternity to find and enjoy? Unequivocally yes!

“Strive for the things above.” How? What is involved? It must mean to apply our whole soul and spirit, meaning our mind, our emotion, and our will along with our Spirit-filled spirit. All our inward parts are necessary for the task.

3:3

For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

Our human nature died in the all-inclusive death of Jesus, and now, through our faith, we have eternal life in Him. Our obligation is to live according to this divine life in us.

3:4

When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Christ our life! Can we grasp this? He is in us to *live*. We are vessels containing Him. He thinks, emotes, decides, and behaves through us if we allow it. And when He appears (however that will be) we will be with Him.

3:5

Put to death, therefore, the components of your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry.

Our position in Christ is set, is an accomplished fact. Now it's up to us to make our position our condition. We have died with Christ, so now we must live in that fact. Let Him live in and through us for the *spontaneous* death of our fleshly nature. We "put to death" by *living* according to our new life, not by struggling against a dead thing.

3:8-10

But now you must put aside all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to one another, since you have taken off the old self with its practices, and have put on the new man, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

Paul expects the Colossians to "put aside" evil. In other words, deny the flesh by the power and strength of the spirit. Like taking off an old coat, like shedding a worn and useless garment, we need to treat our "old nature with its practices" the same. After all it's a dead thing.

The negative is never disconnected from the positive. We put off the old nature, but immediately following is "put on the new man." The new man is not simply an individual matter, but much more a corporate. The body of Christ is the new man – the image, the expression and the fulness of the Head. This we put on like a brand-new set of clothes. Practically, this involves much prayer and fellowship with other members, the scriptures being central to our gatherings.

3:11

Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, or free, but Christ is all and is in all.

The body of Christ respects no person or group, but all focus is on the Head. Members are only important under His headship. This teaching makes Paul a target for criticism and abuse by the legalistic Jews, but this is the vision the Lord gave him to reach out and gain the Gentles. It is truly a game-changing revelation and Paul was feisty enough to see it carried out. But he suffered mightily for it.

3:12-14

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with hearts of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with one another and forgive any complaint

you may have against someone else. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which is the bond of perfect unity.

“Clothe yourselves” with the characteristics of Christ for the sake of the body. True Christian behavior is not contrived; it is the outworking of the One who lives in all the members. This is no more apparent than in the love each member has for one another, for love is the most penetrating and convicting aspect of the body.

3:15

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, for to this you were called as members of one body. And be thankful.

The peace of God can govern our hearts if we are resolute to allow it to. When there is peace among the members, the headship of Christ is most evident. Peace follows compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, and love. It is the eighth in the list of virtues that Paul expects of the Colossians, and eight is the number of superabundance.

Living according to the inward Christ spontaneously produces the riches of Christ in the believers, the last being peace, the clear proof of His headship over this beloved group of Christians in the ancient world.

Proper behavior in the body is evident when there is peace among the members, and when the members are themselves thankful for each other and for their place in the body.

3:16-17

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Here is the practical means of accomplishing the previous instructions. The word of Christ must dwell in us. “Dwell” implies something living, and surely the word of Christ is alive because it is Him! Under this indwelling word we live the life of the body – admonishing, singing, living in His name with thanksgiving. All our words and deeds directed toward the members must be done in His name. This will build the body and render us thankful.

3:18-22

Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is pleasing to the Lord. Fathers do not provoke your children, so they will not become discouraged. Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only to please them while they are watching, but with sincerity of heart and fear of the Lord.

Paul is keenly aware that the inner life of a believer is seen and known and judged by the effect it has on a person’s behavior. Behavior is a barometer of inner health. Ideally, a believer’s spirit, which is mingled with the Holy Spirit, is the leading part where the divine life does its life-

changing work. That work spreads to the soul, comprised of the mind, the emotion, and the will. The Lord's intention in us is to control our thinking, our feelings, and our decisions, and the more He controls us, the more our behavior expresses Him.

So, when Paul urges wives, husbands, children, fathers, masters, and slaves toward certain behavior, he is not admonishing them to try harder to act a certain way; rather he expects them to draw their supply of the divine life from the spirit and from each other. The proper behavior will come naturally as the Lord lives out His life in us. Paul does not advocate for behavior modification, but for behavior spontaneity that comes from the inner person of the saint.

3:23-24

Whatever you do, work at it with your whole soul, for the Lord and not for men, because you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as your reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Paul sweetens the pot of good behavior by introducing “an inheritance from the Lord as your reward.” A soul filled with Christ will produce good behavior. There is no other way. Those who press forward to allow the inward Christ to live His life in them will qualify for the inheritance. What is this inheritance? What is the reward?

It may be as hidden as the calling upward described in Philippians 3. By that life we attain. We have the most powerful life in us waiting to do its work.

4:1-4

Masters, supply your slaves with what is right and fair, since you know that you also have a Master in heaven. Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful, as you pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may declare it clearly, as I should.

These verses should complete chapter 3. Masters of slaves must know their Master in heaven to treat their slaves with dignity. Behavior guided and controlled by the inner life.

