A Holy Temple in the Lord: The Story of the Ecclesia at Ephesus

Foreword

The Bible's record of the ecclesia at Ephesus extends approximately 43 years. It begins with Paul's visit to the city at the conclusion of his Second Missionary Journey. That occurred around 54 AD. It ends with the writing of the Book of Revelation, which contains a specific message to the elders of the ecclesia from the Lord Jesus Christ. Revelation was probably written around 96 AD.

In a sense, however, the Bible's record of the ecclesia at Ephesus stretches over an even longer period of time. It goes back to the beginning of the Gospel record and the preaching of John the Baptist. There were members of the Ephesian ecclesia who were exposed to his teachings. The history of the Ephesian ecclesia also includes the early period of Acts. There were Jews visiting from the region around Ephesus who witnessed the Apostles speaking in tongues at Pentecost in Acts 2. In the years that followed their journey home, many of those people could have eventually heard Paul, Apollos, Timothy, Titus, or perhaps even the Apostle John teaching in Ephesus. They also would have had occasion to spend time in the company of some of the other pillars of the first-century ecclesia, including Priscilla and Aquila, Aristarchus, Tychicus, Sosthenes, and Erastus. All of them spent time in Ephesus.

We can learn so much about the ecclesia at Ephesus because the Bible's record of its history is not only long, but it is also detailed. Some of the ecclesia's story is covered in the Acts of the Apostles, but a great deal of it is also provided in the epistles. Some of the letters that shed light on the ecclesia at Ephesus, such as I and 2 Timothy, were written to a person in the ecclesia; others, such as Ephesians, were written to the ecclesia at Ephesus (and perhaps other ecclesias in the region as well); still others, such as I Corinthians, were penned to another ecclesia by brethren living in Ephesus at the time they were written. John may have written his Gospel while he lived in Ephesus.

Much of the history of Christianity in the second half of the first century is told through the lens of the ecclesia at Ephesus. By studying the Ephesian ecclesia, we can see the historical context of many of the New Testament epistles, which helps to amplify their lessons. We can learn more about many of the characters, major and minor, who appear in the Acts and the epistles. We can identify the issues that confronted the early believers, many of which are similar to those that we encounter today, and gain insight from how they were addressed.

There are also wonderful lessons in spiritual development that come from the Bible's record of the ecclesia at Ephesus because the Bible shows the Ephesian ecclesia as it matured. These lessons in spiritual development are particularly valuable to young people and those new to the Truth, although it is important for everyone to be reminded of them. The textboxes in this book highlight particularly salient lessons in spiritual development that arise in the Scriptures' narrative of the ecclesia at Ephesus.

The Lord Jesus Christ knew the ecclesia at Ephesus well. He said that he walked in its midst. He observed the Ephesians' works, and he knew their hearts. Today he is watching us as he watched them. Let us learn from their story so that one day we can join the faithful from among them and also receive the reward that they were promised: "to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God" (Revelation 2:7).

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I. Beginnings

After his initial plans to visit Ephesus were frustrated, Paul journeys to the city for the first time. Although Ephesus presented many opportunities for pleasure and personal advancement, the early preaching efforts there bore fruit as some in the synagogue rejected the world and embraced the Gospel.

I.I. Wanting and waiting to go to Ephesus

Near the beginning of his Second Missionary Journey, in around 52 AD, the Apostle Paul tried to go to Asia, the Roman province where Ephesus was located, to preach the Gospel. (See Appendix I for background on the significance of Asia in Bible prophecy.) Paul's interest in the region is understandable. Acts 6 indicates that some of the people who lived there were familiar with the Gospel message even though ecclesias had not yet been established in the area. That chapter records that there was a synagogue in Jerusalem composed in part of Jews from Asia that had debated with Stephen:

And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia *and Asia*), disputing with Stephen (Acts 6:8-9, New King James Version, emphasis added).

Those people were not receptive to Stephen's message. They brought false witnesses to lie about him (Acts 6:I3), which led to his trial and subsequent execution. Deceit and a readiness to use violence to oppose the Gospel are characteristics that the Bible repeatedly ascribes to the Jewish opponents of Christianity from that region (cf. Acts 2I: 27-34). A person's natural instinct, therefore, would be to avoid going to a place like Asia to spread the Gospel. Paul, however, was driven by love of his Lord, and he wanted to go to Asia to preach. It is possible that Paul might have viewed preaching in Asia as continuing the work that Stephen had been doing before his death. The killing of Stephen by stoning was a brutal act to which Paul had consented (Acts 8:I).

Spiritual Growth: Righting a Past Wrong

As we grow spiritually, we will come to recognize wrongs that we have committed in our past and harm that we have previously caused. When we realize our mistakes, we need to try to undue their effects. We need to restore, but we also need to do something more.

This principle is taught in the trespass offering under the Law of Moses. If a person stole by fraud, for example, he had to give back what he took plus 20% of its value (Leviticus 6:2-7). So, if a person took \$100 from another person, he had to give him back \$120. He also had to offer a ram as a sacrifice.

Biblical restitution is illustrated through the behavior of faithful individuals in the Bible. For example, after his conversion, Paul tried to make amends for his earlier persecution of the

Jerusalem ecclesia, which followed the death of Stephen (Acts 8:1). He did this by dedicating himself to providing material assistance to the Christians in Jerusalem because his persecution had caused many of them to be financially devastated. He also strove to continue their work of Gospel proclamation, even when doing so was incredibly challenging and potentially dangerous.

Paul, however, was not permitted to go to Asia at that time:

Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia (Acts 16:6, emphasis added)

We are not certain how God directed Paul and his company from going to Asia. Perhaps God's guidance was conveyed indirectly through a series of circumstances that prevented them from going there, or maybe it came in the form of a direct message. The subsequent text may provide a hint. In Acts 16:9, the Bible records that Paul later received a vision encouraging him to go to Macedonia:

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us (Acts 16:9, emphasis added).

INSERT MAP: EPHESUS AND THE ROMAN PROVINCES OF ASIA AND MACEDONIA

The contrast between the description of that vision and the more ambiguous language about Paul and his companions being "forbidden" – the Greek word used there is rendered "hindered" elsewhere – to go to Asia in Acts 16:6 may be suggestive. It could indicate that it was not a vision that prevented Paul and his company from going to Asia. It might suggest instead that God's guidance came in the form of a chain of events that steered them in another direction.

There are two ways that God guides us. There is His guidance that comes directly, and there is His indirect guidance that comes through the circumstances of our lives. It appears that both of these types of guidance are illustrated in this section of Scripture. Paul received direct guidance in the form of the vision instructing him to go to Macedonia in Acts 16:9. He may have gotten indirect guidance through the circumstances that hindered him from going to Asia in Acts 16:6.

In our day, we pray for God's continued indirect guidance through the events of our lives. We also seek His direct guidance, which is available to us as well. It is provided through the Word of God, which tells us what we should and should not do.

The reason Paul and his company were not permitted to go into Asia is not explicitly stated. It is implied, however. The subsequent verses show that God ultimately revealed to them that He wanted them to go over to Europe and to preach the Gospel in Macedonia instead (Acts 16:7-10). It was also the case that the stage had not been set for Paul's preaching work in Ephesus to begin. There were some additional pieces that needed to be put in place, as it were.

¹ See Luke II:52.The Greek word is *koluo*. It is Strong's Number G2967. J. Strong, The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, I995).

Spiritual Growth:

When Good Intentions are Frustrated

This section of Scripture illustrates why it is important for us to maintain our faith in God and to keep looking to Him to guide us even during times when we do not entirely understand why exactly He is working in our lives as He is. Paul wanted to do a "good thing" by going to preach in Asia, but God prevented it. That sometimes happens in our lives. We want to do something for the glory of God – missionary work abroad perhaps or seeking to move near a small ecclesia in need of help - but then it does not work out. Maintaining a proper perspective can keep us from becoming discouraged when that happens. It helps to remember that He is in control and "that all things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28). Sometimes – as in the case of Paul going to Macedonia – there is something that God wants us to be doing instead at that point in time. Sometimes we are also temporarily delayed from doing something so that God can provide us with additional resources that will enable us to do the work more effectively in the future. This certainly seems to be the case with Paul's preaching in Ephesus.

I.2. Paul's arrival in Ephesus - Perspectives

Paul was eventually permitted to journey to Asia. He came to its chief city, Ephesus, two years later. When he arrived, he had Priscilla and Aquila with him. They were a married couple, who ultimately played incredibly important roles in the founding of the ecclesia at Ephesus. Eventually, they even saved Paul's life in Ephesus.

Paul had met them as a result of having been directed to Macedonia in Acts 16. After going to Macedonia, he eventually made his way to Corinth where he encountered Priscilla and Aquila:

After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them (Acts 18:1-2).

After having spent time in Corinth, Paul and his companions journeyed to Ephesus. They departed from Cenchrea, which was the port city of Corinth:

And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow. And he came to Ephesus ... (Acts 18:18-19).

INSERT MAP: EPHESUS, CORINTH, AND CENCHREA

One of the most common human actions is to reach your hand up and touch or run your fingers through your hair. If Paul did that upon his first arrival in Ephesus, he only would have felt stubble. Acts 18:18 states that "he" had shaved his head prior to his departure from Corinth because "he" had a vow.² It

² Commentators on the Greek say that the sentence structure suggests that it was actually Aquila's head that was shaved. However, the context is clearly about Paul, and most commentators believe the passage is about him.. See, for example, C.C. Williams, A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles (London, United Kingdom: Adams and Charles Black,1957), p. 213.

seems likely that Paul had taken a Nazarite vow as part of his service in Corinth. Nazarites shaved their head at the conclusions of their vows:

All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto the LORD, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow...And the Nazarite shall shave the head of his separation at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shall take the hair of the head of his separation, and put it in the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace offerings (Numbers 6:5, 18).

Paul probably shaved his head at the end of his time in Corinth to mark the termination of his vow before he left. In addition, he was on his way to Jerusalem at the time, and his shaved head would have demonstrated his respect for the Law. He might have hoped it would help to placate the Judaizers, who were causing strife among the believers.³

Spiritual Growth: Bible Reading and Bible Study

Many people read the Bible, but some are hesitant to say that they "study" it. "Bible study" can seem like a lofty endeavor, an activity that is not accessible to ordinary people.

But Bible study arises quite naturally out of thoughtful Bible reading. When approaching a section of the Bible, it can be helpful to try to envision as much of the scene as possible. (Some people study the Bible by literally creating a picture of what is being described. They try to make it as accurate as possible. They keep returning to the text until they have gleaned as much information from it as they can in creating their image.) In the case of Paul traveling to Ephesus for the first time, if we were to try to envision him, we would think of him standing on a ship with a bald head.

Then we can start asking why the image that we have is the way that it is:

Question: Why was Paul bald?

Answer: He had shaved his head.

Question: Why had he shaved his head?

Answer: He probably had a Nazarite vow.

Question: Why did he shave his head at that particular time?

Answer: It is likely that it had something to do with the end of his time in Corinth, but it was also the case that he was planning on continuing on to Jerusalem. His shaved head would have great meaning to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem who were concerned about his respect for the Law of Moses and might have helped to ease the tensions in the ecclesia there.

³ Consider, for example, Paul's actions in Acts 21:19-24. They were intended to demonstrate to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem that he did not abhor the Law.

Suddenly thinking about a little detail in the narrative has indicated a great deal about the character of the Apostle Paul and illustrates how he was willing to engage those who disagreed with him.

Paul and his companions arrived in Ephesus by ship. As they approached the city, they would have seen the lush countryside that surrounded it. To the north of the Ephesus, there was a plain through which the Cayster River flowed. It brought silt from the interior of Asia Minor and deposited it around Ephesus. That made the land around the city fertile and excellent for farming.⁴

MAP IDEA: EPHESUS, CAYSTER, AEGEAN

The Cayster River emptied into the harbor of Ephesus. Paul's ship came in to that harbor by way of a channel that linked it with the Aegean Sea. The harbor was about four miles inland from the coast. It was an extremely busy place. In addition to goods (and people) arriving from the Aegean Sea, it also received travelers and materials brought down from the interior of Asia Minor and beyond by the Cayster River. Moreover, Ephesus was the termination point of the "Royal Road." It originated in Persia and linked people across the I,700 miles over which it stretched.⁵ Thus, Ephesus was a connection point for land and sea routes and served as a hub of world trade. It is interesting to note that Paul arrived in Ephesus both by land and by sea over the course of his travels.⁶

The name Ephesus means "desirable." Its location certainly had many features that are desirable for a city to have. Paul saw Ephesus at the height of its temporal glory. As he made his way through the sea channel to the bustling harbor, he would have had a beautiful view of the city nestled on the slopes of Mounts Coressus and Pion.

As he exited his ship, what was known as "the white city" would have spread out before him. (It got that name because of all the marble used in its construction.) Looking to the left, Paul would have seen one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The Ephesians took great pride in the Temple of Diana. It stood alone on a plain. Its marble glistened with the colors of the precious metals that adorned it.⁸ It attracted many visitors to the city, who gave it gifts in the hope of securing the favor of the goddess, Diana. Since the Temple was very successful in keeping its assets safe, wealthy individuals deposited their riches there. The Temple began to make loans and became the largest bank in the province of Asia.⁹

ILLUSTRATION IDEA: TEMPLE OF DIANA

⁴ For more information, see G. Notes. 2003. "Ephesus." Believer's Web. www.believersweb.org. Accessed April 5, 2010.

⁵ For more information, see L. Jenott, 2004. "Ancient Ephesus." Walter Chapin Simpson Center for the Humanities, University of Washington. http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad. Accessed December 4, 2011.

⁶ Paul arrived by sea in Acts 18:18-19. He arrived by land in Acts 19:1.

⁷ D. Hitchcock, "Ephesus." *Hitchcock's New and Complete Analysis of the Holy Bible* (1869). http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/hitchcocks-bible-names. Accessed March 31, 2010.

⁸ H.P. Mansfield offers interesting insight into the history and layout of the city of Ephesus in his travelogues based on his visit there. They were published in the July and August issues of *Logos* magazine in 1974.

⁹ F.E. Mitchell. 1978. "Ephesus." *The Testimony.* 48(April), p. 116-118. This article in the "Archaeology & History" section of the magazine provides considerable information based on archaeology on the culture and worship of the Ephesians. It shows how archaeology can help a Bible student understand the context of the Bible's account of events in Ephesus and also how it demonstrates the historical accuracy of the Bible's narrative.

Upon exiting the ship, Paul would have stepped onto the Arkadiane Road, which was lined with columns. As Paul walked along it and looked ahead, he would have seen the city's theater on the slopes of Mount Pion.¹⁰ Years later, that is where the Silversmiths' Riot of Acts 19 occurred.

If we journeyed back in time, many aspects of Ephesus' culture would be very familiar to us. Sexual immorality abounded. The Temple of Love was located not far from the Agora, or market place. That temple was essentially a large and lavish brothel. Footprints leading to it were carved into the street so that visitors would be able to make their way to it with ease.

IMAGE IDEA: THIS IMAGE IS PUBLICLY AVAILABLE

Athletic achievement was glorified in Ephesus. As an indicator of the honor given to them, the city had a graveyard reserved for its gladiators. Pathologists who have examined the gladiators' remains have found evidence that they received the best available medical care, just as modern professional athletes do. The treatment they received indicates the high esteem in which they were held.¹¹

IMAGE IDEA: GLADIATOR GRAVESTONE IMAGE EXISTS

Ephesus was a multicultural society. Its population of 250,000 came from all over the known world and made it one of the largest cities in the Rome Empire. 12 It was a prosperous and technologically advanced place. Many of the houses of the wealthy had indoor plumbing; the public restrooms did as well.

Ephesus was also a center of learning. The city's streets were dotted by schools, one of which was eventually hired by Paul for his preaching activities. The city's library, the Library of Celsus, which was completed in I35 AD, held one of their largest collections of scrolls in the ancient world.¹³

IMAGE IDEA: THIS IMAGE IS PUBLICLY AVAILABLE

But even with that wealth, sophistication, and opportunity (both for personal development, as well as for depravity), many Ephesians still felt empty. They longed for purpose and guidance. That is why so many of them responded to the Gospel's call. They had experienced the world and knew that it had nothing of lasting value to offer. They agreed with the words Paul wrote concerning their former way of life:

That at that time ye 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* (Ephesians 2:12, emphasis added).

How true those words are of our lives before we chose to be followers of the Lord!

Paul's work among the Ephesians was part of the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy:

¹⁰ H.P. Mansfield. 1974. "Ephesus: City of Splendor." Logos. 40(August), p. 359-361.

¹¹ M. Kupper and H. Jones. 2007. "Gladiators' graveyard discovered." *BBC News*. http://news.bbc.co.uk. Accessed April 5, 2010.

¹² T. Butler, "Ephesus." Holman Bible Dictionary (1991). http://www.studylight.org/dic/hbd. Accessed December 11, 2011.

¹³ J. Craven. "The Ancient Library of Celsus." http://architecture.about.com. Accessed April 5,2010.

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined (Isaiah 9:2).

It is remarkable how quickly the members of the Ephesian ecclesia advanced in their spiritual development. Within the course of a few years, they went from being people of the world who pursued their own self-interest to being the "workmanship" of God (Ephesians 2:10). When Paul wrote the Epistle to the Ephesians, he evidently expected them to understand exhortations such as:

That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will (Ephesians I:IO-II).

Not only did Paul have high expectations of the Ephesians' spiritual comprehension, but he also expected their walk to be in accordance with the example of Christ:

Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour (Ephesians 5:I-2).

Recalling what was asked of the Ephesians is a good reminder of what is required of us.

Spiritual Growth: Reminders

We need to constantly remind ourselves of God's expectations of our service to Him. If we fail to do so, there is a danger that we will set up standards of behavior of our own making for ourselves (2 Corinthians 10:12). Those standards tend to be easy for us to meet because they come from us. They can make us feel prideful while at the same time encouraging us to be deficient in important aspects of our service to God.

Instead of making the mistake of creating our own standards of service to God, we need to carefully examine the Bible and reflect on what God required of people in the past since it reminds us of what He requires of us now. An essential part of this process is remembering the Lord Jesus at Memorial Service since he lived God's requirements perfectly.

I.3. Plans for the future "if God will"

Paul's work among the Ephesians began in the synagogue. Acts 18 records that his initial reception there was positive:

And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not (Acts 18:19-20, emphasis added);

Paul refused the Jews' request to stay longer. He was anxious to make it to a feast in Jerusalem.

Yet Paul told the Ephesians that he would return "if God will" (Acts 18:21). Paul was very busy during that time, and he was an important instrument in an incredible work. But he was careful not to

express pride or self-sufficiency or to lose sight of the fact that he was laboring for God and that God was in control. Paul's words – "if God will" – would have helped to remind him and his hearers of that important fact.

Spiritual Growth: "If God will"

Realizing the sobering fact that our lives are but a vapor – here for a moment and then gone – is an important step in gaining wisdom and making sure that we make the most of the time that we do have:

So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom (Psalm 90:12).

In chapter 4 of his epistle, James offers insight into the mindset that acknowledges this principle and is pleasing to God:

Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that" (James 4:15, New King James Version).

This verse is not so much a command to constantly *say*, "If the Lord wills." Rather, it is about a frame of mind. There were times when Paul did not use that phrase when discussing his plans. For example, in writing to the Corinthians, he said,

Now I will come unto you, when I shall pass through Macedonia: for I do pass through Macedonia (1 Corinthians 16:5).

(He stated his plans without explicitly saying "if the Lord wills.") Again, to the Romans, he wrote,

Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain (Romans 15:28, New King James Version).

There were, however, times when Paul explicitly stated that his plans were subject to God's will:

But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus (Acts 18:21).

Even though Paul did not always say the words "if the Lord wills," he consistently *lived* by that phrase. That is what James exhorts us to do. It is also true that actually saying "if the Lord wills" can be a helpful way of reminding us of our focus and of sharing our hope with others. (Saying those words can prompt people to ask us about our faith.) But James' exhortation – and Paul's example - is primarily about the attitude that we should have.

After he told those in the Ephesian synagogue that he would return if it was God's will, Paul left the city and continued on his journey. Priscilla and Aquila stayed behind in Ephesus, however. I Corinthians, which was later written from Ephesus, makes reference to an ecclesia in their home:

The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house (I Corinthians 16:19, emphasis added).

Priscilla and Aquila played very important roles in the formation of the ecclesia at Ephesus, which was probably founded during this time.¹⁴

I.4. "An eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures"

While Paul was away, Apollos came to Ephesus; Acts 18:24 describes him as a Jew "born at Alexandria." That particular detail that the Bible chooses to note about him reflects an important aspect of who he was. Alexandria was a city renowned for its scholarship: it had the largest library in the ancient world. The association was fitting because Apollos was a very learned and eloquent person.

Apollos was wise: he made the decision to use the gifts that God had given him in His service. Many people were helped by the fact that Apollos made that choice (Acts 18:27), and the impact of his labor in the Truth was much longer lasting than if he had chosen to dedicate his talents to the things of this world. Indeed, his spiritual impact endures to eternity.

Spiritual Growth: Blessings

God has given blessings to all of us. They may consist of abilities, opportunities, or relationships. These blessings can bring us joy, but we need to remember that they are from God and have been given to us for the purpose of serving Him. If we only use them in service to ourselves, we will dramatically limit their impact and will ultimately find that they are taken away from us.

Apollos knew about a coming Messiah, and he acted on that understanding. He wanted other people to know about him as well. After his arrival in Ephesus, he went to the synagogue and spoke fervently about the Lord. Acts 18:25 records that "he spake and taught diligently." The Greek word translated "diligently" is better rendered "accurately" as in the English Standard Version's translation: "he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus." Yet Apollos' accurate understanding of the Lord was based *only* on the teaching of John the Baptist^{15,16}:

He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, *though he knew only the baptism of John* (Acts 18:25, English Standard Version, emphasis added).

Apollos had been taught "the way of the Lord" (Acts 18:25). In the New Testament, that phrase is used only in reference to the teaching of John the Baptist.¹⁷ See Matthew 3:3, Mark 1:3, Luke 3:4, and John 1:23.

¹⁴ Note that Acts I8:27 makes reference to "the brethren" (plural) who were there before Paul's return at the start of the Third Missionary Journey.

¹⁵ G.E. Mansfield, *The Book of the Acts of the Apostles* (Findon, Australia: Logos, 1998), p. 376.

¹⁶ A. Barnes, "Acts." *Notes on the Bible* (1834). http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/cmt/barnes/ Accessed December 15, 2011.

¹⁷ J. Alexander, *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Klock and Klock, 1980), p. 644.

Apollos had evidently used what John the Baptist had said about the coming Messiah to guide his understanding of the Old Testament's passages concerning him. As a result, he had arrived at a correct understanding of what the Lord Jesus' work would be like. That made him very excited.