Paul appeals to the saints to pray for him and his team of apostles. His request isn't general and vague, but pointed and specific – that they could proclaim clearly the mystery of Christ. The Colossians knew what he was talking about because they were living it!

4:5-6

Act wisely toward outsiders, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Nowhere is behavior more exposed than in what we say. That is no surprise. The Lord created by language. He conveys Himself by language. Paul knows that outsiders will judge the saints by what they say and how they say it. Will they convey their fallen nature or the divine life of the Savior? Our words are not neutral. Something or someone will be riding on what we say. “Let your speech always be gracious.” In other words, convey Christ!

Speech is the most obvious feature of behavior. It can kill or give life, which is why Paul urges it be seasoned with grace. Our words can convey Christ, the fallen nature, or the vile flesh. It all depends upon the source. Nothing is more critical to the building of the body than our words. May they always flow with grace in and to every conversation.

For our lives the Lord has given us space and time. We live on Earth located in the Milky Way galaxy, one among millions comprising the universe. This is space. The Earth revolves continuously and orbits our burning star. This gives us time. The Lord will accomplish His eternal purpose in space and in time. Paul urges the Colossians to redeem the time, which means to buy time. Time is like a commodity to be purchased and used. To buy it costs us. It requires sacrifice. We can either waste time or buy and use time. There is no neutral ground seeing the Earth turns and the sun burns. Once wasted, time never gives us a second chance. It is gone forever. The Lord has shown us His plan and He expects us to capitalize upon it by buying up time and using it for His benefit. Our lives should be spent building up the body.

4:7-18

Tychicus . . . is a beloved brother . . . a fellow servant . . . Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother. . . Aristarchus sends you greetings, as does Mark the cousin of Barnabas . . . Justus, also sends greetings . . . Epaphras is always wrestling in prayer for you . . . he goes to great pains for you . . . Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas send you greetings. Greet the brothers in Laodicea, as well as Nympha and the church that meets at her house. Tell Archippus: “See to it that you complete the ministry you have received in the Lord.”

Paul is a team player, never hogging the spotlight and never forgetting those who fully buy in to the Lord’s purpose. Paul does the writing; these brothers demonstrate the truth of his words. It is a beautiful coordination in the Spirit and a window into Paul’s soul.

1 TIMOTHY

1:1-2

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope, to Timothy, a true son in the faith:

It truly is amazing that 1950+ years after the fact we could read a private letter from the first century that applies to us as current members of the body of Christ. These are words from Christ in heaven put forth by our apostle, the apostle to the Gentiles. So why is it that the Father would allow for this invasion of privacy? Perhaps it is to teach future leaders of the body how to communicate with and behave toward one another.

Timothy is first mentioned in scripture as a disciple. His home was probably Lystra where Paul was brutally beaten and left for dead. It could have been then that Timothy first met the Lord. On his second pass through Lystra, approximately three years later, Paul realized the value of the young disciple to the ministry and decided to take him along. But because Paul’s ministry included the Jews, they knew Timothy, being a Greek, was not circumcised. Timothy must have been an exceptional young brother to subject himself to circumcision for the sake of those who

hated him as a Gentile. It must have impressed Paul as well that this young brother would endure the pain for the sake of the ministry to a people not his own.

1:3

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine,

The Ephesian fellowship is the crowning jewel of the new economy. Paul intends to keep it that way.

1:4

nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.

This refers to the Jews stirring up the young believers with questions.

1:5

Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith,

Paul appeals to the “spirit of the law” to show what the end of Judaism should be: love, pure heart, good conscience, and pure faith. This is what Moses brought into the world as the antidote to human evil. It was enshrined in Israel. This was the ideal, the way the Father intended until the appearance of His Son.

1:6-7

from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.

This is where Judaism had fallen, corrupted by pride and tradition.

1:8-11

But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust.

The law exists to expose and condemn evil, including the fallen nature in every person. Classified with the bad actors are those who reject the healthy teaching of Paul’s ministry. That is a wide net. This shows Paul’s deep regard for the mystery of the body of Christ. Those who are contrary may as well be murderers or sodomites as far as Paul is concerned.

“Sound doctrine” could be translated “healthy teaching” of the “glorious gospel” committed to Paul. In other words, the “mystery.”

1:12-13

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.

Paul's gratitude to Christ Jesus is always at the vanguard of his life. He never forgets where he was when called to salvation by the heavenly Head of the body. He was a blasphemer, persecutor, and outrageously odious person toward the Christians.

But he obtained mercy because what he did to believers he did in ignorance. Only because of this did he obtain mercy.

1:14

And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

He gives all the credit to the Lord's grace. Nothing else can explain what happened on that road.

1:15

This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

Paul is not hyperbolic here. Only the Lord confronting him from heaven could have saved him.

1:16

However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.

Paul is first in what sense? He is not the first to obtain mercy, but he is the first to be confronted, convinced, and commissioned by the heavenly Christ. He is the first to be saved without any human work or obligation. The previous economy required repentance and baptism for salvation. Paul was saved when he cried, "Who are you, Lord?" He was saved by grace, by the Lord's unearned favor. Nothing else! He later wrote, "For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Paul was the *first* person to be saved by grace alone, and as such he is the *pattern* of all who would be saved after him.