Paul's friends heard Apollos teaching in the synagogue. They could have made themselves look smart and perhaps impressed the crowd by standing up and saying, "Yes, the things that Apollos says are true, and the man he is talking about has come already. His name is Jesus of Nazareth. Let us tell you about him." Instead, verse 26 states that "they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly." The passage informs us that they assured Apollos that Jesus was, in fact, the Messiah. Verse 26 also describes *how* Acquila and Priscilla instructed Apollos: "they took him unto them." It seems that the idea being conveyed is that they were caring and kind in how they approached him and went about talking with him.¹⁸

After having learned about the identity of the Lord, Apollos decided to travel to Achaia, the southern part of Greece where Athens and Corinth are located. The brethren of the fledgling ecclesia at Ephesus provided him with a letter of their support (Acts 18:27). Apollos eventually made his way to Corinth. Acts 18 describes the nature of his work there:

And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publickly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ (Acts 18:27-28).

The passage states that he "helped them which had believed." It is a reference to his activity strengthening the ecclesia. In making reference to that work in I Corinthians 3, Paul notes, "I have planted, Apollos watered" (verse 6).

MAP IDEA: ACHAIA, ATHENS, CORINTH

There is a minor detail in verse 26 that is worth noting because of the good, practical guidance that it offers. In the King James Version, Aquila's name is listed before Priscilla's in describing the instruction of Apollos. That is significant because it is frequently the case that Priscilla is listed first when the two of them are mentioned. See, for example Acts 18:18 and Romans 16:3. Commentators usually suggest that that ordering is a reflection of Priscilla's exceptional spiritual characteristics. But even though Priscilla was a wonderful sister, when it came to teaching Apollos, Aquila's name is listed first. The order suggests that Aquila, a male, took the lead in interacting with Apollos, who was another, presumably single, male. If, in fact, that is the idea being conveyed, then there was wisdom in their approach. It would have helped them to avoid any appearance of evil and would have helped to keep any temptation in check. When it comes to preaching and giving counsel, we need to remember that our first duty is to God. It is important to honor Him in everything that we do, and we need to make sure that nothing happens that would disgrace our work in His Name. So, it is generally a good idea for men to take the lead in interacting with male interested friends and brethren who are in need of counsel and for females to take the lead in interacting with other women. It should be noted that Priscilla's name is listed first in modern translations (e.g., the New International Version and the English Standard Version); however, the general principle that brethren should take the lead in interacting with men while sisters should take the lead in interacting with women is sound regardless of whether or not it is supported by the order of the names in Acts 18:26.

Apollos was also actively involved in Gospel proclamation in Corinth. Acts 18:28 records that "he mightily convinced the Jews." The verse concludes by stating that the means he used to preach to them was "shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ."

Spiritual Growth:

"Shewing by the Scriptures" within and without the ecclesia

In an age when churches are increasingly relying on emotional appeal and personal testimony to gain converts, we need to remember and seek to replicate the successful approach that Apollos used (i.e., "shewing by the scriptures"). We need to ground our message in the Word, and we need to strive to be active in both aspects of the work in which Apollos was engaged. We need to edify our ecclesias, and we need to spread the Gospel. These activities are essential to the growth of an ecclesia, and they support one another.

I.5. Preparing for the next stage in Antioch

In the meantime, Paul completed his journey to Jerusalem and returned to the familiarity of Antioch:

And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch. And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples (Acts 18:22-23).

Paul spent "spent some time there." He probably would have rested a while and recovered from the rigors of his travels during the Second Missionary Journey.

MAP IDEA: ANTIOCH AND ITS ENVIRONS

During that time, he began to make plans for his next trip, the Third Missionary Journey. Faithful friends gathered around him. He was with Timothy and Erastus (Acts 19: 22) Titus (2 Corinthians 12:18), ¹⁹ Gaius, and Aristarchus (Acts 19:29). The excitement would have mounted as they prepared for their departure and the work ahead.

Paul was about to begin what was probably the busiest and most productive stage of his life.²⁰ He was about to return to Ephesus.

¹⁹ A number of commentators believe that Titus delivered I Corinthians. See for example A. Fausset, "Titus." *Fausset's Bible Dictionary* (1878). http://www.bible-history.com/faussets Accessed December 2, 2010. If that is the case, then he would have been with Paul during his second trip to Ephesus.

²⁰ H.P. Mansfield, *The Story of the Bible, Volume 8* (Kidman Park, Australia: Eureka Press, 2006), p. 262.

2. Hearing the word of the Lord Jesus

Paul returns to Ephesus at the beginning of his Third Missionary Journey. He lets his light shine and labors hard, boldly proclaiming the Gospel to those he encounters. God blesses his efforts, which bear fruit, but challenges emerge in the ecclesia at Ephesus and beyond.

2.I. Serving others on the return trip to Ephesus

Shortly after he made his first visit to Ephesus, Paul returned to Antioch and concluded his Second Missionary Journey (Acts 18:22).²¹ His Third Missionary Journey began around 54 AD and ended in about 58 AD. Paul was mostly likely between the ages of 48 and 52 during that time. He spent three of those four years in Ephesus.²²

Paul's Third Missionary Journey began when he set out from Antioch by land. A journey by sea probably would have been less arduous, but traveling by land gave Paul the opportunity to visit a number of ecclesias on the way to Ephesus.²³

Spiritual Growth: Putting the needs of others first

Putting the care of his brothers and sisters above his own comfort is a consistent theme of Paul's service among the Ephesians. In acting as he did, he was following the example of the Lord Jesus, which we are called to follow as well.

Paul's first stops on his Third Missionary Journey were at the ecclesias of Galatia and Phrygia where he strengthened "all the disciples" there:

And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples (Acts 18:23).

MAP IDEA: THE ROMAN PROVINCES OF GALATIA AND PHRYGIA

While he was in Galatia, he made arrangements for the collection of the Jerusalem Poor Fund, which was intended to provide relief to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem who had become impoverished because of persecution and famine. Paul made reference to the collections that he had arranged for in Galatia when he later wrote to the Corinthians with instructions for them to do the same:

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come (I Corinthians I6:I-2, emphasis added).

²¹ H.P. Mansfield, *The Story of the Bible, Volume 8* (Kidman Park, Australia: Eureka Press, 2006), p. 259.

²² H.P. Mansfield, *The Story of the Bible, Volume &* (Kidman Park, Australia: Eureka Press, 2006), p. 262.

²³ H.P. Mansfield, *The Story of the Bible, Volume 8* (Kidman Park, Australia: Eureka Press, 2006), p. 264.

Paul then continued on to Ephesus. The language the King James Version uses about his route is somewhat confusing. Acts 19:I states that he journeyed to Ephesus by way of "the upper coasts." The English Revised Version's rendering of the phrase is clearer: "Paul having passed through *the upper country* came to Ephesus" (emphasis added).

This passage reflects the fact that from where Paul was there were two routes to Ephesus from the interior of modern-day Turkey. One of them passed through the Lycus Valley and approached Ephesus from the south. It was a trade route. The other, more direct route went through the hills through which the Cayster River ran and approached Ephesus from the north. The Lycus Valley road would have brought Paul through Colossae and Laodicea. Colossians 2 states that he had never been to those places:

For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many *as have not seen my face in the flesh* (Colossians 2:I, emphasis added).

MAP IDEA: COLOSSAE, LAODICEA, LYCUS VALLEY, MEANDER RIVER, CAYSTER RIVER

If Paul had passed through those cities, he probably would have been tempted to stop. But it seems that his goal was to return to Ephesus quickly and to resume his work there. So, he did not choose the Lycus Valley route. Instead, he opted for the less populous, upper country route that offered fewer potential diversions along the way.

2.2. Finding disciples in Ephesus

The upper country route brought Paul back to Ephesus, and he quickly went to work after he arrived. Acts 19 states that he "found" certain disciples:

And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and *finding certain disciples* (Acts 19:I, emphasis added)

Paul had a remarkable knack for "finding" spiritually minded people in new cities that he visited. For example, Acts 18 records that Paul had previously "found" Priscilla and Aquila shortly after his arrival in Corinth:

And *found* a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them (Acts 18:2, emphasis added).

How was he able to find these people? It is definitely something we should consider if we want to be more like him.

Paul certainly must have let his light shine. His words and his actions undoubtedly demonstrated his commitment to God. People who wanted an alternative to the vanity of the world would have been curious about him. His lifestyle brought him into contact with people who would have been receptive to his message, and his focus on sharing the Gospel would have caused him to see opportunities to preach and to take advantage of them when they arose. He viewed sharing the Gospel as his duty:

For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel (I Corinthians 9:16, English Standard Version, emphasis added)!

Thus, Paul's frequent involvement in conversations about the Gospel was not an accident. It was a result of conscious decisions that he made. God approved of those choices, and He blessed Paul's efforts.

Spiritual Growth: Preaching

If we love God and our actions reflect that feeling, we will probably find ourselves more likely to come into contact with people who are receptive to the Gospel. If sharing the Gospel is a goal of our lives that we actively think about, we will see opportunities to share the Word that we might otherwise have overlooked. By orienting our minds properly (and seeking God's help, of course), preaching can become a core component of our lives. It will not be something that happens sporadically or that feels artificial or forced. Working to become more like Paul in this regard is a way to bring glory to the Father and to help others to better understand Him, just as Paul did.

Paul asked the disciples that he found in Ephesus whether they had received the Holy Spirit. They had not. When he inquired further, he learned that they had been baptized with the baptism of John:

He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, *Unto John's baptism* (Acts 19:2-3, emphasis added).

The King James Version's rendering of their statement in Acts 19:2 is somewhat misleading. It is translated as "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Spirit." That makes it sound like they did not know whether there was such a thing as the Holy Spirit. But that is hard to imagine since the Old Testament speaks about the Holy Spirit, and, as followers of John the Baptist, they certainly would have believed in the Holy Spirit because of John's teachings about it. In fact, they would have looked for the Holy Spirit gifts to be given as a sign of the Messiah's coming. John taught:

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: *he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost*, and with fire (Matthew 3:II, emphasis added).

The Revised Version's rendering of what these men said seems to be more in harmony with the rest of Scripture: "Nay, we did not so much as hear whether the Holy Ghost was given." Those disciples were still looking for the coming of the Messiah and the giving of the Holy Spirit gifts that would follow.

In response, Paul told them that the Lord Jesus was the one that John the Baptist had said was coming. They believed and were re-baptized:

Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ

Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:4-5).

Their re-baptism was an acknowledgement of the difference between the two baptisms. John's baptism was for repentance. It was given in anticipation of the soon coming of the Messiah. Baptism in the name of Christ, however, is an expression of faith that he came, that he died, and that he had been resurrected to life. Through baptism into the Lord, we identify with him. We have hope to "be also in the likeness of his resurrection" (Romans 6:5) and to reign with him in the Kingdom. A great deal more is expressed by baptism into the name of Christ than in John's initial call to repentance and baptism.

Paul then laid his hands on the men. They received the Holy Spirit, which allowed them to speak in tongues and to prophesy:

And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied (Acts 19:6).

Paul's work to ensure that their understanding was correct before laying hands on them probably helped to lay the foundation for doctrinal soundness for which the Ephesian ecclesia later became known.

Acts 19:7 states that there were about twelve men who received the gifts of tongues and of prophesy at that time. The gift of tongues that the men received would have been particularly useful in Ephesus because there were people there from all over the world. The men with the Spirit gifts undoubtedly would have been put to work spreading the Gospel and strengthening the ecclesia. That is the reason those gifts were given:

Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe (I Corinthians 14:22).

2.3. Speaking boldly

Paul would have set a wonderful example for those twelve men in the way he set about preaching. Acts 19 states that he spoke "boldly" in the synagogue:

And he went into the synagogue, and spake *boldly* for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 19:8, emphasis added).

That was one of Paul's characteristics. Acts makes repeated reference to him proclaiming the Gospel "boldly" in different areas that he visited:

And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached *boldly* at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. And he spake *boldly* in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him (Acts 9:26-29, emphasis added).

Long time therefore abode they speaking *boldly* in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands (Acts I4:3, emphasis added).

Paul's bold preaching was no accident. He asked people to pray for him that he might speak "boldly" because he regarded doing so as his duty. Consider the request he made in the Letter to the Ephesians, for example:

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may *open my mouth boldly*, to make known the mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may *speak boldly*, as I ought to speak (Ephesians 6:18-20, emphasis added).

The word "boldly" means "to be frank in utterance, or confident in spirit and demeanor."²⁴ This passage is a good reminder that boldness in preaching is not a characteristic that necessarily arises in us naturally. It is something that we probably need to pray for, and we may want to ask others to pray for us as well, just as Paul did.

Paul taught in the synagogue for three months. But some there did not believe:

⁹But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude ... (Acts 19:9)

The Greek word translated "believed not" in verse 9 is frequently translated "were disobedient" (or a related phrase) in a number of other verses where it appears.²⁵ In fact, the Revised Version adopts that rendering in this passage and translates it as "some were hardened and disobedient." There is great meaning in that statement for it reminds us that belief in God and response to His commands is not an option. *Disbelief is disobedience*.

Indeed, the extent to which the unbelieving group's rejection of the Gospel message was displeasing to God is indicated by the fact that the Scripture appends the words "were hardened" to the statement that they were "disobedient." The phrase "were hardened" is an echo of the disbelieving folly of Pharaoh, which lead to his undoing:

For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in. And I will *harden Pharaoh's heart*, that he shall follow after them; and I will be honoured upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host; that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD. And they did so (Exodus I4:3-4, emphasis added).

In fact, the same Greek word that is translated "were hardened" in Acts 19:9 is used in the Greek-language Septuagint in Exodus 14:4 about the heart of Pharaoh.²⁶

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²⁴ The Greek word is *parrhesiazomai*. It is Strong's Number G3955. J. Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1995).

²⁵ See Romans 2: 8; 10: 21; I Peter 2: 7; 2: 8; 3: 1; 3: 20; 4: 17.

²⁶ The Greek word is *skleruno*. It is Strong's Number G4645.

2.4. The Way

The enemies of the Gospel in the Ephesian synagogue were not content to merely remain in a state of disbelief, however. They were actively hostile towards Paul's message. The King James records that they "spake evil of *that way* before the multitude" (Acts 19:9, emphasis added). "The Way" is an interesting phrase to consider because of the meaning that it conveys.

"The way" includes the things we must believe to be saved, "the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 8:12):

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, *By a new and living way*, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh (Hebrews 10:19-20, emphasis added).

Christ's redemptive work taught powerful lessons about the righteousness of God, so much so that "the Way," the term used to describe it, is used to echo a request made by Moses centuries before:

Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, *shew me now thy way*, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people (Exodus 33:13, emphasis added).

Moses, the servant of the LORD, desired with all his heart to see God's way. We have the privilege of seeing it in Christ. Indeed, "the Way" is a component of the sixth "I am" title of Christ.²⁷ In John 14:6, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." The first century believers recognized this, so they called their faith "the Way." In speaking of his beliefs before the Temple crowd that had tried to kill him, for example, Paul reminded them:

And I persecuted *this way* unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women (Acts 22:4, emphasis added).

"The Way" is a wonderful phrase because it reminds us that our faith is more than just a set of beliefs – it is a way of life that reflects the righteous character of God.

2.5. Separation of the ecclesia and the synagogue

In Acts 19:9, a strong word is used in the Greek to characterize the evil speaking of the opponents of the Way in the synagogue. It is the same word that is used for cursing parents in the Lord's condemnation of the Pharisees' behavior in Matthew and Mark (Matthew 15:4, Mark 7:10).²⁸

As a result of that opposition, the Apostle Paul "departed from them and separated the disciples" (Acts 19:9). This was part of the process whereby the synagogue and the ecclesia became separate entities.

²⁷ The Lord Jesus said "I am" over fifty times in John's Gospel. Many of these passages are quite well known. For example, he said, "I am not yet ascended to my Father" in John 20:17. There are a number of times where the Lord followed the phrase "I am" with an object or concept. Those phrases are the "I am" titles of the Lord Jesus. There are seven of them in John's Gospel: John 6:48, 8:12, 10:7, 10:11, 11:25, 14:6, and 15:1.

²⁸ The Greek word is *kakologeo*. It is Strong's Number G2551. J. Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1995).

It is interesting to note that James makes reference to his audience gathering together in "synagogues." He writes of someone coming into "your assembly:"

For if there come unto your *assembly* a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment (James 2:2, emphasis added);

The Greek word translated "assembly" is *sunagoge* from which the English word "synagogue" is derived.²⁹ James did not just refer to the synagogue, however. He also wrote about "the ecclesia." In James 5, he wrote about calling "for the elders of the ecclesia:"

Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the *church*; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord (James 5:14, emphasis added):

James' use of language suggests that he wrote before Christians and Jews had fully separated their worship services. It appears that when the Epistle of James was written, many "ecclesias" were groups of Jewish believers in the Lord Jesus who worshipped in synagogues. As time passed and belief in the Lord Jesus spread, hostility to Christianity within the synagogues increased. Later New Testament writings made clear distinctions between "the ecclesia" and "the synagogue:"

And unto the angel of the *church* in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the *synagogue* of Satan (Revelation 2:8-9).

The contrast between the language of James and Revelation indicates that the Epistle of James was a very early New Testament writing.

2.6. The wonderful example of Paul's daily labor

Paul's preaching work continued outside of the synagogue after the separation of the ecclesia and the synagogue. Acts I9 records that he taught "daily" in the "school of one Tyrannus:"

But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus (Acts 19:9).

"Tyrannus" means "a tyrant." (We have to wonder how we got that name. Did his parents call him that or his students?)

Paul probably taught at the school after Tyrannus' classes had ended for the daily siesta. Public life in the Ionian cities³⁰ came to a halt around II AM, and the people rested during the heat of the day until around 4 PM.³¹ It has been said that more people were asleep in Ephesus at I PM than at I AM.³²

²⁹ It is Strong's Number G4864. J. Strong, The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1995).

The Ionian cities, which included Ephesus, were the Greek-speaking cities of Asia. See Appendix I for more information.
 C.C. Williams, A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles (London, United Kingdom: Adams and Charles Black, 1957) p.
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³² F.F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans, 1955) p. 389.

Why is Tyrannus' name provided in the Bible's record? The Scriptures could simply note that Paul taught in a school, but the record explicitly states that the school belonged to Tyrannus. The reason why this detail is preserved is not revealed, but it is interesting to consider. Perhaps some of Tyrannus' students were curious about Paul and stayed to hear him teach. Maybe some of them even accepted the Gospel and joined the ecclesia in Ephesus. If so, then seeing their teacher's name in the Acts record many years later could have been a stirring reminder to them of where they were and how they felt when they first learned about the Lord Jesus and accepted the Truth.

Paul's schedule during this period of his life – when he was teaching at Tyrannus' school - was absolutely exhausting. In addition to all of his preaching and ecclesial work, he also labored (probably as a tentmaker) to provide financial support to himself *and* to those who were with him. He later reminded the elders of Ephesus of the way he had lived while he had been among them:

Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me (Acts 20:34).

Paul worked hard to provide for his own needs as well as those of his travelling companions. The Ephesian ecclesia did not have to support him financially. That was important to Paul. He wanted to be able to share the Gospel without charge. He made that point when wrote to the Corinthians while he was in Ephesus:

What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, *I may make the gospel of Christ without charge*, that I abuse not my power in the gospel (I Corinthians 9:18, emphasis added).

Paul's toil is evidenced by the way in which the "special miracles" that he performed in Ephesus took place:

And God wrought *special miracles* by the hands of Paul: So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them (Acts 19:11-12, emphasis added).

These verses note that by God's power Paul was able to heal people from a distance. That is why the miracles were "special." Paul accomplished these cures by sending items to the sick. It is worth noting the kind of objects that Paul used in performing these healings because it reveals a lot about who he was and what his time in Ephesus was like.

Try to image the scenario. Someone comes to Paul with news that a distant brother or sister is sick. Paul wants to help the person, so he grabs a nearby object to send to the person so that he or she would recover quickly. What kinds of objects were near Paul? What did he pick up to send? Verse I2 notes that it was "handkerchiefs" and "aprons." What kind of objects were those? The Greek word translated "handkerchief" is *soudarion*, which means "a cloth for wiping perspiration from the face," thereby indicating the kind of exhausting lifestyle that Paul led. The Greek word rendered "apron" is

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³³ The Greek word is Strong's Number G4676. The definition is from J.H. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testatment*. e-Sword 9.9.0.

simikinthion, which means "a narrow apron, or linen covering, which workmen and servants were accustomed to wear," ³⁴ indicating that his was a life of service. The fact that Paul used these items – sweat cloths and work clothes – to send to people at a distance to heal them indicates what an incredibly hard worker he was. As a laborer, these were the items that Paul had on hand. ³⁵

Spiritual Growth: How are we spending our time?

What we would end up using to heal people if we suddenly found ourselves in the same position that Paul was in? If someone needed us to send something to someone quickly, what would it be? What objects are typically close at hand in our lives? Would it be a TV remote? Would it be a video game console? Would it be a Bible marking pen? We need to look honestly at our lives to examine what we are doing with our time and energy and to see if we are serving the Lord as Paul did.

It would have been particularly remarkable for the people of Ephesus to witness items from Paul healing people since Paul himself was not well. Galatians 4 implies that his eyesight was bad:

Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have *plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me* (Galatians 4:15, emphasis added).

Galatians 6 also suggests that he could not see well:

Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand (Galatians 6:11).

(He had to write large letters in order to see them.) The epistles to the Corinthians make reference to what could have been other physical maladies:

And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling (I Corinthians 2:3).

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me *a thorn in the flesh*, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure (2 Corinthians 12:7, emphasis added).

Paul's sickly appearance was a distraction to some:

For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible (2 Corinthians 10:10, emphasis added).

Moreover, his beloved companion, Timothy, who was with him in Ephesus, was frequently ill as well. The fact that the Apostle could only encourage him to "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities" (I Timothy 5:23) and *could not actually heal him* (or himself for that matter) would have been compelling proof that the miracles he performed were not due to any

³⁴ The Greek word is Strong's Number G4612. The definition is from J.H. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testatment*. e-Sword 9.9.0.

³⁵ It is interesting to note the parallel between the miracles that Paul performed in Ephesus and the miracles that the Lord performed in Matthew 9:20-22 and 14:36 where people where healed by touching the hem of his garment.

power that he personally possessed. Instead, they were incredible signs confirming the existence of the God about whom he preached.

2.7. Ephesus - a hub of Gospel proclamation

Paul's preaching bore much fruit. Not only was the Gospel widely proclaimed in Ephesus, but also people throughout the whole province of Asia heard the message. Acts 19:10 states that "all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus." In fact, when corresponding with the Corinthians from Ephesus at the end of his stay, Paul could write that "the *ecclesias* of Asia salute you" (I Corinthians 16:19). (Note that it is the plural word "ecclesias" that he used.) It is likely that the seven ecclesias mentioned in Revelation 2-3 were founded at this time, as well as the ecclesias at Hierapolis and Colossae (Colossians 4:13).

MAP IDEA: EPHESUS, COLOSSAE, HIERAPOLIS, 7 ECCLESIAS

Ephesus was the hub of the preaching efforts going on in Asia during this period, even though Paul did not personally visit all of the new ecclesias that were established. Paul had never travelled to Colossae, for example. That ecclesia was established by Epaphras (Colossians I:7).