1:17

Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Paul exults in the Christ who did all this for him.

1:18-19

This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck,

The charge must be related to the mystery, a charge Timothy is about to assume from Paul. Timothy was saved under the economy of the kingdom when prophecies were standard and abundant. They may have been concerned about Timothy receiving the baton from Paul.

Paul knows what awaits Timothy, but he has raised a good warrior who lives by faith and exercises a good conscience. He can ask for nothing more.

2:1-4

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Paul's view is expansive, incorporating "all men," saved and unsaved. This is the scope of his charge to his son and fellow slave.

After prayers for all men then prayers for kings and authorities. It's hard to know how to pray for this group. Perhaps that they might leave us alone. And if they don't, that they won't fall under the sway of Satan in their governance. After all, what we need are quiet and peaceful lives, undistracted by those who have rule over us. Our prayers for them should reflect our desire to be protected and not oppressed internally and externally. Unfortunately, the godly are targets in this evil world.

Nevertheless, the Lord does not will this. He would have *all* men saved, not just a select few.

2:5-6

For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time,

Christ is mentioned first because He as the Son of God came in incarnation to be Jesus the Son of Man. Why? To reconcile sinners to the righteous Father. He went between by offering Himself as the sacrificial lamb. We are brought to the Father through His perfect sacrifice. He paid the price, the ransom, to the enemy of God to secure our release unto salvation.

2:7

for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle—I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying—a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

The reconciling work of Jesus is the basis of Paul's ministry.

2:8

I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting;

Paul's desire for the many congregations is that they pray for "all men" (:1); "for kings and authorities" (:2); and for "all men to be saved" (:4). Prayer is big with Paul.

2:9-10

in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.

Next, the women. These are guidelines for Timothy who would soon be responsible for the ministry. Paul is not laying down another law to replace Moses' law, but showing Timothy what behavior should look like in the body of Christ. He knows well how women affect men, and in the congregation, it is imperative that women pay close attention to their behavior and outward expression. It is vital that the outer life (behavior) of the sisters be regulated by the inner life of Christ.

2:11-12

Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.

"Silence" should read "stillness and peace," or "quietness." It is not that women are not allowed to speak, as speech is the primary expression of the inner spiritual life of a believer. It is that they speak under the headship of Christ, of their husbands, and of the elders of the fellowship.

2:13-14

For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.

The man is in first place in the Lord's order. Losing her way in this order resulted in the fall of humans.

2:15

Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.

Bearing children is a severe limitation to a woman, but it is her salvation from usurping authority over the man. Being responsible for children as a Christian sister helps them to continue in faith, in love, in holiness, and in a sound mind that restrains misbehavior. This has nothing to do with keeping silent. The famous axiom fits here: "She who rocks the cradle, rules the world." Mothers have outsized influence because they are the ones who tend to their households; they are the ones who bear, raise, and teach their children every day. More than mere influencers, who they are in Christ seeps into what their children see, hear, absorb, and imitate. Eventually they will grow up

to be solid believers and members of the body of Christ, and that becomes the basis for her salvation in childbearing.

This sounds so sexist in the modern world, but it is the raw truth. Unrestrained women seem bent on usurping authority over men, just as Eve did. Paul appeals to the original failure. No matter how we parse it, the truth remains. This is not to exonerate men. For whatever reason, Adam stood by, undeceived, and let the catastrophe play out by participating in it. But to her credit, Eve raised a son to honor Yahweh and lost his life doing so; but Eve did not quit. She bore Seth, and the line of Christ took off from him. Without Seth, she would have been lost.

3:1

It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires.

Next in Paul's instructions to this young leader are elders, keys to a healthy assembly.

3:2-3

A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous;

Once again Paul holds behavior to the highest standard. Unsaid but understood is the spiritual source of good behavior. The saints being led cannot see the inner life of an elder, only the outward behavior. By this he is judged; by this he must lead. A corrupt leader in the body of Christ is a shameful disgrace, and Paul moves to prevent it.

3:4-5

one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?);

An elder must rule his house well if he is to oversee the congregation appropriately.

3:6

not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.

Elders need much life experience to lead well. Young believers cannot qualify even if they want to. There is no substitute for life experiences.

3:7

Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Here again is the importance of behavior as a "good testimony." Unbelievers have no discernment of spirituality so are left with only observing behavior.

3:8-9

Likewise servants must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.

Next in Paul's lineup are serving ones, those who assist the elders in ruling the congregation. These care for the saints in all variety of needs. They relieve the elders of the day-to-day responsibilities of caring for the members. However, they are not exempt from the key to all service: "holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience."

3:10

But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as ministers, being found blameless.

Ministers must be tested and approved. Life itself is a test, so, as with the overseers, life experiences are necessary as is their walk with Christ in spirit.

3:11-13

Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For those who have served well as ministers obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Marriage is a necessary element for a minister, and ministers' wives are critical to the office because well-raised children are required of them. Serving the saints is not a light matter.

3:15

but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

Paul's charge to Timothy. Once again behavior arises, this time directed at Timothy. With it is some excellent doctrine.

The congregation in a universal sense is the house of God, the fellowship of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. A pillar supports the heavenly; the ground supports the pillars and links the pillar to the Earth. This shows the communication between the ascended Head and the earthly body.

3:16

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, and received up in glory.

The "mystery" must refer to the body of Christ that is "Christ in you" (Colossians 1:27), as "godliness." This body is manifested in the flesh, or in the saints' behavior. It is made righteous in the Spirit. Jesus *is* righteousness and never needed to be *made* righteous. The mystery of the body is witnessed by angels; preached by Paul unto the Gentiles, and eventually will be received up into glory.

The popular interpretation for these features is Christ, and that may certainly fit the description, but Paul has just written about the “congregation of the living God” in verse 15. Is there any indication or reason for him to switch to Christ? I rather think it is the message, or gospel, of the mystery that we have here and that involves both the Head and body.

4:6

If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.

Paul’s condition for Timothy to become a “good minister.” Strength for this charge comes from nourishment in the word of faith and good teaching that has come from Paul’s teaching and letters.

4:7-8

But reject profane and old wives’ fables and exercise yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

Paul encourages Timothy to pursue a relationship with Christ. It will profit him now and in the future.

4:10

For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.

God is the “Savior of all men, particularly of those that believe.” This should put to rest forever the noxious idea that salvation is only for the elect.

4:12

Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

Paul’s encouragement to his young brother: “Be an example of the believers.” Everyone of any age wants to follow a good example.

4:13-14

Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.

Practical commands. What this gift is is speculation. Perhaps the elders in Lystra laid hands on Timothy when he was to embark with Paul to the ministry. This outward sign was consistent with the kingdom economy in play at that time.

4:15-16

Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

Mentoring continues. “Meditate” means “to care for.” All of Paul’s instructions to Timothy require much care to execute. Timothy’s faithfulness in this will show everyone his unrelenting progress in spiritual things, and in obedience to Paul’s teachings concerning the mystery of the body of Christ. This is “the doctrine,” and this will preserve Timothy and those who hear and heed him.

5:1-2

Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity.

Young leaders need this word concerning the older men. Timothy is no exception.

Knowing Timothy is short on life experiences, Paul emphasizes the need for human dignity, especially regarding the older saints. It is easy for a young brother to run roughshod over those whose strength and stability is most compromised. Young leaders need to learn that they are running this race with *all* the saints and that it is not a matter of finishing first, but rather seeing to it that *all* finish the race.

5:3-7

Honor widows who are really widows. But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God. Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives. And these things command, that they may be blameless.

How Timothy is to deal with widows. It’s hard to know the dynamics of this situation. Why must a widow with children be taught to show piety at home? Would losing her husband cause her to lose her motherly instinct to care for her children and grandchildren, and to respect her parents? Does anguish result in disorientation? Who knows what Paul saw in all his travels related to these things? The point he is making is that Timothy would have to discern how to help all the saints.

A widow left alone, apparently without children, is instructed to pray night and day as she trusts the Lord, a good word for all of us.

Finally, widows who use their freedom to sin need to be warned to cease sinning.

These are guidelines for Timothy, not laws for him to lay on the backs of the saints. Widows need special care that occasionally only leaders can render. They no doubt present opportunities for others to care for and support them. Losing the head of the family and being left to negotiate life alone is uniquely difficult in any culture, and one of great concern for Paul.

5:8

But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

To whom is this spoken? To widows with children? It doesn't sound like it because of the masculine pronouns. Whom, then? It seems that husbands and fathers are the subjects, but maybe it is directed to grown children. If they do not provide for their own mothers, they are worse than unbelievers. Really, Paul shouldn't have to give this exhortation, but he obviously feels it necessary.

5:9-10

Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man, well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work.

For some reason Paul is really exercised about this matter and puts a finer point on it.

"Taken into the number" must refer to a category of needy widows that the congregation supports. Paul sets the limit at 60 years of age for the widow of one man, but with qualifications attached. She must be a woman full of good works toward others, one who has a proven track record.

5:11-13

But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith. And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not.

To Paul, young widows have a lot to prove. Apparently, his experience with them has been entirely negative. Obviously, the Greek culture has not served them well. What did Timothy think of this?

5:14

Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully.

Here is Paul's inspired formula for young widows.

5:16

If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows.

If a man or a woman has a widowed mother, they are to take care of her needs and relieve the assembly. The assembly is responsible for the widows on the list (:9) who have none to care for them.

5:17-18

Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages."

More practical advice for Timothy. Concerning elders that rule *well*, they may receive recompense for their labor in the word and doctrine. Timothy decides who qualifies and who needs rebuking.

Is the "word and doctrine" a reference to Paul's teaching and writings regarding the mystery? I would think that his letters were circulating among the congregations, and perhaps transcribed as they went. It makes sense, then, that the elders could spend much time studying them, could "labor in the word and doctrine."

5:19-20

Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.

Timothy, who oversees elders, must be wise in hearing complaints against them. Even with this caveat, there can be bad elders (See 3 John 9-10) who need public rebuking.

5:21-22

I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality. Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure.

Paul's word to Timothy: Do not take sides. Treat all the saints equally. And remember, "Your behavior is a barometer of your inner life."