Spiritual Growth: Laboring in prayer

Epaphras must have been a wonderful brother, and he set a tremendous example of how we can help those that we love in the Truth when we cannot physically be with them. We can do that by praying for them, just as Epaphras did for the Colossians and others when he could not personally be in their midst:

Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, *always labouring fervently for you in prayers*, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. ¹³For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis (Colossians 4:12-13).

Regardless of our circumstances or abilities, we can always do a valuable work by laboring in prayer.

2.8. Paul leaves; Timothy stays behind.

Paul left Ephesus and did some traveling during this time. There is evidence that he returned to Macedonia and Corinth, for example. Those visits are not mentioned in Acts, but they are referred to in the epistles. For example, I Timothy was written while Timothy was at Ephesus and Paul was away:

As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine (I Timothy I:3, emphasis added).

There is some question about the timing of when I Timothy was written, but the Bible does provide clues. It is unlikely that this epistle was written following the Third Missionary Journey because at the end of it, Paul told the elders of Ephesus that the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that they would never see him again:

And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, *shall see my face no more* (Acts 20:25, emphasis added).

In I Timothy, however, Paul expressed his intention to return to Timothy in Ephesus "shortly:"

These things write I unto thee, *hoping to come unto thee shortly* (I Timothy 3:14, emphasis added).

Therefore, Paul it seems that must have written I Timothy during the time of Acts 19 when he was based in Ephesus and *prior* to the end of the Third Missionary Journey.

There is also evidence that Paul went to Corinth during that time. 2 Corinthians 12 mentions three of Paul's visits to that city:

Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children (2 Corinthians I2:I4, emphasis added).

The first of these visits occurred during the Second Missionary Journey. It is recorded in Acts 18:

After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth (Acts 18:1);

The third visit was one that he was about to make at the time 2 Corinthians was written. That occurred during the Third Missionary Journey after Paul had departed from Ephesus. That visit is recorded in Acts 20:

And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia. And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, *he came into Greece* (Acts 20:I-2, emphasis added),

The second visit to Corinth is not recorded in Acts, but it had to have taken place between the first visit in Acts 18 and the third visit in Acts 20. It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that it occurred during the time of Acts 19 when Paul was based in Ephesus.

Paul's second visit to Corinth could have been prompted by the return of Apollos to Ephesus. (Apollos's return is evidenced by the reference to him at the end of I Corinthians. See I Corinthians 16:12). When Apollos came back to Ephesus, he might have had news about the issues arising in the Corinthian ecclesia. Paul attempted to address those problems during his second visit to Corinth (I Corinthians 5:9-10).

The fact that Paul's second visit to Corinth is not recorded in Acts suggests that it was probably short. It has been called "the flying-visit" by commentators because of its assumed brevity. It seems likely that it occurred on the same trip as Paul's visit to Macedonia. (Paul was in Macedonia when he wrote I Timothy.) Corinth was not far from Macedonia. In fact, when Paul visited Corinth for the third time, he departed from Macedonia and then returned to Macedonia (Acts 20:I-3). It seems reasonable that when he made his second trip to Corinth, he would have visited Macedonia as well.

³⁶ C.C. Williams, A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles (London, United Kingdom: Adams and Charles Black,1957) p. 219.

Paul's three visits to Corinth

Second Visit Occurred during Acts 19 when Paul was based in Ephesus. Not recorded in Acts.

Third Visit Acts 20:2

Putting the evidence together suggests that Paul made a trip to Corinth and Macedonia during the time of Acts I9 when he was based in Ephesus. While he was away, he wrote I Timothy. Timothy had evidently wanted to accompany Paul on his trip. But Paul had "besought" him to stay back in Ephesus (I Timothy I:3). Many translations render "besought" in I Timothy I:3 as "urged."³⁷ Paul needed Timothy to remain in Ephesus to shepherd the fledgling ecclesia. ³⁸ The task was daunting, which was probably one of the reasons why Timothy wanted to leave with Paul when he departed.

2.9. Paul's encouragement to Timothy

Doctrinal problems were beginning to emerge in the ecclesia at Ephesus. Some in the ecclesia were advocating Greek philosophy:

O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and *oppositions of science falsely so called* (I Timothy 6:20, emphasis added):

Others were corrupting the faith with Jewish traditions and fables, which were probably similar to those of the Talmud:³⁹

Neither give heed to *fables and endless genealogies*, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do...Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm (I Timothy I:4, 7, emphasis added).

Still others had reverted to a belief in devils and spirits:

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to *seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils* (I Timothy 4:I, emphasis added);

Lifestyle problems were also arising. Sisters were trying to usurp the role of brethren in the ecclesia (I Timothy 2:II-I5), and the wrong kind of men were trying to lead (I Timothy 3:I-I3). The rich were looking down on the poor (I Timothy 6:I7), and the poor were seeking to be rich even at the expense of the Truth (I Timothy 6:5-I0). Meanwhile, some were content to live in idleness and to be supported by the ecclesia (I Timothy 5:3-I6). Paul had already had to withdraw from some people in the meeting. He mentioned Hymenaeus and Alexander by name:

³⁷ See, for example, the New International Version, English Standard Version, and New American Standard Bible. The Weymouth New Testament and the Darby Bible Translation use "begged."

³⁸ For an excellent overview of I Timothy in the context of the history of the ecclesia in Ephesus, see J. Allfree. 1995. "Ephesus: The Loss of 'First Love." *The Testimony* 65(775), p. 246 - 254.

³⁹ Titus I:I4 refers to "the fables" as Jewish fables.

Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme (I Timothy I:19-20).

"Satan" is used as a codeword for the Roman authorities in Revelation 2:13. It is possible that Paul used the term in that way here as well and that he is indicating that the behavior of Hymenaeus and Alexander was bad enough that he had to turn them over to the Romans. Alexander's later involvement with the Silversmiths' Riot in Ephesus suggests that he had a tremendous capacity for making trouble (Acts 19:33). He went on to cause Paul problems for many years.

Paul's message to Timothy can be summarized by the words of I Timothy 6:20.40 The margin of the Revised Version renders them as "guard the deposit." The ecclesia is a treasure. Paul wanted Timothy to strive to protect the one in Ephesus.

There are a few points, in particular, that Paul wanted Timothy to emphasize to the Ephesians. Some are indicated by the Greek word *paraggello*, which is translated as either "charge" or "command." There are five such charges in the epistle that are identified by that word. They are part of the structure of the epistle and can be summarized as follows:

- I) that people in the meeting should "teach no other doctrine" (I Timothy I:3)
- 2) that "we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe" (I Timothy 4:I0-II)
- 3) that sisters "may be blameless" (I Timothy 5:7)
- 4) that the commandment be kept "without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Timothy 6:I3-I4),
- 5) that those who are rich "be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy" (I Timothy 6:17).

Other points of emphasis in the epistle are labeled "faithful sayings." Three of the five "faithful sayings" of the Pastoral Epistles are found in I Timothy. They are listed below:

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief (I Timothy I:I5, emphasis added).

This is a true saying, *If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work* (I Timothy 3:I, emphasis added).

For bodily exercise profiteth little: but *godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.* This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation (I Timothy 4:8-9, emphasis added).

⁴⁰ H.P. Mansfield, *The Story of the Bible, Volume 8* (Kidman Park, Australia: Eureka Press, 2006), p. 281.

⁴¹ It is Strong's Number G3853.

As the third "faithful saying" indicates, all of the lessons that Paul wanted to convey were for the purpose of encouraging godliness. In fact, "godliness" is a key word of I Timothy. It appears nine times in the epistle.⁴² The structure of one of the passages in which the word "godliness" is found indicates that it was probably a quotation from a hymn sung in the Ephesian ecclesia:⁴³

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory (I Timothy 3:16).

Judging from the content of the epistle, it seems that Timothy struggled to rise to the task of leadership that was before him. Timothy faced challenges. He was young:

Let no man despise *thy youth*; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity (I Timothy 4:12, emphasis added).

He was sickly:

Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities (I Timothy 5:23).

He was naturally timid:

Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. For God hath not given us *the spirit of fear*; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind (2 Timothy I:6-7, emphasis added).

Plus, the situation in the Ephesian ecclesia was deteriorating. Part of the problem appears to be that Timothy was reluctant to confront some people who had gone astray. Paul had to remind him of his obligation to do so. Consider again, for example:

Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy (I Timothy 6:17, emphasis added);

Yet it seems that when Timothy did muster the courage to address a problem that he overcompensated for his quiet nature and was sometimes unduly harsh in the way he handled the situation. Perhaps that is why Paul included a reminder for him not to "rebuke" but rather to "intreat" those in the meeting:

Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren (I Timothy 5:I);

The problem was not Timothy's intentions. He wanted to do right, but he was allowing himself to be hindered by his natural disadvantages. He was conscious of them and tried to compensate for them. He turned to exercise:

⁴² See ITimothy 2:2, 2:10, 3:16, 4:7, 4:8, 6:3, 6:5, 6:6, and 6:11.

⁴³ R. Jamieson, A. Fausset, and D. Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*.. e-Sword 9.9.0.

For *bodily exercise* profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come (I Timothy 4:8, emphasis added).

Further, he might have attempted to curry favor by showing partiality to certain groups in the meeting:

I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality (I Timothy 5:21, emphasis added).

He also might have entertained spurious accusations by some in the ecclesia against other members, perhaps to try and gain their approval:

Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses (I Timothy 5:19).

Paul sought to re-direct his "own son in the faith" (I Timothy I:2). Timothy had been given the role that he had because of his faith, and Paul wanted him to better himself by investing in his spiritual development. Paul wrote:

Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine (I Timothy 4:12-13).

Paul wanted Timothy to dedicate himself to study, to building his character, and to teaching others. He encouraged Timothy to prepare himself for leadership by following the pattern that Ezra had followed, which was "to seek," "to do," and "to teach:"

For Ezra had prepared his heart *to seek* the law of the LORD, and *to do* it, and *to teach* in Israel statutes and judgments (Ezra 7:10, emphasis added).

Developing personal appeal was not the path to service to God and leadership in the ecclesia. Cultivating godliness was:

This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, *holding faith* and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith (I Timothy I:18-19, English Standard Version, emphasis added).

We should all give careful heed to Paul's advice to Timothy because it runs so contrary to our natural inclinations. As the Bible makes clear time and again, God does not value the same characteristics that people do. He does not care about our personal appeal or our natural abilities. His interest is in our commitment to Him.

Spiritual Growth: Solving problems

Timothy had a problem in Ephesus. Some in the ecclesia were dismissive of him and were not listening to him. He reacted at first by pursing natural solutions. He exercised to get

stronger, for example. Paul directed him to try a more spiritual approach instead. He encouraged Timothy to make himself an example of godliness.

When we encounter problems, we need to examine ourselves to make sure that we are not taking the world's approach to solving them. Instead, we should trust in God and rely on the guidance that comes from His Word.

2.10. Trouble brewing

Paul's letter to Timothy was meant to encourage and to guide Timothy until Paul returned to Ephesus. Following his visit to Corinth, Paul wrote an epistle to the Corinthians, which has not been preserved, to reinforce the lessons he had conveyed to them while he was there. The epistle is mentioned in I Corinthians 5:

I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world (I Corinthians 5:9-I0).

But the problems in Corinth did not end. They grew worse.

Paul had to write to them again. When he did, he was back in Ephesus. The words of I Corinthians 16: 9 characterize the situation in Ephesus:

for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries (I Corinthians I6:9, English Standard Version).

The next chapter considers the positive developments that came with the opening of the "wide door for effective work" in Ephesus, as well as the mounting number of adversaries who were increasing their opposition to the fledgling ecclesia.

3. "A wide door for effective work" opens

Known for their interest in the occult, the Ephesians witness a dramatic display of the futility of the magic in which they had trusted. Ephesians within and without the ecclesia renounce their old ways and embrace the Gospel instead. Paul perseveres through a great deal of adversity, and the idol makers in Ephesus, seeing their wealth threatened by Paul's work, lash out at the Christian community.

3.I. The Word of God prevails

There is only one place in the Bible where the phrase "special miracles" occurs. It is in Acts 19:11. There it is used to describe the wonders that Paul performed while in Ephesus. Those miracles would have had a particularly powerful impact on the Ephesians, who were known for their interest in the occult. Many of them believed in magic. They bought and sold spells, and they gathered to watch visiting sorcerers attempt miracle cures. As a result, charlatans who claimed to have special abilities were drawn to the city. They offered to use their powers or to share them – for a price.

The reputation that Ephesus had of being a place full of magical con artists was so strong that it appears in a well-known description of the city contained in Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*, which was written many centuries later. In that work, the character Antipholus of Syracuse describes Ephesus as follows:⁴⁴

They say this town is full of cozenage,
As, nimble jugglers that deceive the eye,
Dark-working sorcerers that change the mind,
Soul-killing witches that deform the body,
Disguised cheaters, prating mountebanks,
And many such-like liberties of sin.

The fact that Ephesus was still remembered as a place where magical con artists flourished over 1,500 years after Acts 19 was written indicates how infamous it was. Its longstanding reputation certainly indicates the historical validity of the scene with the sons of Sceva in Acts 19:

Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so (Acts 19:13-14).

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⁴⁴ W. Shakespeare. *Comedy of Errors*. Scene II. "The Mart."

Sceva's sons were among the many tricksters who came to Ephesus. Sceva's name means "left handed," 45 a symbol that is often associated with evil intent. (The English word "sinister" comes from the Latin word *sinestra*, which originally meant "left" but later came to be used for evil or bad luck.) 46

The King James Version describes Sceva as "chief of the priests."⁴⁷ It seems likely that he was head of one of the 24 courses of priests that David set in order.⁴⁸ These courses are referred to in Luke I:

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth (Luke I:5, emphasis added).

Sceva's sons traveled about and performed exorcisms, a practice that is also mentioned in Luke II:

But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils. And others, tempting him, sought of him a sign from heaven. But he, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub. And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, *by whom do your sons cast them out?* therefore shall they be your judges (Luke II:I5-I9, emphasis added).

The Bible's record of the attempt by the sons of Sceva to heal a man with a mental illness in Acts 19 is very much in harmony with archeological evidence of the practice of magic in Ephesus. The magical artifacts discovered in the area around Ephesus are part of the voluminous evidence of the historical accuracy of the Bible.

In the first century, magicians in Ephesus used spells known as "Ephesian letters" to cure disease, find love, solve infertility, or bring luck. These spells were combinations of words and characters thought to have power when used in a particular order. Use of these them was connected to the worship of the Ephesians' goddess, Diana. (Magical characters were written on the crown, belt, and feet of her image in the city's great temple.) Spells of Ephesian letters were often comprised of little more than a few words or characters. They were purchased in little scrolls, worn on the body, and pulled out and uttered when need arose.⁴⁹

As Acts 19:13 suggests, Jewish magicians were popular in Ephesus. They knew Hebrew and could invoke words and names from the Old Testament in their spells. A number of magical scrolls that have been preserved contain Hebrew words like "Sabaoth" and names like "Abraham." Other scrolls provide guides for the pronunciation of the Divine Name for use in spells. The closest parallel to the spell used by

⁴⁵ "Sceva." NETBible.org: http://net.bible.org. Accessed May 21, 2010.

⁴⁶ "sinister." The Random House College Dictionary, Revised Edition. (New York, New York: Random House, 1988).

⁴⁷ Similar language appears elsewhere in Acts, such as "Now when the captain of the temple and *the chief priests* heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to" (Acts 5:24, emphasis added).

⁴⁸ S.F. Hunter. "Sceva." *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. http://www.internationalstandardbible.com. Accessed December 12, 2010. The possibility also exists that "sons of Sceva, a Jew, chief of the priests" was a stage name. See F.F. Bruce, Commentary on the Book of the Acts (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans, 1955) p. 390.

⁴⁹ F.E. Mitchell. 1978. "Ephesus." The Testimony. 48(April), p. 117.

the sons of Sceva in the Acts 19 record is found on line 318 of the Paris magical papyrus Number 574. This papyrus contains the words, "I adjure thee by Jesus the God of the Hebrews." 50

The sons of Sceva tried to use similar words to heal a mentally ill man in Ephesus. It appears that they gathered a great company together to watch the anticipated healing. That is probably how the events described came to be "known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus:"

And this was *known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus*; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified (Acts 19:17, emphasis added).

It was an occasion that presented a wonderful opportunity for the Truth to triumph over error.

The magicians used the words: "We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth" (Acts 19:13). Apparently, the sick man was aware of the interest in Jesus and Paul that had developed in the city. Perhaps that is why the sons of Sceva selected him for "healing." They might have thought that saying the names of Jesus and Paul would elicit a reaction from him that would look like a healing. But after the sons of Sceva spoke, the man replied, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?" (verse 15).⁵¹ (The verse actually states that "the evil spirit" spoke. See Appendix 2 for a brief examination of the use of language about evil spirits in the New Testament.) The deranged man's perception was sufficient to tell that the sons of Sceva were charlatans, and his response was a remarkable illustration of the folly of those who believed in the magicians. Even a person who was not mentally sound could tell that they were nothing but frauds.

The sick man then leapt on the sons of Sceva, overcame them, and prevailed against them. So desperate were the sons of Sceva to get away from him that they shook off their clothes to escape. Acts 19:16 records that they fled "naked and wounded." The inability of the sons of Sceva to restrain this man, let alone cure him, was a convincing demonstration to many of the Ephesians of the powerlessness of the magic that they had believed in and spent so much money on.

An important lesson from the episode with the sons of Sceva is that a mere recognition of Jesus' power and an acknowledgement of his existence are not sufficient to save a person. The sons of Sceva knew that there was power associated with the name of Jesus, but it did them no good because they did not change their characters as a result. Let this be a lesson to us. The transformation of a life through the power of the Lord Jesus Christ requires an understanding of the moral implications of his work and a commitment to follow in his footsteps, not just an acknowledgement that he exists.

The episode with the sons of Sceva had a dramatic effect on those within and without the ecclesia at Ephesus. Within the ecclesia, many came forward and confessed that they had been continuing the practices of the occult in secret. Persistent belief in magic and superstition had been a problem in the ecclesia at Ephesus, as indicated by Paul's warning to Timothy in his first epistle to him (I Timothy 4:I). However, the fact that people in the meeting "came, confessing and divulging their practices" (Acts 19:18,

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⁵⁰ F.F. Bruce, Commentary on the Book of the Acts (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans, 1955), p. 390.

⁵¹ He uses two different Greek words for "to know." When speaking of Jesus, he uses *ginosko* (Strong's Number GI097), which means "to be aware of." When speaking of Paul, he uses *epistamai* (Strong's Number GI987), which means "to be acquainted with." J. Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, I995).

English Standard Version) following the episode with the sons of Sceva showed that those events had brought about a profound change in them. They were now prepared to break those ties to their old way of life.

Spiritual Growth: Confession

James exhorted his readers to "confess your faults one to another" (James 5: 16). Confession is a powerful way to confront a moral problem in our lives. When we confess a fault that we have to another person, we accomplish two things. First, we reinforce in our minds that what we have been doing is, in fact, wrong. One of the greatest obstacles we face in overcoming a moral problem in our lives is the voice in our heads that repeatedly says that what we have been doing is not actually all that bad. By confessing to someone else that we have been doing wrong, we rebuke that voice and draw a firm line in the sand, as it were, between right and wrong in our minds. Second, by confessing our sin to someone else, we gain a resource. We make that person our ally in our fight against temptation.

Many Ephesians outside of the ecclesia were also profoundly moved by the events that had happened with the sons of Sceva. They responded to what had occurred by renouncing their old practices and destroying the books they had used to practice magic arts:

And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver (Acts 19:18-19).

The Ephesians burned their occult books in public. The value of the magical books the Ephesians destroyed was 50,000 drachmas. The context suggests that was a large amount of money. Since a drachma was approximately the daily wage of a skilled worker, that amount was probably the equivalent of about \$9 million in 2010.⁵²

The Ephesians did not sell their magical books even though the proceeds from them could have gone to a good cause, such as the Jerusalem Poor Fund, which Paul was collecting at the time. Their decision is very much in harmony with the Bible's teachings. Money gotten from unwholesome sources was not to be used in the service of God:

You shall not bring the hire of a harlot, or the wages of a dog, into the house of the LORD your God in payment for any vow; for both of these are an abomination to the LORD your God (Deuteronomy 23:18, Revised Standard Version).

There were practical benefits to the destruction of the magical books as well. If the people had sold them, others could have acquired them and used them. The Christians did not want that. Plus, the public renunciation of their old ways gave the new converts a chance to proclaim to all that they were

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⁵² Based on \$22 per hour as the hourly earnings of a skilled worker. See Bureau of Labor Statistics. Career Guide to Industries, 2010-11 Edition: Construction. http://www.bls.gov. Accessed May 21, 2010.

turning from their trust in magic and embracing the Gospel instead. The effect was dramatic. Acts 19 records:

So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily (Acts 19:20, English Standard Version).

Spiritual Growth: Changing our ways permanently

When we discover a problem in our lives, we want to get rid of it. We also want the change that we make to be permanent. It is important, therefore, that we recognize our weaknesses and concede that the temptation to return to our old ways may be quite strong in the future. Therefore, we may need to take practical steps that will make it harder for us to revert to our old habits once we have resolved to change them. The Ephesians did that by burning their magical books in public. We may need to take equivalent steps to deal with our struggles. If we realize that we are watching too much TV, for example, it may not be enough for us to just resolve to watch it less. We might need to remove the TV from our house.

3.2. Paul plans to depart.

With the spread of the Gospel well underway and with thriving ecclesias having been established in the area, Paul began to make plans to leave Ephesus. He wanted to go to Macedonia and Achaia. He undoubtedly wanted to continue the collection of the Jerusalem Poor Fund there. After that, he wanted his next major stop to be Jerusalem. There he would give the Fund to the poor Jewish Christians. Thereafter, he wanted to go to Rome:

After these things were ended, 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 (Acts 19:21).

Paul sent Timothy and Erastus ahead of him into Macedonia to prepare for his arrival:

So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season (Acts 19:22).

Erastus was from Corinth, and he eventually made his way back there. Romans, which was written from Corinth, contains a greeting from him:

Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. *Erastus, the city treasurer*, and our brother Quartus, greet you (Romans 16:23, English Standard Version, emphasis added).

As this verse notes, Erastus was the treasurer of the city of Corinth. There is evidence of his existence in the archeological record. In 1921, a pavement found near the theater in Corinth contains an inscription

that is probably from him. It states, "Erastus, procurator of public buildings, laid this pavement at his own expense." ⁵³

IMAGE IDEA: IMAGE OF ERASTUS STONE IS PUBLICLY AVAILABLE

3.3. Paul writes to the Corinthians from Ephesus.

Erastus was a faithful brother, but not all things were right in Corinth. Paul began to hear of problems in the ecclesia there from Corinthian visitors who came to see him in Ephesus. I Corinthians I:II mentions a delegation that came from the household of Chloe. They told Paul about factions that had formed in the ecclesia:

For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you (I Corinthians II:II).

Some in the meeting were claiming to be followers of Paul, others of Peter, still others of Apollos, and some, trying to sound superior to the rest, said that they followed Christ:

Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul (I Corinthians I:I2-I3)?

Hearing of these factions was terribly distressing to Paul. He, Peter, and Apollos all labored tirelessly for the cause of Christ. Although they each had different strengths, they complemented each other. The idea of developing personal followings and competing against one another was abhorrent to them.

On the surface, the difference between the styles of Paul and Apollos, in particular, would have been obvious to the sophisticated Corinthians. Apollos was a gifted orator (Acts 18:24). Paul was not. In I Corinthians 2, he states:

And I, brethren, when I came to you, *came not with excellency of speech* or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God (I Corinthians 2:I, emphasis added).

Yet superficial differences related to fleshly characteristics or abilities should have no bearing on spiritual matters. Even though these two men had different approaches, they supported one another's work. What is more, there is no hint of jealousy of the gifts that the other had. In fact, evidence suggests that they had a great deal of love for one another and supported each other. Consider the care that Paul showed for Apollos when he wrote to Titus concerning him some years later:

Do your best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; see that they lack nothing (Titus 3:13, English Standard Version, emphasis added).

Paul was clearly looking after Apollos' well-being here, and the support extended - "see that they lack nothing" – was probably financed from his own pocket.

⁵³ F.F. Bruce, Commentary on the Book of the Acts (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans, 1955), p. 395.

During the time of Acts 19, Apollos was with Paul in Ephesus when the delegation from the household of Chloe arrived with news of the factions that had developed in Corinth. Paul suggested to him that he return to Corinth, but Apollos decided against it:

As touching our brother Apollos, *I greatly desired him to come unto you* with the brethren: but his will was not at all to come at this time; but he will come when he shall have convenient time (I Corinthians 16:12, emphasis added).

Apollos' decision not to go back to Corinth was a stern rebuke of those in the ecclesia who had set him forth as the leader of their faction. By refusing to be with them, he clearly demonstrated that he did not approve of their party spirit.

If Apollos had been driven by human pride or personal ambition, he would have leapt at the opportunity to return to the city to be with his supporters. But his desire was to serve God, even when doing so came at a personal cost to him. Paul's mindset was the same. By keeping their focus on serving God and bringing glory to Him, Paul and Apollos helped to resolve what could have been an explosive problem in the ecclesia. Moreover, these brethren did not allow a potentially divisive situation to harm their relationship with each other. The attitude of Paul and Apollos during this time and their willingness to use their gifts together in service to the Lord sets an example for believers in all ages to follow. Paul wrote:

I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building (I Corinthians 3:6-9).

Following the example of Paul and Apollos and viewing each other as "labourers together with God" can help us to sustain our relationships even during times when they could otherwise become strained by the difficulties that sometimes arise in ecclesial life.

There were other problems in Corinth that Paul heard of as well at this time. The ecclesia was tolerating gross sexual immorality by members of the meeting (I Corinthians 5:I-7). They were doing so even though Paul had explicitly warned them "not to keep company with fornicators" in an earlier epistle (I Corinthians 5:9). Another distressing problem was that brethren were taking each other to court (I Corinthians 6:I-8).

All was not totally lost in Corinth, however. A letter arrived from the Corinthians asking Paul questions about a number of matters, including marriage, meat sacrificed to idols, the conduct of worship services, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the resurrection.⁵⁴ The fact that the Corinthians had reached out to Paul in that way demonstrated that they remained teachable and wanted his guidance to be better followers of the Lord. The letter from Corinth was carried by Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus. Paul wrote that he was very pleased to receive it:

⁵⁴ The letter from Corinth is referred to in I Corinthians 7:1.

I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence (I Corinthians I6:17, English Standard Version, emphasis added).

I Corinthians was the letter that Paul wrote in response to all of these issues (See Appendix 3 for the story of the conversion of Sosthenes, the other author of the Epistle, who was with Paul in Ephesus.) I Corinthians I6:8 shows that I Corinthians was probably written from Ephesus:⁵⁵

But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost (I Corinthians 16:8 emphasis added).

Both I and 2 Corinthians offer insight into Paul's experiences and feelings while he was in Ephesus. The problems in Corinth weighed heavily on his mind, for example. He speaks of the anguish that they caused him when he later reflected back on the writing of I Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 2:

For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you (2 Corinthians 2:4, emphasis added).

In addition to the burden caused by his concern for the Corinthians, I Corinthians also lists the many other difficulties that Paul faced while he was in Ephesus. Many of these problems, which are quite extreme, are not presented in detail in the Acts record. Paul identifies the hardships that he faced:

Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day (I Corinthians 4:II-I3, emphasis added).

In addition to deprivation, abuse, and weariness, Paul makes reference to the adversaries who contended against him in Ephesus. They were ferocious people. He compares them to wild animals:

What do I gain if, humanly speaking, *I fought with beasts at Ephesus?* If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." (I Corinthians I5:32, English Standard Version, emphasis added).

Without the resurrection, Paul concludes, believers who follow in his footsteps would be "of all men most miserable" (I Corinthians 15:19).

Paul did believe in the resurrection, however. It gave him great hope, and he trusted in God; therefore, he refused material assistance from the members of the ecclesia in Ephesus (I Corinthians 9: I3-I5).

⁵⁵ The King James Version has a note at the end of I Corinthians that states that the epistle was written from Philippi. That error is due to a misinterpretation of I Corinthians I6:5, which states, "for I do pass through Macedonia." The authors of the footnote took that passage to mean, "I am passing through Macedonia." But most commentators disagree with that interpretation. They believe that the passage is an expression of Paul's intent to go to Macedonia and from there then on to Corinth. The weight of evidence seems to be that Paul wrote I Corinthians while he was in Ephesus.

Paul believed God. He had a sure hope. As a result, he knew what course of action to pursue. Even though he was opposed - violently opposed - by both Jews and Gentiles in Ephesus, he still endeavored with all his might to reach out to both groups and to share the Gospel with them:

And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law (I Corinthians 9:20-21).

Despite all of the challenging events that happened to him and all of the trying circumstances he had to endure while he was in Ephesus, Paul maintained a positive outlook. Bearing in mind all the difficulties that he was experiencing, it is remarkable to consider how he characterizes the situation in Ephesus:

For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries (I Corinthians 16:9).

Paul viewed what was going on in Ephesus as an opportunity!

Spiritual Growth: See opportunities

Paul's attitude in Ephesus is worthy of our contemplation. All too often we faint early in the face of difficulty. His example shows how resilient we can be and how much we can accomplish, regardless of the problems we encounter, if we maintain our trust in God.

Paul sent I Corinthians by the hand of Titus, who was with him in Ephesus at the time (2 Corinthians 7:6-8). When Paul wrote I Corinthians, he was planning on staying at Ephesus for a little while longer. He told the Corinthians that he wanted to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, which is in the late spring (I Corinthians I6:8). He reasoned that Timothy might arrive in Corinth before him, so he told the Corinthians not to make Timothy afraid or to "despise him." This passage is a further indication of the challenges Timothy faced in being a leader of the first-century ecclesia:

Now if Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear: for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do. Let no man therefore despise him: but conduct him forth in peace, that he may come unto me: for I look for him (I Corinthians I6:I0-II).

3.4. Background to the Silversmith's Riot

Shortly after Paul wrote I Corinthians, the situation in Ephesus changed dramatically for the Christians living there. The spread of the Gospel was causing many of the people who lived in Asia to lose interest in the goddess Diana, and the public burning of the magical paraphernalia certainly would have contributed to that sentiment. The impact of Paul's preaching was particularly felt in Ephesus since that is where Diana worship was headquartered and where the temple built in her honor stood. That temple was a grandiose structure with a long history.

3.4.I. The Temple

Historians can now reconstruct in great detail what the worship of Diana and the temple built for her was like because the archeological evidence is so extensive. What they have discovered points squarely in support of the Acts 19 record.

The Ephesians' temple of Diana was the only temple to be known as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The predecessor to the temple that stood in Paul's day burned to the ground on July 21, 356 BC. That was the same night that Alexander the Great was born. Several decades later, when Alexander visited Ephesus after the Battle of the Granicus River, he offered to finance the completion of the temple with the spoils of his victories in exchange for being allowed to inscribe his name on it. But the Ephesians turned him down. ⁵⁶ In their minds, having Alexander's name on the temple would have detracted from the honor of their goddess. Refusing Alexander was remarkable given that a) he was offering them a large sum of money and b) he was at the head of a formidable army that had just crushed the forces of the Persian Empire and could have obliterated them. The Ephesians' decision demonstrates the great pride the Ephesians had in the temple and how deeply ingrained in their history and culture it was. ⁵⁷ It gives a sense of the strength of feeling that the Diana worshippers brought to their opposition to Christianity and the fledgling ecclesia.

It took 76 years to complete the re-construction of the temple of Diana.⁵⁸ (By comparison, John 2: 20 states that the construction of Herod's Temple in Jerusalem took 46 years.) When it was finished, the temple of Diana stood on a base 425 feet long and 200 feet wide. The roof of the Temple was supported by over 120 columns that were 60 feet high.⁵⁹ It has been estimated that it could hold 50,000 people.⁶⁰ It was, therefore, considerably larger than many buildings in antiquity, including the Parthenon in Athens, for example.⁶¹ It was also lavishly decorated. Its striking façade was of red, blue, and gold marble and abounded with precious metals.⁶² Sculptures adorned its columns. The rich kept their wealth and valuables there, and the temple housed a priceless art collection.⁶³ Many of these treasures where brought out into the streets of the city for display during festivals to Diana, which would have increased the people's awe of the great building.⁶⁴

IMAGE IDEA: THE TEMPLE OF DIANA (PERHAPS HAROLD OAKLEY RENDITION

⁵⁶ C. Pissarides. "Greek Temples: Artemis Temple of Ephesus." http://www.mlahanas.de. Accessed May 26, 2010.

⁵⁷ W.H. Boulton. 1909. "Paul: His Life and Labours. Chapter XI – The Third Journey, Antioch to Ephesus." *The Christadelphian.* 46, electronic edition. Logos Library System. Christadelphian Magazine and Publishing Association.

⁵⁸ E. Falkener, *Ephesus and the Temple of Diana* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Day and Son, 1862), p. 230.

⁵⁹ E. Pitt. 1905. "With Paul at Epheus." *The Christadelphian*. 42, electronic edition. Logos Library System. Christadelphian Magazine and Publishing Association.

⁶⁰ C.C. Williams, A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles (London, United Kingdom: Adams and Charles Black,1957) p. 223.

⁶¹ W. H. Boulton. 1954. "Luke's Story of the Christian Church. (29) 'Great Artemis' – Rioting in Ephesus." *The Christadelphian.* 91, electronic edition. Logos Library System. Christadelphian Magazine and Publishing Association. He notes that some of the ruins of the temple of Diana are on display in the British Museum.

⁶² H.P. Mansfield. 1974. "Ephesus: City of Splendor." Logos. 40(August), p. 360.

⁶³ H.P. Mansfield, *The Story of the Bible, Volume 8* (Kidman Park, Australia: Eureka Press, 2006),p. 299.

⁶⁴ W.H. Boulton. 1954. "Luke's Story of the Christian Church. (29) 'Great Artemis' – Rioting in Ephesus." *The Christadelphian.* 91, electronic edition. Logos Library System. Christadelphian Magazine and Publishing Association.

3.4.2 The goddess Diana

The image of Diana itself was located in the temple behind the altar.⁶⁵ In the Acts 19 record, the townclerk of the city describes it as "the image which fell down from Jupiter" (verse 35). (The Greek word translated "which fell down from Jupiter" literally means "from Zeus," but it was used to convey the idea of "fallen from the sky."⁶⁶ That is how it is translated in the English Standard Version, for example.) The image was probably a meteorite that had been sculpted.⁶⁷ Meteorite worship was common during this period, and there were meteorites in numerous temples throughout the Mediterranean rim. There was even one in a synagogue in Egypt.⁶⁸

IMAGE IDEA: EPHESIAN DIANA

The goddess Diana was represented as a many-breasted woman and was regarded as a mother goddess and the nourisher of life.⁶⁹ Her worship was associated with vile practices connected to the ideas of reproduction and fertility.⁷⁰ She also had a turreted crown, which was reminiscent of the Tower of Babel. Indeed, numerous connections between the worship of the Ephesian goddess and Babylonian-style worship have been identified.⁷¹ The combination of her crown and her outstretched arms give her an eerie resemblance to apostate depictions of Mary. Indeed, the obvious influence of Diana on orthodox Christianity's understanding of Mary has not been lost on commentators from a wide variety of backgrounds.⁷² For example, Diana was worshipped as a mother of gods,⁷³ and the men who devoted themselves to her took vows of celibacy.⁷⁴

As part of their worship, devotees of Diana purchased images of her and the temple. These idols could be made of terra cotta, marble, or precious metals.⁷⁵ Those who venerated the goddess wore these objects,⁷⁶ kept them in their homes, and placed them in the graves of their dead.⁷⁷

In Acts 19, the silversmith Demetrius is recorded as saying that "all Asia and the world" worshipped Diana (verse 27). His remarks are an exaggeration, but the worship of Diana was widespread.

⁶⁵ F.E. Mitchell. 1978. "Ephesus." *The Testimony.* 48(April), p. 116.

⁶⁶ The Greek word is *diopetes*. It is Strong's Number GI356. J. Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1995).

⁶⁷ F.E. Mitchell. 1978. "Ephesus." The Testimony. 48(April), p. 116.

⁶⁸ C.C. Williams, A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles (London, United Kingdom: Adams and Charles Black,1957) p. 224.

 ⁶⁹ W.H. Boulton. 1954. "Luke's Story of the Christian Church. (29) 'Great Artemis' – Rioting in Ephesus." *The Christadelphian*. 91, electronic edition. Logos Library System. Christadelphian Magazine and Publishing Association.
 ⁷⁰ W.H. Boulton. 1958. "What the Spirit Saith to the Churches' 7 – The Church that is in Ephesus. (a) A Sketch of Its History." *The Christadelphian*. 95, electronic edition. Logos Library System. Christadelphian Magazine and Publishing Association.

⁷¹ N. Bernard. 1997. "Babel and Ephesus." *The Testimony.* 67(802), p. 375 – 377. E.W. Bullinger traces the roots of Diana worship to Semiramis, the queen of Babylon who introduced many of the false worship ideas that have endured for millennia. See E.W Bullinger, *The Companion Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1922), p.1631.

⁷² See, for example, J. Atkinson. "Ephesus." The Latter Rain Page. http://www.latter-rain.com. Accessed May 28, 2010.

⁷³ F.F. Bruce, Commentary on the Book of the Acts (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans, 1955), p. 397.

⁷⁴ M. Coffey. 1998. "Artemis." http://www.arthistory.sbc.edu. Accessed May 28, 2010.

⁷⁵ F.E. Mitchell. 1978. "Ephesus." The Testimony. 48(April), p. 118.

⁷⁶ G.E. Mansfield, *The Book of the Acts of the Apostles* (Findon, Australia: Logos, 1998), p. 385.

⁷⁷ W.H. Boulton. 1909. "Paul: His Life and Labours. Chapter XI – The Third Journey, Antioch to Ephesus." *The Christadelphian* 46, electronic edition. Logos Library System. Christadelphian Magazine and Publishing Association.

More than thirty ancient cities claimed Diana as their patroness,⁷⁸ and archeologists have found relics of the Ephesians' Diana throughout the region.⁷⁹

3.4.3. Artemision

Sales of objects associated with Diana worship would have undoubtedly increased during the many civic and cultural events in the city associated with her worship. Numerous festivals with athletic, theatrical, and musical competitions were held in her honor.⁸⁰

The height of Diana worship occurred in late spring during the month the Ephesians called "Artemision" after the goddess' Greek name, Artemis. It was probably during Artemision that the Silversmiths' Riot of Acts 19 took place, so, again, the Bible's record is in accordance with history down to the most minor details.⁸¹

As mentioned previously, in I Corinthians, Paul stated his intention to remain in Ephesus until late spring (I Corinthians 16:8). That implies that he must have written I Corinthians *before* it was late spring. There is a good chance, therefore, that Paul was still in Ephesus near the beginning of the month Artemision. Perhaps he had hoped to spend his final days in Ephesus preaching to the crowds of visitors who would have come to the city during that time.⁸²

3.5. "By this craft we have our wealth"

It is easy to imagine the Ephesian silversmith, Demetrius, and the other image makers in the city gathering at the beginning of Artemision to complain about the impact that Paul's preaching was having on the sale of their idols. Their religion thrived on the pursuit of personal gain. In fact, money is a major focus of the speech that Demetrius made to the idol makers in Acts 19. He repeatedly referred to their wealth gained from selling images:⁸³

And the same time there arose no small stir about that way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth (Acts 19:23-27, emphasis added).

⁷⁸ F.E. Mitchell. 1978. "Ephesus." *The Testimony*. 48(April), p. 116.

⁷⁹ C.C. Williams, A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles (London, United Kingdom: Adams and Charles Black,1957) p. 225.

⁸⁰ J. Allfree. 1995. "Ephesus: The Loss of First Love." *The Testimony* 65(775), p. 252.

⁸¹ F.F. Bruce, Commentary on the Book of the Acts (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans, 1955), p. 398.

⁸² F.E. Mitchell. 1978. "Ephesus." The Testimony. 48(April), p. 117.

⁸³ There was a lot of money to be gained. For example, a subscription in Ephesus from Caius Vibius Salutaris dated I04 AD dedicates 3I gold and silver statues to Diana. Those statues were to be carried through the heart of the city on days where Diana was to be honored, which occurred roughly every two weeks. See J. Elsner, *Roman Eyes: Visuality and Subjectivity in Art and Text* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 232.

Demetrius' focus on material gain from religion was a marked contrast to the call to self-sacrifice for God and others that Paul and the Christians proclaimed.

The historical record shows that some of the language in Demetrius' speech echoes that used in a decree that was issued in Ephesus about 20 years before the events of Acts 19 took place. That decree called for continuous celebration of Diana during Artemision and made the whole month sacred to her. It was likely an important reason for much of the revenue that the craftsmen brought in during the month. The decree was inscribed on a stone, which has been excavated, that most likely would have been seen by Paul and everyone else in the city. Demetrius might have alluded to it to heighten the impact of his words.⁸⁴

Acts 19: 28 records that the craftsmen grew angry as they listened to Demetrius speak about the effect of the Gospel preaching on their livelihood. They began to shout:

And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians (Acts 19:28).

As Demetrius' words show, the craftsmen were not as concerned with the honor of their goddess as they were upset that their wealth was being threatened. Their shouts of adoration for Diana were little more than an outpouring of praise for materialism. It is tragic that so much religion is nothing more than a guise for self-seeking behavior. Examining ourselves to see whether we are following in the self-denying footsteps of Christ is the best strategy to avoid falling into that trap as well.

Historians believe that the silversmith's guild in Ephesus was situated near the Commercial Agora. The Commercial Agora was where the marketplace was located, so the crowds gathered there would have heard the uproar. Acts records that the multitude began to get involved. The Marble Road was close by, and it led straight to the Great Theater, which was less than 100 yards away. It was, therefore, a natural progression for the riot to move in that direction, which is what the Bible states happened next (Acts 19:29)⁸⁵ This close connection between the Bible's record and historical evidence is yet another of the many indicators of the inspiration of the Scriptures.

IMAGE IDEA: MAP OF ANCIENT EPHESUS

Acts 19: 29 states that "the whole city was filled with confusion." The people were in an anti-Christian mood, and they sought out some Christians to capture and bring to the theater. They found

⁸⁴The decree states: "To the Ephesian Diana. Forasmuch as it is notorious that not only among the Epbesians, but also everywhere among the Greek nations, temples are consecrated to her, and sacred precincts, and that she hath images and altars dedicated to her on account of her plain manifestations of herself, and that, besides, the greatest token of veneration paid to her, a month is called after her name, by us Artemision, by the Macedonians and other Greek nations and their cities, Artemisius, in which month general gatherings and festivals are celebrated, and more especially in our own city, the nurse of its own, the Ephesian goddess. Now the people of Ephesus deeming it proper that the whole month called by her name should be sacred and set apart to the goddess, have resolved by this decree, that the observation of it by them be altered. Therefore it is enacted, that the whole month Artemision in all the days of it shall be holy, and that throughout the month there shall be a continued celebration of feasts and the Artemisian festivals and the holy days, seeing that the entire month is sacred to the goddess; for from this improvement in her worship our city shall receive additional lustre and enjoy perpetual prosperity." See M. Dods, *An Exposition of the Bible, Volume 5.* (Hartford, Connecticut: S.S. Scranton, 1905), p. 487.

⁸⁵ C. Rasmussen. "Theater and Agora." Holy Land Photos. http://www.holylandphotos.org. Accessed December 20, 2010.

Gaius and Artistarchus, and they dragged them through the streets of the city and through the doublearched gates of the theater:^{86,87}

And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre (Acts 19:29).

Neither of those men was from Ephesus. Aristarchus was from Thessalonica; Gaius was from Derbe (Acts 20:4). Subsequent sections of Scripture suggest that they had been given the task of bringing their respective ecclesias' contributions to the Poor Fund to Jerusalem (c.f., Acts 20:4; 21:29). To the credit of Aristarchus and Gaius, when the people of Ephesus wanted to have a riot against the Christians, they knew where to go. There was no doubt in their minds who these men were or what they believed.

Spiritual Growth: Do people know what we believe?

Aristarchus and Gaius were known to be Christians in Ephesus. What about us? Do the people around us know that we are followers of Christ? If we dropped a Bible at work, at school, or in our neighborhood, would people think it might belong to us? What about a pamphlet on the coming Kingdom? Do people associate us with that belief? Paul's companions had been sure to let their light shine to those around them. As we strive to follow their example, we need to make sure that we are endeavoring to do the same.

A riot had begun, and it was a terrifying time for the Christians in Ephesus. The Greek word translated "rushed" in Acts 19: 29 appears three other times in the New Testament. In each instance, it is rendered "ran violently."88 The Great Theater into which the crowd rushed had frightening associations. It was where the gladiator battles took place and men's blood was shed to the sound of cheering crowds.

IMAGE IDEA: GREAT THEATER AT EPHESUS, VIEW FROM A DISTANCE

The Great Theater in Ephesus still stands today. It can seat approximately 25,000 people, but many more than that were probably crowded into it on the day of the riot. The theater is anchored on the slope of Mount Pion, and it has excellent acoustics. It is said that a person speaking in a normal voice from the center can be heard in the highest seats.⁸⁹ The noise from the tumult, therefore, would have carried throughout the city. Inside the theater itself, the sound the shouting crowd would have been deafening.

The situation was dire, but God is with his people even when it seems that their world is crumbling to the ground. He was with Paul and his travelling companions on the day of the riot. In the

⁸⁶ The Revised Standard Version of Acts 19: 29 states that they were dragged.

⁸⁷ H.P. Mansfield. 1974. "Ephesus: City of Splendor." Logos. 40(August), p. 361.

⁸⁸ The Greek word is *hormao*. It is Strong's Number G3729. This word is used to describe the heedless behavior of the swine that cast themselves over a cliff after the Lord healed Legion. See Matthew 8:32, Mark 5:13, and Luke 8: 33. It is also used to describe the action of the crowd that rushed at Stephen before casting him out of the city and stoning him (Acts 7:57-58).