5:23

No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities.

Paul's personal care for his young brother. That he could not heal Timothy shows the change in economies. What once was routine in the kingdom economy has now disappeared. Why? Because Israel, for whom the kingdom was promised, required a sign, but now after her final rejection of Messiah, there are no more signs.

5:24-25

Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later. Likewise, the good works of some are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden.

In the long run, behavior cannot be hidden or faked. Everyone can see it whether good or evil.

6:1-2

Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed. And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather serve them because those who are benefited are believers and beloved. Teach and exhort these things.

Servants should be slaves. This is a hard word for the lowest class in society. But in the Christian realm it is the highest demonstration of devotion, for, after all, Jesus was a slave to all of us.

Believing masters must not despise his believing slaves. Rather, he should do *them* service who are partakers of Christ.

6:3

If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness,

What “words” of our Lord? Those spoken on Earth to Israel, or those spoken from heaven to both Jews and Gentiles through Paul? Timothy knew the answer, knew what “wholesome words” were. He also knew what was “the doctrine which accords with godliness. He knew these concepts were wrapped up in the mystery of the body of Christ.

6:4-5

he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.

Paul has no use for those who contest the mystery, namely, the Jewish religionists.

6:6-8

Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.

Paraphrase: “Being content with the mystery, the body of Christ, is great gain.”

6:9-10

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

Pursuing wealth results in “many sorrows.”

6:11-12

But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Paul’s charge: Pursue the embodiment of every positive virtue – lay hold of Christ. By so doing you will fight the good fight as you have been doing.

6:13-14

I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing,

The commandment is all that has preceded in five chapters of exhortations, prohibitions, and encouragement.

6:15-16

which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen.

The ultimate encouragement to the young brother – the appearing of “the blessed and only potentate.” This title has nothing to do with Earth or the earthly kingdom promised to Israel. This “Potentate” will rule the heaven “in unapproachable light.” This overarching kingdom is the destiny of the body of Christ.

6:17-19

Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

Paul misses nothing. Here is the last class of people needing a strong word. Though the rich have many choices, Paul points them to eternal things including the members of the body. They are to be “ready to give, willing to share.” After all it is “the living God who give us richly all things to enjoy.” I doubt Paul is referring to earthly comforts; most likely this is Christ, the pouring out of all the attributes of His eternal Father.

6:20

O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust,

With this Paul commits to his young protégé everything he received of Christ concerning the great mystery. The everyday nuts and bolts of building up the body of Christ now rests in Timothy’s care.

There will be a final word to Timothy in about a year, but for now the weary apostle can rest in a race well run.

TITUS

1:1-2

Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began,

More than a servant, but a slave to God to do His bidding – to be the apostle of His Son to the Gentiles. In his vigilance he brought them into faith for salvation and into the truth of the mystery of the body of Christ for service. This gave them the “hope of eternal life.”

1:3

but has in due time manifested His word through preaching, which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior;

The Lord manifested His word through Paul's preaching – more evidence that Paul's letters are the speaking of the ascended Head of the body. This bold statement should not shock or surprise because every fundamental Christian believes that the Bible is the literal Word of God. Included in that word are the epistles of Paul, so why can't we take his writings as the speaking of the ascended Head to His body through all time? We should, confidently.

1:4

To Titus, a true son in our common faith:

Like Timothy, Titus is a faith son of Paul having been saved by his ministry.

1:5

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you—

A demonstration of Paul's confidence in Titus, a capable, no-nonsense leader.

Titus' task is to appoint elders in the city assemblies to close the gaps in the function of the saints. The proper body requires proper and strong leadership and functioning members.

1:6-8

if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled,

To qualify as an elder a brother must lead a proper home and have integrity forged in the hot fire of a vibrant inner life.

1:9

holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

The faithful word of Paul's gospel. With this word the elders must exhort and convict the critics.

1:10-12

For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain. One of them, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."

Paul never escapes the religionists of Judaism, a perpetual frustration to him.

1:13

Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith,

It is Titus' job to rebuke sharply to keep the saints in line with the truth. He seems to have the toughness to get it done.

1:15-16

To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.

Here is Paul's low opinion of unbelieving Jews on the periphery of his ministry. They say one thing, but their behavior gives them away. It always does.

2:1-2

But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience;

"Sound doctrine" equals healthy teaching. As with Timothy Paul emphasizes behavior as the outgrowth of a strong and robust inner life. Healthy teachings lead to a healthy spirit and soul that, in turn, leads to good behavior.

2:3-5

the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.

Paul never dismisses the worth of the older sisters. They are critical to the health of the young sisters – vital members of the congregation.

2:6-8

Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you.

Titus is to be a pattern to all, but especially to young men. His solid speaking and upright behavior will shame the critics. “Sound speech” is especially crucial for language is the vehicle the Lord chooses to convey Himself.

2:9-10

Exhort bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.

Slaves never fail to fall under Paul’s care. Being the lowest in society, their treatment by others is a supreme demonstration of the health of the members’ inner life. The true indication of saints’ relationship with Christ is how they treat those who cannot benefit their physical lives.