⁸⁹ H.P. Mansfield. 1974. "Ephesus: City of Splendor." Logos. 40(August), p. 361.

next chapter, we will consider the other events of that day and then how Paul spent the last of his time in the company of the ecclesia in Ephesus.

4. "Pressed out of measure, above strength"

Events during the riot reveal a great deal about the character of Paul, and God protects His people during it. Numerous leaders of the ecclesia depart Ephesus after the uproar subsides. Paul is away from Asia for a year and responds to his troubles by devoting his energy to helping brothers and sisters in need.

4.I. The riot and the character of Paul

The Silversmiths' Riot of Acts 19 was a dangerous time for the Christians living in Ephesus. For example, in the Epistle to the Romans, which was written after the riot, Paul wrote that Priscilla and Aquila had risked their lives to save him:

Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles (Romans I6:3-4, emphasis added).

Paul wrote to the Romans not long after the Silversmiths' Riot occurred. Although not specified in the Scripture's record, the courageous act that Paul referred to in this verse probably took place during that event. Since the Ephesian ecclesia met in the home of Priscilla and Aquila (I Corinthians I6:19), it seems possible that the rioters may have gone there looking for valuables and Christians to seize. The mob may have been aware of the Christians' efforts to raise money for the Jerusalem poor and might have gone to Priscilla and Aquila's home looking for it. Perhaps they thought that if they took the Jerusalem Poor Fund, it would be a compensation for the income they had lost as a result of the decrease in sales of their idols caused by the spread of Christianity. If so, it might have been when the rioters came to their home that Priscilla and Aquila put their lives on the line to save Paul. Priscilla and Aquila may have had a hand in preserving the Jerusalem Poor Fund during the riot as well, which is why Paul mentions "all the churches of the Gentiles" being grateful to them. Gaius and Aristarchus were ecclesial delegates for the Jerusalem Poor Fund and, therefore, had responsibility for helping to safeguard it. It is possible that they were seized at Priscilla and Aquila's home during the riot and were taken to the theater from there.

Regardless of how he eluded them, Acts 19 makes it clear that Paul was not captured by the rioters. His primary interest, however, was not in escaping from them. His goal was to glorify God and to help his brothers in Christ. Therefore, when he heard about what was happening in the theater, Paul wanted to go to there:

And when *Paul would have entered in unto the people*, the disciples suffered him not (Acts 19:30, emphasis added).

IMAGE IDEA: GREAT THEATHER, VIEW FROM INSIDE

Paul's intention to present himself before the rioters was truly remarkable given his past. He knew the risks. He had witnessed mob violence. He had seen Stephen stoned to death by a vicious crowd, and he had personally experienced the rage of a multitude. He wrote:

Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons one frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep (2 Corinthians II:23-25).

What is more, Paul knew that there were people in Ephesus who were actively seeking to kill him, so the danger to him was very real. But his actions on the day of the riot (and throughout his life) were not guided by self-focus or self-preservation. He knew that God could deliver him from anything, so he acted based on the principles of his faith. Bearing in mind the righteousness of God, he was willing to place his life in God's hands. His example is an encouragement for us to always do the same.

Paul's reputation for boldness in defense of the Truth and his friends was well known, even among those outside of the ecclesia. Not only did the disciples try to stop him from going to the theater, but also "certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends" anticipated his reaction to the riot:

And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre (Acts 19:31).

These leaders of Asia knew what Paul's response to the riot would be. They knew that he would be courageous, and that he would attempt to enter the theater to reason with the people. They also knew the incredible danger that doing so would entail; therefore, they sent messengers imploring Paul not to go to the theater (Acts 19:31). The Revised Standard Version states that they "begged" him not to go.

The Greek word rendered "chief of Asia" in the King James' translation of Acts 19: 31 is the Greek word *Asiarchs.*⁹¹ (It appears in transliterated form in the Revised Standard Version.) It is an historical term that frequently appears in ancient inscriptions in Ephesus. "Asiarch" was an annually elected position.⁹² The person selected had the responsibility of presiding over the games and public festivals held in honor of the gods. He was also expected to help subsidize the cost of those events, so Asiarchs were typically very wealthy individuals.⁹³ There was only one Asiarch in a city at a time; however, the Bible indicates that multiple Asiarchs sent messages to Paul. Former Asiarchs must also have been among those who contacted him during the riot, therefore.⁹⁴

Acts 19:30-31 appear to draw a distinction between the disciples and the Asiarchs, which suggests that the Asiarchs were not believers:

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⁹⁰ Some commentators have argued that one and perhaps more of the imprisonments Paul refers to occurred in Ephesus. F.F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans, 1955), p. 393.

⁹¹ It is Strong's Number G775. J. Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1995).

⁹² C.C. Williams, A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles (London, United Kingdom: Adams and Charles Black,1957) p. 223.

⁹³ H. P. Mansfield, *The Story of the Bible, Volume &* (Kidman Park, Australia: Eureka Press, 2006), p. 303.

⁹⁴ F.E. Mitchell. 1978. "Ephesus." The Testimony. 48(April), p. p. 118.

And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, *the disciples* suffered him not. And *certain of the chief of Asia*, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre (Acts 19:30-31, emphasis added).

The fact that the Asiarchs counted themselves as Paul's friends indicates the extent to which his preaching had impacted the region. Their regard for him and their admiration of his character are a testimony to the manner in which he presented the Gospel. Although Paul makes it clear that he did not hesitate to declare the whole counsel of God while he was in Ephesus (Acts 20:27), he did so with sensitivity and tact and without demeaning those who did not believe as he did. As Paul demonstrates in the speech he gave on Mars Hill in Acts 17, it is possible to show respect and to be courteous towards people of other faiths while preaching to them without compromising the Truth. Indeed, the Bible's record of Paul's Gospel proclamation work suggests that was a hallmark of his very successful preaching endeavors.

4.2. Events in the theater

There is a touch of wit in Luke's statement in ActsI9:32 that most of the crowd in the theater "did not know why they had come together" (English Standard Version).⁹⁵ They just stood there and shouted all sorts of things:

Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together (Acts 19:32, English Standard Version).

There were probably cries against the Jews. At that time, many people did not understand the distinction between Judaism and Christianity, ⁹⁶ and they probably thought that the Jews were the cause of the riot. There was a sizable Jewish community in Ephesus. ⁹⁷ That was one of the reasons Paul went there in the first place. The Jews of Ephesus were not well liked by the Gentile inhabitants of the city. The historian Josephus records that Jews who were Roman citizens in Ephesus were exempt from military service and were granted religious freedoms. ⁹⁸ Their religious practices made them stand out from the rest of the people, and the special privileges they received made them unpopular.

Acts 19 records that the Jews in the theater put a man named Alexander forward to speak on their behalf:

And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward . And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people (Acts 19:33).

Paul referred to an Alexander in both epistles that he sent to Timothy (I Timothy I:20, 2 Timothy 4:14), and Timothy was in Ephesus when both those epistles were written. If the Alexander of those epistles is the same as the Alexander of Acts, and many commentators believe that he is, then he was

⁹⁵ F.F. Bruce, Commentary on the Book of the Acts (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans, 1955), p. 400.

⁹⁶ G.E. Mansfield, *The Book of the Acts of the Apostles* (Findon, Australia: Logos, 1998), p.391.

⁹⁷ H. P. Mansfield, *The Story of the Bible, Volume 8* (Kidman Park, Australia: Eureka Press, 2006),p. 259.

⁹⁸ F. Josephus. *Antiquities of the Jews.* Book XIV. Chapter 10. Sections 11-14. http://www.gutenberg.org. Accessed January 1, 2012.

an ideal choice for the Jews to use as their spokesman.⁹⁹ I Timothy records that he was a former member of the ecclesia from whom Paul had withdrawn fellowship:

Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme (I Timothy I:20).

Alexander was, therefore, someone who was familiar with Christianity but who had serious disagreements with Paul. 2 Timothy refers to him as a coppersmith:

Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words (2 Timothy 4:14-15).

He too was a craftsman, like the instigators of the Riot.

The Jewish community that Alexander represented probably hoped that he could make it clear that they did not support Paul. They wanted to ensure that the fury of the crowd was directed at the Christians, not at them. With his background, Alexander probably could have chosen his words to incite the crowd against the Christians even more, but God did not allow him to do that.

Alexander beckoned with his hand to quiet the rioters, so that he could speak. But when the Ephesians saw that he was a Jew, they knew that he was not a worshipper of Diana,¹⁰¹ so they shouted him down. He was not permitted to speak.

But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians (Acts 19:34).

Man's best plans will always be thwarted when they conflict with the will of God.

The Ephesians cried, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" for about two hours. It is hard to imagine a crowd maintaining that level of intensity for so long, but if the riot occurred during the month Artemision, there would have been many festivals and games going on to honor Diana. Those events would have inflamed the emotions of the population and made it easier to whip them into a sustained frenzy.

The townclerk of Ephesus was worried about what was going on in the theater. He was the most important public official in the city. He published the decrees that the civic assembly made, and he served as the liaison between the city's administration and the Roman provincial government, which was headquarted in Ephesus.¹⁰² Ephesus enjoyed autonomy from Rome, but the townclerk's stated concern in Acts 19:40 about the people being "in danger" of being "called in question" by the Romans for the day's events showed that the Ephesians had an awareness of and respect for the awesome power of their Roman

⁹⁹ See, for example, H. P. Mansfield, *The Story of the Bible, Volume 8* (Kidman Park, Australia: Eureka Press, 2006), p. 304 and C.C. Williams, *A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (London, United Kingdom: Adams and Charles Black,1957), p. 224.

¹⁰⁰ R. Abel, *Quenching All the Fiery Darts of the Wicked: Lessons from Ephesus, the Ecclesia of the Cayster River* (Grand Valley, Ontario: Christadelphian Study Notes, 1981), p. 38.

¹⁰¹ F.F. Bruce, Commentary on the Book of the Acts (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans, 1955), p. 400.

¹⁰² F.F. Bruce, Commentary on the Book of the Acts (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans, 1955), p. 401.

masters. The Romans could remove their autonomy, and the townclerk was concerned that the riot would prompt them to do so, especially since, as far as he was concerned, there was no cause for the uproar: 103

And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter? Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly. For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess. Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another. But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly. For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse (Acts 19:35-40).

The townclerk reasoned with the people to calm them down. He reminded them that their devotion to Diana was beyond question.¹⁰⁴ Diana, he implied, did not need their affirmation to be great. Although the Christians taught that "they be no gods, which are made with hands" (Acts 19:26), that was irrelevant to the case of Diana in the townclerk's mind. Her image, he said, came from Zeus. He claimed that it was made in the heavens. Therefore, he argued, there was no need for the people to do anything rash (Acts 19:35-36). What is more, he noted that the Christians had done nothing wrong (Acts 19: 37).

Spiritual Growth: Maintaining a good reputation

Just like the Lord Jesus, there was no fault that the authorities could find in the Ephesian believers (c.f., Matthew 27:23). We are likewise called upon to ensure that our conduct is above reproach. Our reputation among those outside of the ecclesia is an important part of our preaching work:

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation (1 Peter 2:12, English Standard Version).

The townclerk then spoke to the concerns of Demetrius and the craftsmen. He told them that if they had a complaint to make they should bring a legal case before the deputies (Acts 19:38). The Greek word rendered "deputies" in the King James Version refers to the Roman proconsul. There was, however, only one Roman proconsul at a time, so the Bible's use of the plural "deputies" stands out. The plural form used is yet another remarkable demonstration of the historical accuracy of the details of the Acts record, however.

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¹⁰³ C.C. Williams, A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles (London, United Kingdom: Adams and Charles Black, 1957), p. 225.

¹⁰⁴ In Acts 19:35, he referred to the city of Ephesians as a "worshipper" of the goddess Diana. The Greek word used there is *neokoros*. It is Strong's Number G3511. It literally means "temple sweeper." It was a commonly used descriptor of the time according to F.E. Mitchell. 1978. "Ephesus." *The Testimony*. 48(April), p. 118.

Around the time that Paul was in Ephesus, the proconsul of Asia, Marcus Junius Silanus, who was a great-grandson of Augustus, was poisoned by the Roman Emperor Nero. Prior to the appointment of the next proconsul, the two officials who were in charge of Nero's personal affairs in the province, Helius and Celer, served as temporary proconsuls. 105 During the period of time in which Paul was in Ephesus, there was, therefore, more than one proconsul, as the Bible correctly notes.

The townclerk told the people that the city's business was to be conducted in "a lawful assembly" (Acts 19:39). The Greek word he used for "assembly" is ekklesia. This word is the term that we frequently use for our congregations. It means "a called out assembly." Interestingly, archeologists have discovered many instances of the word "ecclesia" in inscriptions pertaining to political matters in Ephesus. In civic affairs, "the ecclesia" was an assembly of people called out to make a democratic decision about the governance of the city.¹⁰⁶ Luke's use of that term, which was common in Ephesus, suggests that he was thinking in the parlance of Ephesus when he recorded the events of Acts 19 and indicates his close familiarity with what occurred. It is yet further evidence of the historical validity of the Acts record.

As mentioned previously, the townclerk gave the people a warning about the danger of rioting. He reminded them that it could incur the dreaded displeasure of the Romans (Acts 19:40). Then he dismissed the assembly (Acts 19:41).

4.3. "After the uproar was ceased"

The Silversmiths' Riot was over, but the hostility of the people of Ephesus towards the Christians remained. It was no longer safe for the leaders of the ecclesia to be in Ephesus. Priscilla and Aquila departed. They moved to Rome, and there an ecclesia started meeting in their home, as indicated by Paul's greeting to them when he wrote the Epistle to the Romans shortly after he left Ephesus:

Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Salute my wellbeloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ (Romans 16:3-5, emphasis added).

Paul bade an emotional farewell to the ecclesia in Ephesus. Acts 20:I records that he called the disciples to him and embraced them:

And after the uproar was ceased , Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia (Acts 20:I, emphasis added).

It was trying time for Paul. He had endured many hardships, but his difficulties never hardened his heart or lessoned the depth of feeling he had for his brothers and sisters.

As Paul and his travelling companions departed Ephesus, he was deeply concerned about the Corinthian ecclesia. He was anxious to hear from Titus how the Corinthians had reacted to receiving I Corinthians, the letter he had sent to them. Paul first went to Troas, but when Titus was not there, he continued on to Macedonia. 2 Corinthians describes Paul's journey:

¹⁰⁵ F.F. Bruce, Commentary on the Book of the Acts (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans, 1955), p. 401.

¹⁰⁶ F.E. Mitchell. 1978. "Ephesus." *The Testimony*. 48(April), p. 118.

Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother: but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia. Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place (2 Corinthians 2:12-14).

INSERT MAP: EPHESUS, TROAS, MACEDONIA, CORINTH

Paul met Titus in Macedonia and was overjoyed to hear that the Corinthians had reacted well to receiving I Corinthians:

For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears. Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus; And not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoiced the more (2 Corinthians 7:5-7).

Paul wrote 2 Corinthians after he met Titus not long after his departure from Ephesus. In 2 Corinthians, Paul referred to the Silversmiths' Riot, which had recently occurred:

For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of *our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life*: But we had *the sentence of death* in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: Who *delivered us from so great a death*, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us (2 Corinthians I:8-10, emphasis added).

It is clear from what he wrote that Paul's life was in danger during the riot. Paul also made reference to other extreme difficulties that he experienced while in Ephesus in 2 Corinthians:

In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? (2 Corinthians II:27-29, emphasis added).

It is likely that Paul learned that many of the Galatians had departed from the Truth and turned their backs on him around this time as well. The epistle that he wrote to them is raw with emotion stemming from his concern for them and from the pain that their change of heart caused him:

Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth? They zealously affect you, but not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them. But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you. My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you (Galatians 4:16-20, emphasis added).

A number of commentators believe that Paul wrote the Epistle to the Galatians from Ephesus or shortly after he left.¹⁰⁷ Writing the Epistle to the Galatians must have been hard for him, particularly with all of the other trials that he was experiencing at that time.

INSERT MAP GALATIA, EPHESUS

Paul's commitment to the Truth and his concern for others helped to sustain him during this difficult period. As 2 Corinthians 8-9 indicate, he dedicated much of his energy during this challenging period in his life to collecting for the poor believers in Jerusalem:

But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:6-7).

Spiritual Growth: Enduring hardship

Paul's example illustrates the wisdom of focusing on helping those less fortunate than us during times of hardship in our lives. We can relieve our own mental anguish by shifting our concern to others.

Paul spent about a year in Troas, Macedonia, Greece, and other parts of Europe after he left Ephesus. It was probably during that period that he journeyed up to the province of Illyricum, a visit that he refers to in Romans 15:

Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto *Illyricum*, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ (Romans 15:19, emphasis added).

INSERT MAP: ILLYRICUM

Then Paul began to make his way back to Jerusalem with plans to deliver the Poor Fund. He hoped to be back there by Pentecost, one year after he had left Ephesus: 108

For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost (Acts 20:16).

Paul was in a hurry and was not planning on stopping at Ephesus. But from the nearby port city of Miletus, where he paused on his journey, he called for the elders of the ecclesia in Ephesus to come and meet with him one last time:

And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church (Acts 20:17).

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, H. P. Mansfield, *The Story of the Bible, Volume 8* (Kidman Park, Australia: Eureka Press, 2006), p. 276 and H. Gehman. "Galatians." *The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Westminster Press, 1970), p. 312.

¹⁰⁸ F.F. Bruce, Commentary on the Book of the Acts (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans, 1955), p. 405.

The final words that Paul spoke to the elders of the Ephesian	n ecclesia at Miletus are the s	subject of the next
chapter.		

5. "Therefore watch, and remember"

Paul exhorts the elders of Ephesus for the final time in person. He encourages them to follow his example among them, and he reiterates his emotional warning to them about the rise of false teachers.

5.I. "And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus"

Miletus, where Paul's ship was docked, was about 30 miles to the south of Ephesus. From the time that Paul's messenger departed from Miletus to journey to Ephesus to the time that the elders of the Ephesian ecclesia arrived in Miletus to meet with Paul would have been around three days. ¹⁰⁹ Something — most likely providential — must have happened to have kept Paul in Miletus for that period of time because he was trying to make haste in his journey. Acts 20 records that he had only spent a day in each of the previous few places that he had visited:

And sailing from there we came the following day opposite Chios; the next day we touched at Samos; and the day after that we went to Miletus (Acts 20:15, English Standard Version).

Chios and Samos were nearby islands off the coast of Asia. Miletus was a port city.

INSERT MAP: CHIOS, SAMOS, MILETUS, EPHESUS

God had a final job for Paul to do among the Ephesians, and the additional time that he had in Miletus made it possible for him to do it.¹¹⁰ The words that Paul spoke in Miletus to the elders of the ecclesia at Ephesus are recorded in Acts 20:18-38.

5.2. "From the first day that I came into Asia"

After the elders of Ephesus assembled, Paul began his remarks. Paul's speech is somewhat apologetic.¹¹¹ He seems to be on the defensive. The probable reason is that he was coming under attack by some members of the ecclesia in Ephesus, just like he had been by members of the ecclesias in Galatia and Corinth. Paul had labored hard in service to the believers in those places, and he had a great love for them. Yet many of them did not respond to him in kind. His message was distorted, and he was falsely accused. Those developments must have been disappointing, but it not surprising that they occurred. The Lord said it would be that way:

The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master

¹⁰⁹ F.F. Bruce, Commentary on the Book of the Acts (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans, 1955), p. 412.

¹¹⁰ G.E. Mansfield, The Book of the Acts of the Apostles (Findon, Australia: Logos, 1998), p. 401.

¹¹¹ C.C. Williams, A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles (London, United Kingdom: Adams and Charles Black, I957), p. 232.

of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household? (Matthew 10:24-25).

Spiritual Growth: Dealing with disappoint results

Sometimes a good work does not immediately yield the outcome that we had hoped for. Sometimes hardships come after - or even because - we do the right thing. But we should not judge the worthiness of a task merely by what happens in the short term as a result of it. We need to make our choices based on the principles of the Word of God. That is of primary importance. Doing so will always lead to a good outcome in the end - eternal life. The immediate result may not pleasant, but that is of secondary importance.

Paul opened his remarks by reminding the Ephesians of the constancy of his service among them:

And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at *all seasons* (Acts 20:18, emphasis added).

Paul had been constant even in the face of adversity. He mentioned the "the plots of the Jews" in particular (Acts 20:19, English Standard Version). Members of the Jewish community in Ephesus had actively sought to harm Paul, but he had continued his work despite their activities.

Spiritual Growth: Being the same in all circumstances

Constancy was a theme of Paul's service. From the first day that he had arrived in Asia, Paul had not allowed changes in circumstances to alter who he was, what he said, or what he did. As he told the Ephesians in his final address to them, his manner of life was the same in "all seasons." The same must also be true of us. We each should strive to be the same spiritually minded person regardless of where we are, who we are with, or what happens to us.

In verse 19, Paul also mentions "humility of mind" as a trait that he displayed:

Serving the Lord with all *humility of mind*, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews (Acts 20, emphasis added):

Paul was humble because he knew that he served a mighty and loving God. That understanding stirred him. Paul was deeply affected by the work that the Lord gave him to do. That is why he shed "many tears" in the course of his labors (Acts 20:19).

The Revised Standard Version renders Paul's statement in verse 20 as "I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable." In the things that he said, Paul exemplified the mindset that he later commended to Timothy in 2 Timothy I:

for God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control" (2 Timothy I:7, Revised Standard Version).

Spiritual Growth: Declaring the Truth without compromise

At times it can be hard for us to be courageous and to plainly declare the things that we know to be true from the Word of God regarding belief and conduct. But we can be aided in this regard by reminding ourselves that the teachings of the Bible are "profitable" to the hearers (Acts 20:20). We do no one a favor by telling him or her something less than what the Bible really says. When we begin to detect a "shrinking" feeling welling up inside of us, we do well to remember Paul's perspective that being forthright in stating what the Bible teaches is truly profitable to people. It is a way to help them.

Paul reminded the Ephesians that he did his teaching work both "in public and from house to house:"

how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in *public and from house to house* (Acts 20:20, Revised Standard Version, emphasis added)

Paul's reminder was an encouragement for the Ephesian believers – and for us – to continue to do the same. The importance of the declaration of the Truth to the public in seminars, lectures, and online cannot be minimized. It is an essential aspect of our service to God, and it cannot be neglected. The work that Paul characterizes as occurring "from house to house" is also necessary. Going "from house to house" conveys the sense of more private interactions focused on the doctrinal and lifestyle questions of individuals and families. The house-to-house ministry is where many of the principles of the Truth articulated publicly can be explained in more detail to interested friends and new converts and where they can be reinforced among members of the meeting. Sitting down with people around the Word, listening to them, and encouraging them in the faith all take time. Those steps were part of the process of building the ecclesia in Ephesus, and they are necessary for the edification of our ecclesias as well.