Paul’s failure to deal with the philosophy behind slavery is not failure at all. Slavery has always been a part of the human condition, extending even to the Hebrews’ indentured servitude. It existed in force in the first century, and to oppose it would have moved it into the political arena, a place Paul dared not go. It was not his calling.

2:11

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,

Here are the credentials of Paul’s ministry of the mystery. The unveiling of the economy of the great secret unleashes irrepressible grace on the whole world.

2:12-14

teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

This is the practical result of the mystery on the lives of the members of the body. Note that “looking for that blessed hope” is not the same as the so-called “rapture.” I believe it is that which Paul referred to in his letter to the Philippians when he taught the saints that he was trying to “attain unto the out-resurrection from among the dead” (Phil. 3:11). Paul is urging Titus toward this. Failure to attain will place a believer in the general resurrection of 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, after which is the judgment seat of Christ.

“Special” means “over and above,” and “possessed.” We are over and above others only by means of the mystery. Because of our embrace of the mystery, He can and will possess us. When we see the mystery, we will appreciate our position in the heavens with Him.

“Zealous of good works.” Good works concerning what? It can only be the building up of the body of Christ. This has to consume our prayers, our time, and our energy.

3:1-2

Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.

Only proper behavior through thinking and speaking will touch the lives of outsiders. Once again Paul emphasizes behavior, not behavior born of human effort, but through submission to the inward Christ.

3:3-4

For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared,

Paul shows clearly the source of good behavior – God our Savior demonstrating kindness and love toward believers and unbelievers.

3:5

not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,

In the economy of the body of Christ regeneration is the impartation of the divine life by the Spirit into us to form a new life and by blending the human and divine. This action by the Spirit washes away our sins and makes us a new creation.

3:6-7

whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

This work “He pours out on us abundantly,” and it is grace. We are “justified by grace” and we are made heirs of the hope of eternal life. Nothing to add here.

3:8

This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.

Believers in this wonderful work of the Spirit must maintain good works so that the outsiders may know and understand this glorious process and desire it for themselves.

3:9-11

But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless. Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.

Avoid the legalists who bring their iconic law to oppose Christ. Titus is to teach the saints to reject them and all their questions.

If they persist in contending for the law, rebuke them twice and then reject them outright.

3:14

And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful.

It's hard to know who "our people" are. Those helping Titus? New believers? The saints of all the assemblies? Whatever the case, good works directed to the saints will meet their urgent needs.

2 TIMOTHY

1:3

I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day,

This letter is the last written words we have of the faithful apostle to the Gentiles. He draws upon his pedigree to undergird his prayer for Timothy.

1:4

greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy,

As he nears death, Paul does not hold back his feelings for his young brother.

1:5

when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also.

Timothy's background comes from stellar stock, critical to the building up of the Father's eternal purpose.

1:6-7

Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

The laying on of hands and the passing on of gifts comes from the economy of the kingdom which was center stage during Paul's earlier ministry when Timothy came to salvation. What he passed to Timothy is not known, but it probably had to do with the mitigation of his timidity and fear.

Paul explains what the Father has given all believers, and it involves every part of the soul. Power is of the *will*; love is of the *emotion*; a sound mind is of the *mind* – all the parts of the soul that regulate behavior. In a healthy believer the human spirit – the deepest part of a human being – in collusion with the Holy Spirit controls the three-part soul. A Christian wishing to exhibit good behavior (as Paul constantly urges) must resort to the spirit/Spirit to regulate what he thinks, feels, and decides. Paul's seemingly endless exhortations to behave well forces his readers to retreat to the heart for the supply of the enabling divine life.

1:8

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God,

“The testimony of the Lord” is the expression of the Lord. At this point in history there is no speaking of the ascended Messiah. His earthly ministry is over. So what is the expression Paul is talking about?

If an unbeliever becomes convicted by the Spirit, where would he go to hear His speaking? What form would His expression, or testimony take?

The body of Christ localized in towns and cities of the empire are His testimony. These congregations reveal His headship. Paul tells Timothy to not be ashamed of them even if they are poor, inept, and adrift. He should rather enter their situation even if persecution is their lot.

1:9

who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began,

Here are the credentials of the body of Christ. He saved us and called us to holiness, according to His eternal purpose and grace. This wonderful calling happened before creation (Ephesians 3:9).

1:10

but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,

What was hidden in God is now revealed by the incarnation of Christ, by His beautiful life, and His all-inclusive and efficacious death. He destroyed death and revealed life and immortality through the good news of the mystery.

1:11

to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.

“Appointed” is to be placed by God.

1:12

For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.

This is the reason Jesus met Paul on the road, and the reason Paul suffers unashamedly. He knows the Christ he believes in and His keeping power to the day of His appearing.

1:13

Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

This describes Paul and his healthy teachings that Timothy learned through his verbal and written words.

1:14

That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

“That good thing” is Paul’s gospel of the mystery. This is committed to Timothy, and he is to keep it by the indwelling Spirit.

This is an important truth. The Holy Spirit dwells in us. He doesn’t fall on us or visit us occasionally; rather He *resides* in us. He makes His home in our heart!

1:15

This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes.

A very sad historical note. No suffering could surpass this.