Spiritual Growth: Ministering from house to house

There are many little ways for us to support the spirit of the house-to-house ministry in our ecclesias. We can invite single people and families out to meals after meeting on Sunday or before Bible class during the week. We can greet everyone at meeting and send a message or give a call to those who are absent. All of these activities follow the pattern of Paul's ecclesia-building work while he was in Ephesus.

Paul continued by saying that he testified "to the Jews, and also to the Greeks:"

Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21).

He set a good example by interacting with both Jews and Gentiles. (In fact, when he met with the elders of the Ephesian ecclesia, Paul was on his way to Jerusalem to deliver the Poor Fund in the hope that it would help to bind Jewish and Gentile believers together.) Subsequent to his departure from Ephesus, divisions began to emerge in the Ephesian ecclesia along Jew-Gentile lines. Paul later needed to write to

the Ephesians to remind them that it was God's will that the Gentiles would be part of the Hope of Israel. (See, for example, Ephesians 3: 6).

In Acts 20:21, Paul reiterated that he taught "repentance toward God." The word he used for "repentance" comes from the Greek word *metanoeo*, which means "to think differently." Paul did not want the Christians to just feel sorry for the wrong they had done. He wanted them to change their thinking fundamentally. He wanted their thoughts to be guided by "faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ," not self-interest (Acts 20:21). He then proceeded to give the Ephesians an example of how that principle of being guided by faith in the Lord was working out in his life.

5.3. "I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem"

Paul told the elders of Ephesus that he was going to Jerusalem and that he was doing so even though in every city the Holy Spirit was telling him that it would result in "bonds and afflictions" for him:

And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, *saying that bonds* and afflictions abide me (Acts 20:22-23, emphasis added).

The Bible even records that Paul "hasted" to make it to Jerusalem (Acts 20:16).

Paul demonstrated great faith in the Lord by pressing on to Jerusalem. In fact, he was following Christ's example. At the conclusion of his ministry, the Lord went to Jerusalem even though he knew it would result in his betrayal and crucifixion. Yet he did so because it was what God required, and Christ's actions brought glory to Him. That certainly motivated the Lord.

It motivated Paul as well. In speaking of the troubles that awaited him, Paul courageously told the Ephesians:

But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24, emphasis added).

Paul saw past himself and the immediate concerns of his life and focused instead on the great work in which he was engaged.

Paul said that he wanted to finish his "course" (Acts 20:24). The word means "a race." Races involve hardship, and determination is required. The runner must keep pressing forward despite the difficulty to finish the race. Just like a runner, Paul was prepared to experience fatigue and pain to accomplish his task. Yet he added that he wanted to finish "with joy." It is tremendously encouraging that Paul could speak of joy after all that he had been through. In doing so, he was again following the example of the Lord, which we are exhorted to do as well:

¹¹³ The Greek word is *dromos*. It is Strong's Number GI408. J. Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1995).

¹¹² The Greek word he used is *metanoia*. It is Strong's Number G3341. It is from G3340. J. Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1995).

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 is set down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2, emphasis added).

Paul told the Ephesians that he knew that they would not see him again after his departure:

And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, *shall see my face no more* (Acts 20:25, emphasis added).

Paul faced imprisonment in Jerusalem, and if he were ever released, he planned to make preaching in the western Mediterranean his new area of endeavor. He twice mentioned wanting to go to Spain in Romans 15, for example:

Whensoever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you: for I trust to see you in my journey, and to be brought on my way thitherward by you, if first I be somewhat filled with your company (Romans 15:24, emphasis added).

When therefore I have performed this, and have sealed to them this fruit, I will come by you *into Spain* (Romans 15:28, emphasis added).

Since Paul knew that he would personally not see the elders of Ephesus again, he used the remaining time he had with them to warn them about dangers that were coming.

5.4. "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock"

Paul made frequent allusions to lessons from the Old Testament and the teachings of Christ in his remarks. For example, he invoked the watchman principle of Ezekiel 33:

So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul (Ezekiel 33:7-9, emphasis added).

Paul performed the watchman's role in Ephesus by declaring unto them "all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). As a result, he declared that he was "pure from the blood of all men" (Acts 20:26).

While he was in Ephesus, there would have been a temptation for Paul to have modified his message to please those who came to hear him. He knew the elders of Ephesus would continue to face that temptation. Therefore, Paul warned them, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves" (Acts 20: 28). (J. B. Phillips renders the phrase as "Now be on your guard.")¹¹⁴ God had appointed the elders to be "overseers" of the ecclesia (Acts 20:28). But the ecclesia was not to be used for their profit or glory, which is why Paul reminds them that it had been purchased with the blood of Christ:

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¹¹⁴ J. B. Phillips, *The New Testament in Modern English* (Glasgow, United Kingdom: HarperCollins, 1962).

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath *purchased with his own blood* (Acts 20:28, emphasis added).

Christ did not die so that people could gain from an ecclesia or receive its praise. He died to declare the righteousness of God so that people might be saved. The elders of the ecclesia, therefore, were to continue that mission. Paul told them that their responsibility was "to feed" the ecclesia." (The Greek word used means "to shepherd.")¹¹⁵

Paul encouraged the elders of Ephesus to be watchful and to be guided by the remembrance of what they had learned. He warned them that "savage wolves" would assault the flock over which they had been given charge:

I know that after I leave, *savage wolves* will come in among you and will not spare the flock (Acts 20:29 New International Version, emphasis added).

Wolves are a commonly used scriptural symbol for those whose deeds scatter and destroy the followers of God. Consider the following passages:

Her princes in the midst thereof are *like wolves* ravening the prey, to shed blood, and to destroy souls, to get dishonest gain (Ezekiel 22:27, emphasis added).

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are *ravening wolves* (Matthew 7:15, emphasis added).

Behold, I send you forth as sheep *in the midst of wolves*: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves (Matthew 10:16, emphasis added).

But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep (John I0:I2, emphasis added).

It is sobering that wolves are frequently used in the Bible to represent those who bring down believers while feigning to be followers of God themselves. The character of wolves makes them a very fitting metaphor for that type of person. Wolves are tenacious and strong. They can traverse 45 miles in a night and can achieve speeds of 25 miles an hour in bursts. They also have a powerful bite that can tear open the hides of large animals. Yet they prefer to prey on the sick and the weak. Wolves are incredibly destructive. Zephaniah refers to their habit of annihilating whatever they capture:

Her officials are roaring lions, her rulers are evening wolves, who leave nothing for the morning (Zephaniah 3:3, emphasis added).

¹¹⁶ There is an extensive discussion of the character of wolves and of the appropriateness of their use as a symbol for those who would attempt to ravage the ecclesia in R. Abel, *Quenching All the Fiery Darts of the Wicked: Lessons from Ephesus, the Ecclesia of the Cayster River* (Grand Valley, Ontario: Christadelphian Study Notes, 1981), p. 47-50.

¹¹⁵ The Greek word used is *poimaino*. It is Strong's Number G4165. J. Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1995).

Spiritual Growth:

The importance of being part of an ecclesia

Animals that drift away from the herd are more likely to fall prey to wolves. But those who stick together can thwart their attacks. So, to remain safe, animals, as well as believers, need to stay in the group. That is why the Writer to the Hebrews warns us not to forsake "the assembling of ourselves together" (Hebrews 10:25).

People who are only interested in what they can get for themselves and who have no real concern for others in the ecclesia have a wolf-like mindset. Regrettably, that kind of thinking was a problem for some among the elders of Ephesus. Paul revealed to the group that some among their number would become false teachers who would seek to develop personal followings:

Also *of your own selves* shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them (Acts 20:30, emphasis added).

It is truly remarkable that even though Paul knew that some among the elders of Ephesus would seek to subvert the ecclesia and would endanger his work among them through their teachings, he still showed great care and concern for them in his interactions with them. He still exhorted them. He still embraced them (Acts 20:37). He did not give up hope for them, and he did not shut them out of his heart. He did not just decide that they were lost and not worth the effort. His is an example that we should seek to emulate in our interactions with our brothers and sisters, particularly with those that we think have spiritual deficiencies.

Paul had a great deal of love for the Ephesian ecclesia. He wanted its members to grow spiritually and to resist evil as much as possible. He armed the meeting's elders with the words, "Therefore, watch" (Acts 20:31). The Greek literally means "keep awake!" They needed to maintain their vigilance and their excitement for the Truth. (People do not fall asleep when they are excited.) Paul also told the elders to "remember." They had seen wonderful examples in him and his travelling companions. The Ephesians needed to think about those people (and the Lord Jesus) so that they could do as they had done:

Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears (Acts 20:31, emphasis added).

In Acts20:31, Paul noted that he had been among the Ephesians for three years. That period consisted of the three months he spent teaching in the synagogue, which are referred to in Acts 19,

And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for *the space of three months*, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 19:8, emphasis added).

plus the two years during which he taught in the school of Tyrannus,

And this continued by *the space of two years*; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks (Acts 19:10, emphasis added).

and the "season" during which time the Silversmiths' Riot occurred:

¹¹⁷ F.F. Bruce, Commentary on the Book of the Acts (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans, 1955), p. 417.

So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for *a season* (Acts 19:22, emphasis added).

In Acts 20:31, Paul reminded the Ephesians that his warning to them about the rise of false teachers had been a major component of his message to them when he had lived among them. Paul had warned everyone and he had done so "night and day with tears." The fact that warning the ecclesia drove him to weep repeatedly indicates the depth of his concern. Combating the rise of false teaching was a matter that Paul felt was extremely important and that stirred strong emotions in him.

Spiritual Growth: Do we feel warned?

How often do we feel warned when we read the Bible? Paul's remarks suggest that it should be often. His words remind us how prone we are to sin and what a danger to our spiritual health (and to the well-being of our ecclesias) the self-focused thinking of the flesh can be. We need to make sure that we are not in effect teaching false ideas in our ecclesias by introducing or encouraging worldly ideas and practices through what we think about and do.

5.5. "And now, brethren, I commend you to God"

Paul was no longer going to be present to guide the Ephesians on a day-to-day basis in person. He was leaving them for the last time. Therefore, he commended them to God, who would help them if they would trust in Him, and to the Word, which would steer them if they would look to it and do as it said:

And now, brethren, *I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace*, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified (Acts 20:32, emphasis added).

In Paul's absence, it was the Word that would build the Ephesians up and lead them to eternal life. The same is true for us today. We must constantly examine ourselves to see if we are turning to God and trusting in His Word for direction. Looking to anyone or anything else will lead us down a road that will ultimately end in disappointment and failure.

In his remarks, Paul held himself up as an example for the elders of the ecclesia to remember and to follow. He stated,

I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that *these hands* have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:33-35, emphasis added).

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¹¹⁸ Receiving "an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" is the way that Paul characterizes the reward of the righteous (Acts 20:32). The idea of "inheritance" is echoed in a warning Paul gives in the Epistle to the Ephesians: "For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath *any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ* and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them" (Ephesians 5:5-7, emphasis added).

It is easy to envision Paul gesturing with his hands held up as he spoke those words.

Paul did as the Lord had done in teaching by example. The Lord said:

If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you (John 13:14-15).

Paul could rightly say that he had shown the Ephesians the Lord Jesus Christ in his words and his actions. Remember what he wrote in I Corinthians II:

Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ (I Corinthians II:I).

Spiritual Growth: Teaching by example

Paul's command in I Corinthians II:I is marvelous, and it sets the standard for us. How incredible would it be – and how much glory would it bring to the Father – if we could tell our children, our co-workers, our neighbors, the interested friends we know, and the members of our ecclesia, "If you want to follow Christ then do as I do." That standard might seem so unreachable that it is not even worth a serious attempt at attaining. But God would not have us to be discouraged or to give up. He wants us to know what our goal is – to show the character of Christ in our lives – to make us humble and appreciative and so that it will motivate us to continue to grow spiritually.

In Acts 20:33-34, Paul reminded the elders of the ecclesia that not only had he not taken their wealth, but he had also not even coveted it. He later wrote to the Ephesians that covetousness is idolatry:

For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, *nor covetous man, who is an idolater*, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God (Ephesians 5:5, emphasis added).

A person who is intently focused on attaining something that someone else has is basically looking to it to make him happy and fulfilled. That is what the idolaters did. They looked to an object to make their lives complete. Coveting something tangible (like a beautiful house) or intangible (like a musical gift) that another person has can lead us away from God, just like bowing down to Diana could.

In using his last time among the elders of Ephesus to declare his integrity (Acts 20:33-34), Paul followed the example of Samuel, who at the conclusion of his leadership of the children of Israel called upon them to bear record that he had not taken anything from any of them:

Behold, here I am: witness against me before the LORD, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you. And they said, Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand (I Samuel I2:3-4).

In echoing the behavior of Samuel, Paul illustrated how the deeds of the virtuous men and women of the Bible can be replicated in our lives quite naturally if we read about them and think about them often throughout the day as he did. (See I Corinthians 10:6). Mediating on the accounts of the Bible is the best way to ensure that we will respond as people of faith did in the past when we find ourselves in situations that are similar to ones that that they were in.

Paul told the Ephesians that they should labor "to support the weak" (Acts 20:35). The mindset that Paul wanted to see developed in them is conveyed by the words that he quoted from the Lord Jesus: "It is more blessed to give than to receive:"

I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, *It is more blessed to give than to receive* (Acts 20:35, emphasis added).

Spiritual Growth: Reaching out to those in need

In order to give, we must first be mindful of the needs of others. It follows that we need to talk with them and understand their situations. "Giving" can involve many types of responses to needs that we recognize. It includes not only sharing our material wealth but also our time and our sympathy. Sometimes giving requires us to put the needs of others ahead of our own, which can be hard to do. But it is what the Lord did all of the time; therefore, it is something that we must be willing to do as well as we strive to follow him.

The words of Christ that Paul quoted in Acts 20:35 are not recorded in the Gospels, and they do not appear anywhere else in the Bible. They might have been among the words that the Lord spoke directly to Paul. After all, Paul's knowledge of Christ came from him by revelation:

For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, *but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ* (Galatians I:II-I2, English Standard Version, emphasis added).

5.6. "They all wept sore"

After he quoted the Lord, Paul stopped speaking. He knelt down, and he prayed with the Ephesians:

And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all (Acts 20:36).

The scene described of Paul kneeling in prayer, surrounded by the elders of Ephesus, is such a fitting depiction of his life and of the mindset that he tried so earnestly to inculcate in others. It is an image of a person who had complete trust in God, who looked to Him for guidance, and who commended to His care people that he cared for deeply. It epitomizes Paul's work in the ecclesia at Ephesus.

IMAGE IDEA: IT WOULD BE POWERFUL TO HAVE AN ILLUSTRATION OF THIS SCENE

What followed was an absolute outpouring of emotion. The elders of Ephesus "wept sore." They fell on Paul's neck, and they kissed him (Acts 20:37).

The scene depicted at the end of Acts 20 is one of an incredibly warm ecclesia that abounded with love. At this point, the trials the Ephesians had experienced together with Paul and their toil in the service of the Truth had not sapped their feelings of strength.

The Ephesians were distraught at the thought that they would never see Paul again:

Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship (Acts 20:38).

The Ephesians' reaction to Paul's words is hard for the natural mind to fathom. Paul had just warned them of perils to come, and he had told them that some of them were going to be the causes of serious problems in the ecclesia. Yet the elders of Ephesus expressed no bitterness towards the Apostle. Any negative feelings they might have had were clearly overwhelmed by admiration for a man who had lived by his convictions, who had exemplified self-sacrificing leadership, and who had shared with them and their families the hope of eternal life.

A life of dedication to following in the footsteps of Christ can have many hardships. Yet it also has times of wonderful beauty and incredible love. Therefore, we must stay true to the beliefs we have learned and the values that we have been taught from the Word regardless of what happens to us in this life. The rewards for doing so, both now and in the future, are unsurpassed.

Paul's departure from Miletus was bittersweet. The elders of Ephesus went with Paul to the ship that would carry him away. Rotherham translates the beginning of Acts 2I:I as "And it came to pass when we set sail, having torn ourselves from them..." Thus, Paul had to tear himself away from the Ephesians. It was a wrenching experience for him, yet he left knowing that he had taught people to love the Lord. He knew that he had changed lives, and he had made wonderful friendships based on the Word. That knowledge surely helped to sustain him during the trials that awaited him in Jerusalem.

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¹¹⁹ F.F. Bruce, Commentary on the Book of the Acts (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans, 1955), p. 420.

6. Paul's arrest in Jerusalem

Paul arrives in Jerusalem with the funds for the Jerusalem poor. Jewish opponents of the Gospel from Asia start a riot when they see him in the Temple, claiming that he brought a Gentile from Ephesus into the Court of Israel. Paul is arrested and ultimately taken to Rome as a prisoner.

After leaving Miletus, Paul journeyed to Jerusalem with the brethren listed in Acts 20:4:

And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus (Acts 20:4).

His traveling companions were delegates from their respective ecclesias who were bringing their meetings' contributions to the Jerusalem Poor Fund. It was Paul's habit to encourage delegates from contributing ecclesias to travel with him. Consider what he wrote to the Corinthians, for example:

And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. *If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me* (I Corinthians I6:3-4, English Standard Version, emphasis added).

The presence of the ecclesial delegates helped to avoid the appearance of any impropriety on Paul's part. He could not easily be accused of stealing from the Poor Fund with the ecclesial representatives traveling with him. As Acts 20:4 and 21:29 indicate, Trophimus was the delegate from the ecclesia at Ephesus.

After Paul arrived in Jerusalem, the elders of the Jerusalem ecclesia asked him to accompany four men, who were concluding their Nazarite vows, to the Temple and to pay the costs of their sacrifices:

When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law, and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs. What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law (Acts 21:17-24, English Standard Version, emphasis added).

The elders of the Jerusalem ecclesia hoped that if Paul did what they asked then it would demonstrate to the members of the Circumcision Party within the Jerusalem ecclesia that he did not abhor the Law of Moses. Since Paul wanted to achieve reconciliation with the Circumcision Party, he complied with the elders' request.

There were many Jews present from all over the Roman world when Paul went to the Temple because it was Pentecost (Acts 20:16). Among the many travelers in Jerusalem were people from Ephesus and throughout the province of Asia. They recognized Trophimus when they saw him in the city, and they realized that he was there with Paul (Acts 21:29).

Paul's Jewish opponents in Ephesus had repeatedly tried to kill him when he was living among them. When he was in the Temple, they realized they had another chance, so they started an uproar:

And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut. And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul. Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done (Acts 21:17-24).

The Jews from Asia accused Paul of having brought a Gentile into the Temple's Court of Israel, which had barriers with signs forbidding Gentiles to enter. Archeologists have discovered some of these signs that contain warnings, such as "No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the temple and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death." The Romans took the Jews' scruples regarding the matter of Gentile defilement so seriously that they even permitted the execution of Gentile citizens of Rome who transgressed the Court of Israel. Indeed, the Jewish historian, Josephus, records that the Roman general, Titus, made reference to this concession in a speech he made in 70 A.D. during the Jewish insurrection that led to the destruction of the Temple.

IMAGE IDEA: IMAGE OF SIGN FORBIDDING NON-JEWS FROM ENTERING TEMPLE

Paul most certainly did not bring a Gentile into the Court of Israel. Doing so would have been completely contrary to his mission of reconciliation. That particular detail did not matter to the instigators of the riot in the Temple, however. They were just wanted to have Paul killed.

A willingness to use deceit and violence to try to stop the spread of the Gospel are characteristics that the Bible repeatedly ascribes to the Jewish opponents of Christianity from Ephesus and the province of Asia. For example, Jews from Asia had been among those who had brought false witnesses against Stephen

¹²⁰ F.F. Bruce, Commentary on the Book of the Acts (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans, 1955), p. 433 - 434.

¹²¹ F. Josephus. *The Wars of the Jews*, Book VI, Chapter 2. Section 4. http://www.gutenberg.org. Accessed January I, 2012.

in their successful attempt to have him executed (Acts 6:9, II-I4). These details from the record of Scripture gives us an idea of what the members of the ecclesia at Ephesus had to endure to practice their faith and what great risks they continually took to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. Understanding the situation they were in should help us to realize how truly fortunate we are to be able to worship God without fear for our lives or the lives of our families. We are very blessed, but God expects us to use the incredible opportunity He has given us to serve Him and not just to indulge ourselves.

Trophimus was the Gentile that the Jews from Asia accused of bringing into the Court of Israel. The irony is that since Trophimus was the delegate from the ecclesia at Ephesus, he was in Jerusalem because he was accompanying the Jerusalem Poor Fund and thus trying to help poor Jews in the city. Yet a riot was started over him. Paul must have found the episode exasperating. In fact, later in his defense before Felix, Paul particularly noted that the Jews from Asia were the cause of his arrest:

Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. *Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me* purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult. Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me (Acts 24:17-19, emphasis added).

The riot in the Temple caused by the Jews of Asia led to Paul being dragged down the Temple's steps,¹²² beaten, arrested, spending years in prison, being shipwrecked on the way to Rome, and experiencing extended incarceration as a prisoner of the Roman emperor. Yet his chains did not prevent him from furthering the Gospel and from interacting with the ecclesia in Ephesus, which he did by epistle.

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¹²² H. P. Mansfield, The Story of the Bible, Volume 8 (Kidman Park, Australia: Eureka Press, 2006), p. 361.

7. "After I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus"

Although he experienced many difficulties, Paul retains his keen interest in the spiritual well-being of others. He hears of the Ephesians' faith and love and writes them a letter from prison. Even though many of them are young in the Truth, Paul has high expectations of them.

7.I. "An ambassador in bonds"

Paul wrote the Epistle to the Ephesians while he was a prisoner in Rome in approximately 62 AD.^{123,124} (See Appendix 4 for a discussion of whether the Epistle to the Ephesians was written specifically to the Ephesian ecclesia.) Paul had experienced a lot of adversity in the years leading up to his imprisonment, but he had not allowed his circumstances to dampen his enthusiasm for the Truth. All of his trials had not led him to dwell on himself and the burdens that he bore. Instead, his thoughts were on the work of the Lord Jesus Christ and the people who had accepted his message. Even though hardships had battered him, Paul maintained his care for others.

In Ephesians I:15, he wrote that he had heard of the Ephesians' "faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints." That is one of the many indicators in the New Testament that Paul wanted to know about his fellow believers. The Bible does not portray Paul as a person who was interested in idle gossip, however. He wanted to know about the spiritual welfare of others. Good news about the faith and love of brothers and sisters was stirring to him. It was the source of much of his joy. There is much that we do not know about the Apostle Paul, so the fact that we know of the interest that he showed in the spiritual well-being of his brothers and sisters must be significant. It is an encouragement for us to emulate it.

Spiritual Growth: Interest in the faith and love of others

We can gain a lot of strength and encouragement from inquiring about how our brothers and sisters are doing spiritually and about the work in which their ecclesias are engaged. Asking about outreach efforts in which people are involved and what they are learning from their most recent Bible study are also great ways to make new friends in the Truth and to connect with believers of all ages and backgrounds. It can be very motivating, for example, to send a note of congratulations to a young person or someone new to the Truth who has been recently baptized, even if we do not know him all that well, and to ask what Bible study he is doing and to hear the excitement in his response.

While he was in prison, Paul most likely heard about the faith of the Ephesians and others in the ecclesias of Asia from his friend, Tychicus. Tychicus was from the area around Ephesus. He had travelled

He referred to himself as "the prisoner of the Lord" (Ephesians 4:1) and "an ambassador in bonds" (Ephesians 6:20).

¹²³ J. Knowles. Epistle to the Ephesians. Unpublished manuscript, p. 3.

with Paul during the Third Missionary Journey, and he remained Paul's faithful co-worker throughout the Apostle's life. 125

After Paul heard about how the ecclesias in Asia were faring, he wanted to reach out to them. He wrote several epistles, and Tychicus delivered them. The Epistle to the Ephesians was one of those letters:

But that ye also may know my affairs, and how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things *Whom I have sent unto you* for the same purpose, that ye might know our affairs, and that he might comfort your hearts. (Ephesians 6:21-22, emphasis added).

Tychicus also delivered an epistle to the ecclesia in Colossae, which was near Ephesus.¹²⁶ In addition, he also carried a more personal message from Paul to Philemon,¹²⁷ who was a member of the meeting in Colossae.¹²⁸ Thus, the Epistles to the Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon were all written by Paul from prison and were sent out at the same time.¹²⁹ (See Appendix 5 for a brief comparison of Paul's epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians.)

7.2. A living Lord

Paul began his letter to the Ephesians with a greeting. He wrote:

Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and *from the Lord Jesus Christ* (Ephesians I:2, emphasis added).

The Lord's crucifixion took place decades before Paul wrote to the Ephesians, yet Paul opened his letter with a greeting from him. That showed that not only was Christ alive, but also that he was interested in and aware of what was happening in the ecclesia at Ephesus. Several decades after Paul wrote to them, the Ephesians received another message that reminded them of that fact. In Revelation, the Lord directed John to write:

Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; *I know* thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars (Revelation 2:I-2, emphasis added).

Nothing has changed in the centuries that have passed. The Lord continues to observe and work in our ecclesias today.

127 Compare Philemon 10 and Colossians 4:9.

¹²⁵ See Acts 20:4 and 2 Timothy 4:12.

¹²⁶ See Colossians 4:7–8.

¹²⁸ D. Wallace. 2004. "Philemon: Introduction, Argument, and Outline." NETBible.org. http://net.bible.org Accessed February 28, 2011.

¹²⁹ Paul also wrote Philippians from prison. See, for example, Philippians I:7, I2-I8. Paul's statements in Philippians I:13 and 4:22 imply that he had been imprisoned for some time. That suggests that Philippians was penned near the end of his imprisonment and after the epistles carried by Tychicus had been written.

Spiritual Growth: Serving a living Lord

We need to continually remind ourselves that we serve a Lord who is alive and who is not only knowledgeable about what is happening in our ecclesias but who is also actively working in them as well. If it were God's will, the Lord could also direct a very specific letter to be written to any of our meetings based on his observations of us. Remembering that should certainly motivate us to give our best in service to our ecclesias and to make sure that our conduct always reflects godly principles.

7.3. Working through complicated language

Recall that the proclamation of the Truth in Ephesus began when Paul made a brief visit to the city at the conclusion of his Second Missionary Journey. Then at the beginning of his Third Missionary Journey, Paul returned to Ephesus for a three-year stay. His time there ended after the Silversmiths' Riot. Paul met with the elders of the ecclesia in Miletus one year later, and he wrote the Epistle to the Ephesians four years after that. Thus, when they received Paul's epistle, many of the brothers and sisters in Ephesus had probably known the Truth for less than eight years.

Those years had not been easy. Threats from the Jewish and pagan populations of the city confronted the fledgling ecclesia. Problems also came from false teachers arising from within the ecclesia's midst.

Yet even though the Ephesians were new to the Gospel message and were facing multiple challenges, the language that the Apostle Paul used in the epistle indicates that he still expected their spiritual understanding to be considerable. Although the message of the Epistle to the Ephesians is beautiful, Paul's language is sometimes challenging. The opening verses of chapter I provide an example. Paul wrote about being "blessed" "with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (verse 3), about being "chosen" "in him before the foundation of the world" (verse 4), about being "accepted in the beloved" (verse 6), about God gathering "together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth" (verse I0), and about believers being "predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (verse II).

Paul wanted the Ephesians to understand those words or to contemplate them until they did. Even though they were young in the Truth, Paul evidently had high expectations of them. If subsequent writings offer any indication, the Ephesians were up to the challenge. As subsequent chapters show, they were the audience (or at least part of it) for some of the most complicated writings in the New Testament – the Gospel of John, the Epistle to the Ephesians, and Revelation.

Spiritual Growth: Benefiting from challenging passages

It is in our nature to be complacent, particularly when it comes to grappling with spiritual concepts. The natural mind recoils against godly thinking. One of the ways that we resist God's thoughts and try to keep them penetrating our minds and pricking our consciences is by telling ourselves that we already possess a sufficient understanding of the Bible – that we

know enough already. That is a powerful ploy that the flesh uses to try to keep us from putting more of God's thinking into our heads.

The challenging phrases that the Apostle used in Ephesians 1 can help us to see past that deception. Not entirely understanding what Paul wrote there (or encountering difficult sections elsewhere in the Bible) can be energizing. It can serve as a great motivation for us to rededicate ourselves to Bible study. In fact, that is one of the reasons why some of the language in the Bible is complicated. It challenges us to continue studying and, as a result, to keep filling our minds with godly thinking:

It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter (Proverbs 25:2).

7.4. Spiritual blessings "in the heavenlies"

One of the challenging passages that appears early in the epistle is also one of the features that characterizes the Epistle to the Ephesians and makes it distinct from other New Testament letters. In Ephesians I:3, Paul wrote that God "hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." The word "places" is not in the Greek, and it should not be in the verse. The Emphatic Diaglott renders the passage more accurately. It translates it as God "has BLESSED us with Every spiritual Blessing *in the HEAVENLIES*, by Christ" (emphasis added).

The exact Greek phrase rendered "in the heavenlies" in the Diaglott, which is how it should be translated, only appears in the Epistle to the Ephesians. ¹³⁰ It occurs five times and is one of the epistle's key phrases. Examining the context of each occurrence of the phrase provides insight into its meaning and the exhortations that Paul was imparting when he used it.

The first appearance of the phrase "in the heavenlies" is in Ephesians I. The entire verse states:

Blessed be THAT GOD of our LORD Jesus Christ, who has BLESSED us with Every spiritual Blessing *in the HEAVENLIES*, by Christ (Ephesians I: 3, The Emphatic Diaglott, emphasis added).

Paul's wrote that "every spiritual blessing" is made possible by Christ. As his followers, the Ephesians needed to be reminded of the importance of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible is absolutely filled with references to him that encourage that. They reinforce in the minds of believers that the day-to-day aim of our lives is to show the Lord's character in the things we do and say.

The second occurrence of the phrase taught that God has exalted Christ to be higher than everything:

places in the Bible. It is the precise phrase "in heavenly" (Strong's Numbers G1722 G2032) that is unique to Ephesians.

¹³⁰ See J. Allfree, An Exposition of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (Vancouver, Canada: VCE Publications, 1978), p. 2, J. Carter, The Letter to the Ephesians: An Exposition (London, United Kingdom: The Christadelphian, 1944), p. 17. And E. Sponberg, The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians: An Epistle of Love (Kingsgrove, Australia: Christadelphian Scripture Study Service, 1967), p. 13. Note that the word epouranios (Strong's Number G2032), which is translated "heavenly," appears other

Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own 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 world, but also in that which is to come (Ephesians I:20-2I, emphasis added).

These verses reminded the Ephesians that since Christ is of the highest importance, they should never put anything or anyone in this world above their allegiance to him.

The third appearance of the phrase reminded the believers in Ephesus that their hope was to share in the exaltation of the Lord. It contains additional challenging language:

And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together *in heavenly places* in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6, emphasis added).

The tense of the verbs used in this verse is thought-provoking. Paul wrote that God "hath raised us up together, and made us sit together" (i.e., he used the past tense). Paul's language implies that the Ephesians had, in a sense, already begun to share in Christ's exaltation.

The key to understanding Paul's choice of words and the message he was conveying is the phrase "raised us up together," which he used at the beginning of the verse. That phrase in the King James Version is one word in the Greek.¹³¹ It is a reference to our resurrection to a new way of life in Christ after having put to death the "old man" of sin. That meaning is indicated by the use of the same word in the parallel passage in Colossians. In Colossians 3 the word is rendered "be risen:"

If ye then *be risen* with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God (Colossians 3:I-3, emphasis added).

Ephesians 2:6, therefore, contains a profound message about character development. It taught the Ephesians that their exaltation in Christ was, in a sense, occurring then – in their day-to-day lives. It was happening as they made their thinking more like Christ's, molding their characters in preparation for the work that they will one day do as immortals in the Kingdom.

Spiritual Growth: Developing together

It is important to note that the development of a believer's character does not occur in isolation, as indicated by the repeated occurrence of the word "together" in Ephesians 2:

Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us *together* with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up *together*, and made us sit *together* in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:5-6, emphasis added).

¹³¹ The Greek word is *sugkathizo*. It is Strong's Number G4776. J. Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1995).

The repetition of "together" in these verses is a reminder to us that we need one another to develop spiritually and that God intends for us to work together to strengthen and to encourage one another.

The fourth appearance of "in the heavenlies" is particularly important for understanding what exactly the phrase means:

And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers *in heavenly places* might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:9-I0, emphasis added).

This passage is about the commission of Paul and the ecclesia to declare the Gospel to the Gentiles, including their rulers. Paul referred to the leaders of the Gentiles with the phrase "principalities and powers in heavenly places." Those who rule over Gentile nations are certainly not literally located in the heavens; therefore, the statement about them being "in the heavenlies" must be a reference to their high status, rather than their physical location. Paul's use of language is a continuation of what occurs in the poetic and prophetic writings of the Bible where leaders of nations are symbolized as celestial bodies who occupy the heavens (e.g., the sun, moon, and stars of Psalm 148: 3). That type of language, therefore, was not new when Paul used it in writing to the Ephesians. What it implies, however, is that the phrase "in the heavenlies" in Ephesians is a reference to an exalted status, not to a physical location. Consequently, the phrase "in the heavenlies" in Ephesians I:3 and 2:6 is about the position of believers. It was a reminder to the Ephesians of what a wonderful privilege they had of being in Christ. ¹³²

Paul wrote that the status of being in Christ is more important than any possession or honor that the Ephesians could get from this world (Ephesians I:20-21). Realizing how truly blessed they were to be in Christ could have made it easier for them to pass up opportunities in the world that might have brought them into conflict with their faith, to forsake the desires of the flesh, and to willingly follow in the Lord's footsteps when doing so was difficult.

Some in the Ephesian ecclesia, however, had not chosen to completely follow the Gospel message; therefore, Paul had to warn them about "spiritual wickedness" arising in their midst. When he was with them, Paul had warned the Ephesians with great emotion to be on their guard against "perverse things" being taught among them (Acts 20:29-31). Several years had passed since then and the developments that he was so concerned about were happening. Therefore, in Ephesians 6, he exhorted his readers that they had to contend against "spiritual wickedness" in the heavenlies of their ecclesia. The fifth and final occurrence of the phrase "in the heavenlies" is part of Paul's message on that subject:

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness *in high places* (Ephesians 6:12, emphasis added).

¹³² Riches in Christ are a key concept in the first half of the Epistle. In fact, the word "riches" appears five times in the first three chapters of Ephesians. See Ephesians 1:7,18; 2:7; 3: 8, and 16.

When Paul had been among the Ephesians, he had taught that salvation was available to both Jews and Gentiles through faith in the Lord Jesus (Acts 20:21). In the years that had passed since then, some in the ecclesia were apparently challenging Paul's teaching about the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's plan. That challenge was probably part of the "spiritual wickedness in high places" that Paul expressed concern about in chapter 6. Paul devoted a considerable amount of the epistle to addressing it.

Spiritual Growth: Repetition and reinforcement

Through his words and his actions, Paul had repeatedly taught the Ephesians the lesson that God intended to include the Gentiles in the Hope of Israel. Yet he still had to devote a considerable amount of the epistle to reiterating that message even though he had only been away from them for a few years.

Some in the ecclesia at Ephesus either forgot Paul's message, failed to recognize its importance, or actively opposed it. Their rapid departure from a key feature of Paul's work among them is a sobering reminder to us of how important the repetition and reinforcement of the Truth is for our spiritual health. Our natural impulses are to depart from God's ways; therefore, we need to constantly remind ourselves of what the Bible's teachings are through our own study and discussions around the Word with fellow believers.

8. The recipients and purpose of spiritual blessings

Paul reminds the Ephesians of God's intention to include the Gentiles in the Hope of Israel. He explains that the purpose of the spiritual blessings they had received is to gather both groups together in Christ that God might be glorified.

8.I. "That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs"

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he re-iterated that God had intended to extend the offer of salvation to the Gentiles from the beginning. He made that point in very straightforward language in a number of places in the Epistle:

Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; *That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ* by the gospel (Ephesians 3:4-6, emphasis added):

Some of the challenging language that the Apostle used in Ephesians I is also about the subject of Gentile inclusion in God's plan. For example, in Ephesians I:4, Paul wrote that God chose us in Christ "before the foundation of the world." The word rendered "foundation" can mean "conceived." The Greek word translated "world" is *kosmos*. The has a variety of meanings. It can mean "order or arrangement," but it can also simply mean "the world." Before the world was conceived, therefore, we were chosen in Christ. The word "us" in the verse does not necessarily mean us as individuals, however. It can mean "us" in the sense of Jewish and Gentile believers; that is, it is a statement that God intended to include both groups in his plan of salvation from the beginning. An examination of the message of the epistle as a whole, and this section in particular, indicates that was the point that the Apostle was making. Consider the following passage a few verses later, for example:

The Letter to the Ephesians: An Exposition (London, United Kingdom: The Christadelphian, 1944), p. 22.

The Greek word is *katabole*. It is Strong's Number G2602. See Hebrews II:II where it is rendered "conceive." J. Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1995).

¹³⁴ It is Strong's Number G2889, which can mean "the world." J. Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1995).

¹³⁵ J. Thomas writes, "The constitution of Mount Sinai was the founding of the Hebrew world, or xovsmoz; because it ordered, or arranged, the things pertaining to Israel, as a system *sui generis*. This system had *times peculiar to itself* which were appointed at the promulgation of the law. These are termed in scripture aijwnejz, that is, *aions*." See J. Thomas, *Elpis Israel* (Birmingham, United Kingdom: The Christadelphian, 1990), p. 212. J. Knowles writes, "This *cosmos* was to pass away and its *'elements melt with fervent heat'* (2 Pet. 3), at the end of the Mosiac *aion*." See J. Knowles, *The Olivet Prophecy: An Exposition of Matthew 24 & 25* (Torrens Park, Australia, Christadelphian Scripture Study Service, 1994), p. 21.

136 When it comes to individuals, the Scriptures make clear that just because a person is "chosen," it does not necessarily follow that he or she will ultimately receive eternal life. See, for example, John 6:70: "Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" Also, J. Carter makes the excellent argument that, "From the case of Jesus we see that human choice with the responsibility that it involves is not incompatible with divine foreordination and predestination." See J. Carter,

Having made known unto us *the mystery* of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself (Ephesians I:9, emphasis added).

Paul mentioned the "the mystery" in this verse. He also wrote about "the mystery" in chapter 3 where he stated that it was that the Gentiles would be "fellowheirs, and of the same body" as Jewish believers (Ephesians 3:4, 6).

Continuing along this line of reasoning, the "predestination" Paul referred to in Ephesians I:5 is also about the extension of the offer of salvation to the Gentiles, as well as to the Jews.¹³⁷ Thayer defines the Greek word rendered "predestinated" as "to decide beforehand." As the Law and the Prophets make clear, God had decided beforehand to reveal himself to the Gentiles and "to take out of them a people for his name" (Acts I5:I4).

It is interesting to note the language that Paul used under inspiration when he wrote about what it was that believers were predestined to in Ephesians I:5. He wrote that God has "predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ." He used the term "adoption." That is not a concept from the Law of Moses. A search for "adopt" or "adoption" in the Old Testament will not reveal occurrences of either term. Adoption is a Gentile concept, and Paul used it in Ephesians I:5 because he was particularly emphasizing God's intention to offer the hope of salvation to Gentiles in this section of the epistle.

Spiritual Growth: Implications of adoption

For those of us living thousands of years after Paul's words were written and for whom the issue of Gentile inclusion in the Hope of Israel is not a source of contention, the idea of "adoption" is a wonderful concept to consider and to draw exhortation from. In Roman times, when a person was adopted, he essentially became a new being. He received a new name, and his old debts were cancelled. That is exactly has been done for us. We have been called to be bearers of the name of Yahweh, and our great debt has been forgiven (Luke 7:36-49).

There were other important changes that occurred in a person's life when he was adopted in Roman times. His property became the possession of his adopted parent. The ties to his old life were gone, and everything he had belonged to his new father. So it is with us.

The fact that we have been adopted and our great debt has gone away is wonderful, but we must remember that a condition of being adopted is that we are no longer our own. Everything we have, including our lives, now belongs to our Heavenly Father and should be used to bring glory to Him.

¹³⁷ E. Sponberg, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians: An Epistle of Love* (Kingsgrove, Australia: Christadelphian Scripture Study Service, 1967), p. 15.

¹³⁸ The Greek word is *proorizo*. It is Strong's Number G4309. The definition is from J.H. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testatment*. e-Sword 9.9.0.

¹³⁹ E. Sponberg, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians: An Epistle of Love* (Kingsgrove, Australia: Christadelphian Scripture Study Service, 1967), p. 15.

¹⁴⁰E. Sponberg, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians: An Epistle of Love* (Kingsgrove, Australia: Christadelphian Scripture Study Service, 1967), p. 16.

8.2. Gathering together in one all things in Christ

Paul emphasized to the Ephesians how blessed they were to have been adopted into the divine family through the Lord Jesus Christ. He stressed that the offer had been made available to both Jews and Gentiles and that extending it to both groups had been God's plan from the beginning.

While making these points, Paul noted that the blessings they had received from God, such as adoption into His family, were given for a reason. In Ephesians I:6, Paul wrote that God has adopted us as children for a purpose - "to the praise of the glory of his grace."

Spiritual Growth: Remembering the reason for our blessings

The fact that the gift of our salvation – and Paul reminds us in Ephesians 2: 8 that it is a "gift" – is for the praise of God's glory is an incredible reminder that the other gifts that God has given to us - such as our families, our homes, our incomes, our talents, and our time - are for His glory as well. Sometimes we might find ourselves becoming showy or selfish when it comes to the blessings in our lives. That is a step in the wrong direction. Our gifts from God are meant to bring glory to Him, and since He is glorified through the display of His character, we should try to *actively* think about ways that we can use the gifts He has given to us to display who He is. We can use them to show mercy and compassion, for example.

The whole structure of the first part of Ephesians I – where so many spiritual blessings from God are listed – serves as a reminder that those blessings were given for a reason. Paul reminded the Ephesians of all the good things that God had done for them. He wrote that God has "blessed us" (verse 3), "chosen us" (verse 4), "predestinated us" (verse 5), "made us accepted" (verse 6), "abounded toward us" (verse 8), and "made known to us the mystery of his will" (verse 9). He then identified the purpose of those blessings using a key word, which occurs in verse 10. It is the word "that," which shows that God gave the blessings that He did for a reason – that "something" would occur. The reason that the blessings were given is provided in verse 10:

That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him (Ephesians I:10, emphasis added).

Ephesians I: 10 is another verse where a beautiful message is conveyed using language that is somewhat complicated. The key to understanding the verse is contained a few lines before in verse 6:

To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved (Ephesians I:6).

The context makes it clear that "the beloved," which appears at the end of the verse, is a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. That title of the Lord is worthy of consideration because it establishes a connection that elucidates Paul's message in Ephesians I:I0.

The Lord Jesus is referred to by the title "beloved" in other verses. One passage where the title appears that is particularly useful for understanding Ephesians 1:10 is Matthew 12:15-18:

But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all; And charged them that they should not make him known: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; *my beloved*, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles (Matthew 12:15-18, emphasis added).

Matthew quoted from Isaiah 42 in that passage:

Behold my servant, whom I uphold; *mine elect*, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:I, emphasis added).

There are a few differences between the words used in Isaiah and Matthew. For the purpose of understanding Ephesians I:I0, a particularly significant difference is that under inspiration, Matthew changed "mine elect" to "my beloved," which is the title of the Lord that Paul used in Ephesians I:6.¹⁴¹ That change provides a connection between "mine elect" and the "beloved." It shows that "beloved" is, in a sense, the New Testament equivalent of "mine elect."

Isaiah used the symbols of the heaven and the earth, which Paul also used in Ephesians I:10, later in chapter 42:

Thus saith God the LORD, he that created *the heavens*, and stretched them out; he that spread forth *the earth*, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein: I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:5-6, emphasis added).

It is worth noting that chapter 42 is not the only place in Isaiah where the use of the term "mine elect," ¹⁴² which has that connection to the title "beloved," and the symbols of the heaven and the earth are linked. ¹⁴³ The connection is repeated, which indicates its importance. For example:

And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains: and *mine elect* shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there... For, behold, I create new *heavens* and a new *earth*: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind (Isaiah 65:9, 17, emphasis added).

These passages in Isaiah use the same language and symbols as Ephesians I:6 and IO - "heavens," "earth," and "beloved" - because they address the same topic. They are concerned with drawing out a people for

¹⁴¹ The words are related in the Greek. In Ephesians 1:6, "the beloved" is *agapao* (Strong's Number G25). In Matthew 12:18, "beloved" is *agapetos* (Strong's Number G27), which has *agapao* as its root. J. Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1995).

¹⁴² The Hebrew word is *bachiyr* (Strong's number H0972). It is rendered "chosen" in some passages (e.g., Isaiah 65:15).

¹⁴³ Compare also Isaiah 43:20 and 44:23, 24; and Isaiah 45:4 and 45:8, I2. For an extensive treatment of this subject, see J. Allfree, *An Exposition of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians* (Vancouver, Canada: VCE Publications, I978), p. 6 - I6.

¹⁴⁴ J. Allfree suggests that "Paul's mind at the time he wrote the Ephesian letter was very much occupied with the writings of Isaiah." See J. Allfree, *An Exposition of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians* (Vancouver, Canada: VCE Publications, 1978), p. 7.

the glory of God, and Isaiah 42 makes it clear that the Gentiles were going to be among those called. (Remember that is one of the key points Paul was trying to convey in Ephesians I.)

Recall that Paul wrote about uniting "all things" "in heaven" and "on earth" in Ephesians I:10. The symbols of "heavens" and "earth" represent people. That is how they are used in the Song of Moses, for example:

Give ear, O ye *heavens*, and I will speak; and hear, O *earth*, the words of my mouth (Deuteronomy 32:I, emphasis added).