1:16-17

The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; but when he arrived in Rome, he sought me out very zealously and found me.

A sweet, intimate request of the Lord and a short biography of an indispensable brother. At a time when others forsook Paul in his time of need, Onesiphorus stepped up despite inconvenience and probably danger.

1:18

The Lord grant to him that he may find mercy from the Lord in that Day—and you know very well how many ways he ministered to me at Ephesus.

What day? The day the Lord issues His calling to us to come up (Philippians 3:13-14). This is Paul's prayer and hope for his precious brother Onesiphorus.

2:1

You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Paul urges Timothy to stay put, don't deviate from the Lord's grace. It isn't a matter of doing anything, but rather remaining steadfast.

2:2

And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

The truth of the mystery has nothing to do with osmosis. It must be seen, grasped, practiced, and taught. Timothy is commissioned to find faithful men able to teach others. It takes work, and lots of it, but the Lord is strong.

2:3-4

You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.

It should read "suffer hardness with me."

The Lord needs soldiers, those able to discern and disable the enemy. It requires singlemindedness to the cause. Paul has passed on the cause to his pupil and can only trust that he will be faithful to advance it.

2:5-7

And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops. Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.

Here is an explanation of what it means to be a soldier for Jesus Christ. Paul refers to a contestant in the athletic games and to a fruit grower. The former must follow the rules; the latter must take care of others in sharing the fruit (the meaning of "partake"). The former has the individual in view; the latter has the corporate. What have these to do with soldiering of verse four of which these two metaphors are explaining?

To be a worthy soldier of Jesus Christ requires a proper appreciation of the individual runner who conducts himself according to Christ; that is, to "compete according to the rules." And of the farmer who raises fruit for the benefit of others. A runner runs alone; a fruit grower shares his labor. Both are required of a worthy soldier. Not too much individual and not too much corporate. A good soldier strikes a balance.

2:8-9

Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel, for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained.

Paul offers himself as the example. His gospel includes the death and resurrection of Jesus for which he is afflicted.

2:10

Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Though he endures all things – like the runner pursuing the prize – he does it “for the sake of the elect.” His primary concern is that the believers would obtain salvation, the salvation that causes them to obtain the prize of the calling on high.

2:11-13

This is a faithful saying: “For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.”

Here are the conditions a soldier must meet to win the war, to obtain the prize of the out-resurrection of Philippians 3:11. These are *not* conditions for regeneration, for being born of the Spirit, for being saved from sin and perdition. This regards “full” salvation, the life after our initial acceptance of the Lord’s grace. These are the “good works” of Ephesians 2:10.

Even if we fail the soldier test and do not endure, our salvation is secure because we know Him as Savior if not as Lord.

2:14-15

Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

“Charging” means to testify completely and earnestly. In recruiting new soldiers, Timothy needs to set the tone and direction. That requires study, diligent and zealous study. In other words, lots of hard, efficient work.

“Approved” means examined and tested, like gold being assayed for purity. In this case the assayer is God Himself.

“Rightly dividing the word of truth.” This is the next stage in being a good soldier of Christ. He is the Word of God, the vehicle (language) upon which the Father conveys Himself. He gave us His Son and He gave us the written Word, and in these two forms He imparts Himself to us. As the Son He came and went, leaving us the scriptures to know Him by faith (since we can’t see Him), and to know what He wants and how He wants to accomplish what He wants. But if we

can't take apart this Word and put the pieces in their proper places, we are looking at an insolvable puzzle. We must discern what goes where or we simply will not understand it.

When we don't understand what we are reading, we won't read it for long. Most Christians don't understand the Bible, so they'll read what applies to one group of people and take it for themselves and wonder why they don't see results. They become confused, and then give up. For example, there are Christians who think they are to live by the ten commandments and the law given to Moses. Others think that the so-called "sermon on the mount" was spoken to them and therefore they are responsible for the lessons the Lord gave there. Many Christians think that the miracles of Pentecost when the Spirit fell are miracles we should expect in our lives today, and they do their best to conjure up these outward wonders. All these are distractions from what the Lord really desires.

He wants us to understand the truth in His word, but He isn't cheap. A lot depends on us. To know the truth requires diligence and lots of study and fellowship. Hunger for and endurance in the Word are the keys, and knowing the truth of the Word comes at the expense of entangling ourselves in the affairs of this world. Only good soldiers make the grade.

2:16-18

But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some.

Because the Lord chose language to convey Himself, language is where the war with Satan is fought. Here is Paul fighting the battle and Timothy learning.

Imagine having your name forever etched in infamy as deniers of the resurrection. But even worse is the overthrowing of others' faith.

2:19

Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

Blessed assurance!

2:20-21

But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.

Though a metaphor, this great house with its utensils emphasizes the fact that every person is a vessel to contain something. The more valuable the vessel, the more abundant the content.

“Cleanses himself from the latter.” What is the “latter?” Dishonorable vessels of verse 20? Or the corrosive words that lead others astray from the faith? Whatever it refers to, it is up to the individual vessel to purge himself. The Lord will not do it, only the person can. Though our salvation has nothing to do with our effort, our sanctification and usefulness to the Lord certainly does.

2:22

Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

“Lusts” could be translated “coveting or passion.” This is always a product of depraved human nature. Timothy is urged to pursue aggressively to overtake positive virtues from the Lord. Our time is best spent in pursuit of Christ and His characteristics, especially with other members of the body.

2:23-24

But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient,

Don’t be sucked in; don’t strive. Instead, demonstrate the inward Christ.

2:25-26

in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

Minister Christ to cause repentance and an embrace of the truth. By so doing Timothy will deliver those taken captive by the devil.

These are among Paul’s last written words. Here is a seasoned brother pouring himself into a young brother in a profound display of mentoring in the things of the Lord for the sake of the body.

3:1

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:

Because the economy for Israel had been suspended several years prior, Paul must be referring to the economy of the mystery – the body of Christ. At the end of this dispensation, “perilous times will come.”

3:2-9

For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn

away! . . . this sort are . . . always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. . . .these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all,

Paul unloads on those who are led by their fallen souls. His repugnance is palatable. And rightfully so, for they have opposed him for over three decades, slinking around trying to undo his work with young Christians who escaped from Judaism or paganism. That the apostle could endure these perennial irritants is a true testimony of his relationship with Christ.

3:10-11

But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me.

Timothy knows the mystery committed to Paul. In fact, he knows the details. He also knows his father in the faith, his mentor – how he lives, what he purposes, how he suffers, how he loves, and how he shows patience through many persecutions. Timothy is under no illusions about his life ahead of him.

3:12

Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

Timothy's expectation. As his mentoring brother has suffered, so will he.

3:14-15

But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Paul encourages Timothy to follow his example, and to take advantage of his upbringing in the Hebrew scriptures.

3:16

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,

“Inspiration of God” should read “God-breathed.” The scriptures – the Hebrew writings, the four gospels, Acts, the letters and treatises of the apostles of the Lamb, and Paul's writings are *God breathed out*. He is the word, and His very being flows out in the language of the Bible. What He is in all His attributes is incorporated and dispensed in His breathing, and that breath is His Word, the inspired writings of the Bible.

3:17

that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Paul's veiled reference to Timothy, urging him on to maturity (complete) so he is fully equipped for his life ahead.

4:1

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom:

This is the actual end of chapter 3.

“Charge” could not be more intense. It means to testify vigorously; admonish earnestly. This must make a solemn impression on Timothy, because Paul does it before the Father and the Son.

This judgment must be the judgment seat of Christ at the resurrection of the righteous prior to the millennial kingdom on Earth. It surely is not the out-resurrection of Philippians 3:11.

Paul is not saying Timothy will be judged at the Lord's appearing. Most will, but there is the special resurrection at the Lord's upward call that will collect the attaining ones.

4:2

Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

Final instructions to Timothy. Preach, stand, reprove, rebuke, and exhort. All these require a strong, healthy inner life. Timothy has no natural ability to carry out Paul's urgings, but he knows where his strength resides.

4:5

But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

This is Paul's final exhortation to Timothy. “Ministry” could be “service.” “Fulfill” is to be “filled up with your service.” Timothy's charge is not to him alone, but to him as serving the body. Serving the body consumes Paul, and he wants the same for Timothy.

4:6-8

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

The end of the line for Paul. He assesses his life. He knows he did what the Lord called him to do, and his reward is ahead of him. The crown of righteousness must refer to the heavenly kingdom, not the earthly, Jewish kingdom on Earth described in the ancient prophets and in Revelation. There are hints that the faithful of the body of Christ will replace the utterly corrupt angelic administration. Paul's crown fits well in this context.

“That day” must be the day of the upward call at the out-resurrection of Philippians 3. Those who anticipate this event and even love it will participate. Those who have loved self and the world will not love the Lord’s appearing but will cower from it. It is our choice.

4:10-13

for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica—Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry. And Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come—and the books, especially the parchments.

His tragic reference to Demas is heartbreaking. The mention of Mark is heartening. He forsook Paul early on, but came back strong, garnering a positive tribute in the Word of God. He also contributed a biography of Jesus. Physician Luke, of course, is faithful, having nursed Paul to health through his many beatings, and accompanied him to, through and after the great and final rejection by Israel. He was also with him during his first imprisonment at Rome. We don’t know, but he may have been with Paul here.

4:14-15

Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works. You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words.

Perhaps Alexander was still stalking the ministry.

4:16-18

At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!

This may have been his first arraignment and hearing in Rome when only Luke was there. But the Lord was not finished. He strengthened Paul so his final communication of the mystery would go forth to the Gentiles. He was released for a few years to wrap up the message before he sent this final epistle.

His very last word is to confirm his preservation unto the heavenly kingdom where he will wear his crown of righteousness mentioned earlier (:8).

4:19-22

Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus stayed in Corinth, but Trophimus I have left in Miletus sick. Do your utmost to come before winter. Eubulus greets you, as well as Pudens, Linus, Claudia, and all the brethren. The Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Grace be with you. Amen.

Paul ties up some loose ends and acknowledges his faithful companions. It is a touching benediction, full of grace. We Gentiles truly have a wonderful apostle who is still taking care of us.