In Ephesians I: 10, therefore, Paul was teaching that people would no longer be regarded as "Jew" or "Gentile." Instead, they would be gathered "together in one," and they would be "in Christ." That meant that they would have faith in him and would strive to live as he did to the glory of God. In Christ, they would be so different from what they once had been that they would be a "new creation," as it were (2 Corinthians 5:17, English Standard Version). They would be "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1). It was to that end, Paul argued, that the Ephesians had received those spiritual blessings from God that are listed in the first nine verse of chapter I. They had been blessed so that they would bring glory to God by showing the character of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul stated that explicitly in Ephesians 2:

For we are his workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus unto good works*, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10, emphasis added).

8.3. "The earnest of our inheritance"

Ephesians I:10 is about the use of the gifts that God had given to the Ephesians to bring glory to Him by showing the character of Christ. Several verses later – in verses I3 and I4 – Paul wrote about some very specific gifts that some in the ecclesia had received - the gifts of the Holy Spirit:

In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that *holy Spirit* of promise, Which is *the earnest of our inheritance* until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory (Ephesians I:I3-I4, emphasis added).

Paul termed those gifts "the earnest of our inheritance." The word "earnest" means "down payment." The gifts of the Holy Spirit were, in a sense, a down payment. They were a pledge of a greater gift to come. In the context, "that "greater gift" was "redemption" (verse I4). Paul was telling the Ephesians that the Holy Spirit gifts were a foreshadowing of the blessing of immortality that was promised to the faithful in Christ. As verse I4 notes, that blessing is for "the praise of his glory."

Paul once again made the point that the blessings given to believers were to be used for God's glory. The fact that he repeated this lesson again and again suggests that it is something that can slip our minds quite easily. The emphasis that he placed on it also provides an indication of its importance to God.

¹⁴⁶ See Acts 19:1-7. Recall that in the early history of the Ephesian ecclesia, when Paul returned to Ephesus at the beginning of his Third Missionary Journey, "about twelve" men in Ephesus received the Holy Spirit after they were baptized into Christ, having only known the baptism of John previously.

¹⁴⁵ E. Sponberg, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians: An Epistle of Love* (Kingsgrove, Australia: Christadelphian Scripture Study Service, 1967), p. 19.

A key principle from this section of the epistle, therefore, is that we need to make sure that we are keeping God's glory at the forefront of our minds and are looking for ways to use the many gifts that God has given to us for their intended purpose.

9. Paul's prayers for the Ephesians

Paul recounts his prayers for the Ephesians. He uses a title of the Lord Jesus Christ that has important implications for the development of believers' character.

9.I. "Making mention of you in my prayers"

What Paul was asking of the Ephesians in the beginning of chapter I was quite challenging; therefore, he followed it by writing about his prayers for them. That section stretches from verse 15 to verse 23 of chapter I.

In his prayer, Paul told the Ephesians that he did not cease to give thanks for them:

Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, *Cease not to give thanks for you*, making mention of you in my prayers (Ephesians I:I5-16, emphasis added).

There are several features of Paul's prayers for the Ephesians that are worth highlighting. First, thanksgiving, which he mentioned in Ephesians I:16, is emphasized. Giving thanks in recognition of blessings received is a characteristic of a righteous person. The Psalms resound with the phrase "O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever." It is worth noting that thankfulness was not a sentiment that Paul just reflected in good times. When the words of gratitude recorded in Ephesians I flowed from his pen, he was sitting in prison and had endured a myriad of hardships — many of them in service to the ecclesia at Ephesus. One of the reasons that Paul was able to be so positive and to uplift his brothers and sisters despite his circumstances was that he had made a habit of giving himself to prayer and to thanksgiving. As he told the Philippians, doing so allowed him to benefit from "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding:"

Be careful for nothing; *but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving* let your requests be made known unto God. ⁷And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6, emphasis added).

Second, Paul was very specific about the things that he asked for on behalf of the Ephesians. He prayed:

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being

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¹⁴⁷ This is a quotation of Psalm I07:I. See also similar phrases in I Chronicles I6:34; Psalm I06:I; Psalm I18:I, 29; Psalm I36:I. 2, and 26.

enlightened; *that ye may know* what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints (Ephesians I:I7-I8, emphasis added).

Spiritual Growth: Making specific requests

Paul's made specific request to God on behalf of the Ephesians. That is a practice that is worthy of emulation. While it can be appropriate to pray for "the ecclesias scattered throughout the world" or "work going on in the mission field," we want to make sure that we are not speaking to God in general terms merely as part of a formality or because we are not being as thoughtful as we could be. Being specific may help us to be more focused when we pray. Making specific requests is also a great way to remain mindful of needs in the Brotherhood and to remind ourselves of God's active involvement in our lives and the lives of our brothers and sisters. Plus, it is excellent practice for the work that we will be doing, God willing, in the future. Then, as kings and priests in the Kingdom, we will be asking for God's help in specific matters in the lives of the mortals with whom we will be interacting.

One of the specific requests that Paul made to God was that the Ephesians would realize that the same marvelous power that had raised the Lord Jesus from the grave was available to bring about a spiritual transformation in their lives. In verse 18, he began to list the things that he had asked God to help the Ephesians know. That list continues in verses 19 and 20 as follows:

And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places (Ephesians I:I9-20, emphasis added).

The Ephesians certainly had an intellectual understanding of God's power. They knew that it had raised Christ from the dead, and they were aware that it was still active and working in their lives. Paul's prayer must have been for something beyond just factual knowledge, therefore. The Ephesians already had that. It seems instead that Paul was praying for the Ephesians to place their trust in God and to take the next steps in their lives that being a follower of Christ required. It would be then that they would truly know the incredible power of God working with them

Third, Paul's prayers for the Ephesians were focused on spiritual matters. He asked God to give them "the spirit of wisdom and revelation" (verse 17), to enlighten the eyes of their understanding (verse 18), ¹⁴⁸ and that they would know "the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints" (verse 18). It is worth noting that there is no mention of any requests related to the cares of this life in the prayers that he recalls in this section.

That is something that we should consider. It is not to say that we should not seek God's help and guidance in things of this life. We should. However, our prayers reflect our thinking. They indicate where

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¹⁴⁸ The Revised Version renders this phrase as "having the eyes of your heart enlightened." It is a translation that suggests that believers should guard against "blind emotion" (i.e., the heart should have eyes). Followers of Christ should let their feelings be guided by Divine principles.

the focus of our lives is. If our prayers start becoming more about temporal matters and less about God's glory and the spiritual well-being of ourselves and others, we should probably ask ourselves whether we have become unbalanced and overly concerned and preoccupied with the care of this life.

Spiritual Growth: Praying for others

Paul did not just pray for himself. His recollection of his prayers for the Ephesians illustrate that it was his habit to pray continually for other people – both individuals and ecclesias.

God regards laboring in prayer as an important component of our service to Him. We should ask ourselves if we are praying with the same kind of focus that Paul did. Could we recollect our prayers for our brothers and sisters in the kind of detail that Paul was able to do regarding his prayers for the Ephesians? ¹⁴⁹

9.2. "The glory"

In recounting his prayers for the Ephesians, Paul used a powerful expression in verse 17. It should have reinforced in the Ephesians' minds what the focus of their lives was to be. He referred to God as "the Father of glory." There is a definite article in front of "glory" in the Greek. Consequently, the passage should be rendered as Young's Literal Translation has it — "the Father of the glory." God is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ; therefore, Paul used "the glory" as a title of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul was not alone in using that title. When Mary took Jesus to the Temple as a baby, for example, Simeon called him "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke 2:32). James referred to the Lord as "the glory" in James 2:1.

The reason the Bible uses that title for the Lord Jesus is indicated by the response given to Moses when he asked to see God's glory in Exodus 33:

And he said, I beseech thee, *shew me thy glory*. And he said, I will *make all my goodness pass before thee*, and I will *proclaim the name of the LORD* before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy (Exodus 33:18-19, emphasis added).

This passage states that God's glory is declared in the showing forth of His goodness and in the proclamation of His Name, which is precisely what the Lord Jesus, "the glory," did.

¹⁴⁹ One benefit of Paul's frequent prayers for other people was that it probably made it easier for them to periodically receive words of correction from him. It takes an awfully hard heart to be angry at a person who you know prays for you all the time, even after he or she has reproved you for something. Bearing in mind Paul's example, we probably want to be in the habit of praying consistently for a person before speaking words of correction to him, and we might also want to consider beginning a hard conversation by assuring the person we are talking to that we pray for him frequently. That is what Paul did when he wrote to Philemon, for example (Philemon I:4).

¹⁵⁰ See E. Sponberg, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians: An Epistle of Love* (Kingsgrove, Australia: Christadelphian Scripture Study Service, 1967), p. 21.

There were a number of practical implications for the Ephesians that result from the Lord Jesus being "the glory." The fact that Christ was "the glory" meant that the Ephesians' focus should not have been themselves or on their accomplishments:

Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: *But let him that glorieth glory in this*, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD (Jeremiah 9:23-24, emphasis added).

It also implied that they should not be focused on the pleasures of this world:

Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.) (Philippians 3:17-19, emphasis added).

Ephesus was a city filled with opportunities for personal advancement and pleasure-seeking, but the focus of the believers in Ephesus was to be on trying to be like Christ. That meant that their aim was to show other people the goodness of God in their interactions with them. It meant that their goal was to proclaim God's Name in their words and their deeds.

Spiritual Growth: Remembering "the glory"

It is very hard to remember that our duty is to be like Christ. Our fleshly minds can war against that notion, and our lives are full of influences that are contrary to the spirit of Christ. To help maintain our direction, we get together as often as we can to study God's Word, and we gather every Sunday morning to remember the Lord Jesus. We also pray, for ourselves and for others, that we may know and appreciate the riches that we have in Christ and remember that he is the glory.

10. Reflections on life before the Truth

Paul exhorts the Ephesians to embrace the Gospel by reminding them of what their life was like before they chose to follow Christ.

10.1. "In time past"

Paul gave the Ephesians a reason to keep their focus on the Lord Jesus by reminding them of what their life had been like before they had accepted the Gospel. That is what he wrote about at the beginning of Ephesians 2.The language that Paul used in Ephesians 2:2 is complicated, but, again, it is part of a message that is sublime. He wrote:

Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience (Ephesians 2:2).

Loosely translated, Paul's message was: "Before your conversion, you behaved like everyone else. You acted in conformity to the characteristics of this present evil age, and you were encouraged to do so by your leaders. And now there are people around you who remain energized to still live like that."

It is easier to understand Paul's message if it is examined one phrase at a time. In the first part of the verse, Paul wrote, "in time past ye walked according to the course of this world." The word translated "course" is *aion*. Vine defines the word as "an age, a period of time,' marked in the NT usage by spiritual or moral characteristics." The particular *aion* that Paul referred to was "this world," the one that the Ephesians lived in, and the moral characteristics of that world were evil. That is the sense that Thayer gave in his rendering of the phrase. He translated it as stating that the Ephesians had walked "conformably to the age in which this (wicked) world belongs." ¹⁵²

Before their conversion, the Ephesians had been encouraged in their ungodly behavior by the leaders of their communities. That is the subject of the second phrase of Ephesians 2:2: "according to the prince of the power of the air."

"The prince" is periodically used in the Bible as a personification of sin. ¹⁵³ For example, on the night of his arrest, the Lord said, "the prince of this world is judged" (John 16:II). ¹⁵⁴ In Ephesians 2, Paul

¹⁵¹ W. Vine, M. Unger, and W. White, 1985. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), p. 685.

¹⁵² J. Thayer. 1868. "aion." A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament. http://www.blueletterbible.org. Accessed April 20, 2011.

¹⁵³ E. Sponberg, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians: An Epistle of Love* (Kingsgrove, Australia: Christadelphian Scripture Study Service, 1967), p. 28.

¹⁵⁴ See also John 12:31 and 14:30.

wrote about "the prince of the power of the air," which is most likely a reference to wickedness in the high places of society. It certainly was true that the Ephesians' leaders encouraged them in wrongdoing. The Gentile authorities in Ephesus actively promoted devotion to the goddess Diana, and they organized and supported events where the vile practices associated with her worship took place. As for the Jewish inhabitants of the city, judging by their community's behavior, many of their leaders were encouraging them to oppose the Gospel using whatever means were necessary, including deceit and violence.

Paul noted that negative influences of the ruling classes in Ephesus continued to encourage many people to do wrong. That is the subject of the third phrase of the verse: "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." The Greek word translated "spirit" in the verse is *pneuma*, which can mean "wind." The word for "worketh" is *energeo*, which can mean "to put forth power." Paul noted that influential people of Ephesus continued to be a negative force — a wind, as it were — that energized many of the common people to do wrong.

Spiritual Growth: Beware the influence of the world's elites

We need to be on guard against the opposition to God's ways that is emanating from many of the influential people of our day (e.g., people in politics, media, entertainment, and sports). We need to be careful so that their ways of thinking, which have a tremendous impact on society, do not infiltrate our minds.

Society's leaders teach – by their words and their actions – that we should "follow our hearts" and "listen to our instincts." They want us to focus our attention on the cares of this life – to be more concerned about our clothes and our cars than on our commitment to our Heavenly Father. They want us to put bounds on our belief in God. They want us, for example, to be tolerant of behaviors condemned by the Bible and to follow the Lord Jesus only when it is in our interests to do so.

The Christians in Ephesus had left the world's ways behind. It is a testimony to how empty their old way of life in the world had been that Paul could appeal to his readers' memory of what they had once been like as an encouragement for them to embrace the Gospel even more fully.

10.2. "Wherefore remember"

Ephesians 2: 11-12 provide a through-provoking reminder of who the Ephesians were before they became followers of the Lord Jesus Christ:

Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and

¹⁵⁵ It is Strong's Number G4151. J. Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1995).

¹⁵⁶ See E. Sponberg, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians: An Epistle of Love* (Kingsgrove, Australia: Christadelphian Scripture Study Service, 1967), p. 29.

strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:II-I2).

As we consider these words of Paul in the context of the development of the ecclesia at Ephesus, we are not going to focus on their meaning from a strictly doctrinal perspective. That has been done elsewhere, and the lessons are well-known. Instead, we will focus on what the statements in these verses imply about what life in the world is really like (whether it was the world of Ephesus in the first century or life in the Western world in the present day) and what a contrast it is to life in Christ.

Verse II illustrates the disdain that the Jews felt for the Gentiles. They expressed their feelings by referring to the Gentiles by the derogatory term, "the Uncircumcision." The Gentiles responded in kind, calling the Jews "the Circumcision." This verse refers to two groups that together comprise all of humanity — Jews and Gentiles. Each group is shown expressing contempt for the other. It is a reminder of what life in the world is like. Paul's words illustrated to the Ephesians there were always going to be people who disliked them and who spoke evil against them regardless of who they were, what they did, or what stage of life they were in. It did not matter whether they were on "the Jewish side" or "the Gentile side" of a divide, so to speak, unkind words would come their way in the world. The Ephesians could, however, choose to live their lives so that the words that were spoken against them would serve a purpose. They could do that by choosing to follow the Lord Jesus.

If living like Christ was the focus of their lives, then a lot of the criticism they would face would be for that reason. (Recall that when the Medo-Persian princes tried to find a way to criticize Daniel in Daniel 6, the only thing they could speak against was his faith.¹⁵⁸) When believers are criticized or belittled for something having to do with their beliefs, the Bible shows that good comes out of it:

But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil (I Peter 3:14-17, English Standard Version, emphasis added).

These verses teach that believers will be blessed for being spoken against because of their discipleship. They also indicate that believers' reactions to uncharitable words can help lead others to the Truth. Being spoken against for being a believer, therefore, is a hardship with a tremendous upside. In contrast, for people without the Gospel, the unkind words that they are battered with in the world are little more than painful facts of life. It is hard to see much in them that is positive.

Paul continued to characterize those who have not accepted the Gospel in Ephesians 2:12. He described them as "without Christ." People without Christ often lack direction. People who are "with" Christ benefit from the direction that the Lord provides.

 ¹⁵⁷ J. Carter, The Letter to the Ephesians: An Exposition (London, United Kingdom: The Christadelphian, 1944), p. 55.
 158 See Daniel 6: 4–5.

Spiritual Growth: Having direction in our lives

Being directionless is an unsettling feeling. It explains why so many people in the world go careening about looking for someone or something to follow. They might try a form of spiritualism, for example. When they discover that there is little substance to it, they switch to a different flavor of the same stuff. They might also look to politics. If they do, chances are that the politicians that they support will quickly disappoint them. It is amazing to observe the political process from the sidelines and to see how many of the same people who were in euphoria cheering for a politician one moment turn out in droves to support his opponents in the very next election. That type of behavior is depicted in the Bible, of course. ¹⁵⁹ It shows how mentally and emotionally chaotic life can be for those who have not committed to following God. For believers, the search for direction is thankfully over. In fact, that is one of the great benefits of the Truth. We are not constantly looking for a source of guidance in our lives. We follow Christ. That is it.

Continuing in verse 12, Paul wrote that before the Ephesians had learned the Truth, they had been "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel." That phrase speaks to the fact that one of the great privileges of having the Truth is being part of something meaningful – "the commonwealth of Israel."

Spiritual Growth: Having meaning in our lives

Many people in the world long to be part of something larger than themselves. They may look for it in the company they work for, in charitable or community organizations that they belong to, or by championing a cause. Those pursuits may provide some limited satisfaction for a time, but they tend to leave people longing for something more. As believers, we are part of that "something more." There is simply nothing this world can offer that is more meaningful than being a part of God's plan and purpose for the earth.

The next subject that Paul wrote about in verse 12 was "the covenants of promise." Before their conversion, the Ephesians were strangers from those covenants. As a result, everything in their lives was transient. The only certainties they had were change, loss, and death. "The covenants of promise," however, are the exact opposite of what the Ephesians experienced in the world. They are enduring. They are sure. God made them thousands of years ago. They have not been altered, and there is no doubt about their fulfillment. Putting their hope in them was the only way for the Ephesians to have something positive in their lives that lasted and about which that they could feel certainty.

Paul next described the Ephesians prior to their conversion as "without hope." Being without hope can rob a person of the urge to try and the incentive to change. It can be incredibly debilitating. In contrast, the hope that they received of the coming Kingdom was one of the great blessings of the Truth. It could challenge them to grow personally. It could motivate them to endure when times were hard.

¹⁵⁹ See the story of Abimelech in Judges 9 and 10 for example. The contrast between the events of John 6:15 and John 6:66, which took place the next day, illustrates the same principle.

Finally, Paul reminded the Ephesians that they had been "without God in the world" before they had accepted the Gospel. Being without God leaves a person incredibly vulnerable. That is because there is nothing that this world has to offer that can truly be relied upon. Being without God also leaves a person fundamentally alone. Only God could be with the Ephesians through all the changes that would come in their lives. God alone could bring the Ephesians back from the grave. Those were the thoughts that were on the David's mind, for example, when he wrote Psalm 71:

O God, thou hast taught me *from my youth*: and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works. Now also *when I am old and grayheaded*, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come. Thy righteousness also, O God, is very high, who hast done great things: O God, who is like unto thee! Thou, which hast shewed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and *shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth* (Psalm 71:17-20, emphasis added).

They serve as a powerful motivator to strive to give our lives to God.

II. "An holy temple in the Lord"

Paul uses a vivid symbol from his own life and the history of the Ephesian ecclesia to emphasize that there should not be division between Jew and Gentile. He then calls on the Ephesians to become a living temple, prays that God will bless them toward that end, and addresses some of the practicalities of making that vision a reality.

II.I. "The middle wall of partition between us"

In Ephesians 2:11-12, Paul identified what had been spiritually lacking in the lives of the Ephesians before their conversion. They had been "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" (verse 12). He then stated that those individual needs were addressed in Christ:

But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:13).

Paul also wanted the Ephesians to realize that Christ was the solution to the divide that existed between Jew and Gentile:

For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down *the middle wall of partition between us*; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And *that he might reconcile both unto God* in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby (Ephesians 2:14-16, emphasis added).

The Jew-Gentile divide was dramatically symbolized by the physical barrier that separated the two groups from each other in the Temple in Jerusalem. Paul referred to that barrier in verse I4 as "the middle wall of partition between us." As previously described, that barrier led to a riot in the Temple that was prompted by the Jews of Asia, which resulted in Paul being dragged down the Temple's steps, beaten, arrested, spending years in prison, being shipwrecked on the way to Rome, and experiencing incarceration as a prisoner of the Roman emperor.

It was during that imprisonment that Paul wrote the Epistle to the Ephesians. Paul had experienced a lot of trouble, including the loss of his freedom, as a result of the literal "middle wall of partition" that separated Jews and Gentiles. He would, therefore, have been adamantly opposed to a figurative "middle wall of partition," as it were, being erected between Gentile and Jewish members of the Ephesian ecclesia by false teaching and improper behavior.

II.2. "Builded together for an habitation of God"

Paul wanted the Ephesian believers to leave their old way of life behind. That included thinking of themselves in "Jew" and "Gentile" terms. At the end of Ephesians 2, Paul used the symbolism of a temple

to help make his point. That choice of that imagery would have been particularly dramatic given what he had just written.

Paul had already referred to the Temple where the Jews worshipped in Jerusalem, and he made it clear that he wanted the Jewish believers in Ephesus to leave that Temple with its "middle wall of partition" behind. The Gentile members of the ecclesia also needed to leave a temple from their past behind. It was the Temple of Diana, which was so important to many in Ephesus that a riot had taken place with the ostensible purpose of defending the honor of its goddess.¹⁶⁰

Paul did not want the Ephesian believers to just forsake their former lives with their associated temples, however. That would only leave a gaping hole in their lives, as it were. Rather, Paul wanted the Ephesians to replace who they once were with love for God and for each other. *Instead of worshipping in temples, Paul told the Ephesians that he wanted them to become a temple.*¹⁶¹ He wanted them to be a place where God would be pleased to dwell:

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22, emphasis added).

The idea of being a temple for God is a beautiful concept, but it can also seem incredibly challenging. Fortunately, Paul provided guidance on how the temple is to be constructed, as it were, in his description of it. A few of the key points are worth noting.

First, Ephesians 2:20 identified Jesus Christ as the temple's "chief corner stone." This passage reminded the Ephesians that they needed to do what the Lord taught. Any deviations from his commandments were not acceptable. It also reminded them that man-made observances in the name of religion that the Lord did not command accomplished nothing. In fact, they could be a distraction from the real work that the Ephesians were supposed to be doing.

Second, Ephesians 2:20 taught that the "apostles and prophets" were the foundation of the temple. If the Ephesians departed from them, they would be like a stone set apart from the building and not part of the temple.

It is worth noting that both the "apostles" and the "prophets," representing the New and the Old Testaments, comprise the temple's foundation. Anyone attempting to dismiss either of those components was not being true to the design of the temple.

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¹⁶⁰ J. Carter, *The Letter to the Ephesians: An Exposition* (London, United Kingdom: The Christadelphian, 1944), p. 61.

¹⁶¹ Similar ideas are expressed in I Corinthians 3:17 and I Peter 2:5.

¹⁶² In Ephesians 3:5, Paul referred to "apostles and prophets" that were active in his day, so the "prophets" in this verse may be a reference to people in the first century. H. Whittaker suggests that both Old and New Testament prophets might have been intended and that Paul could have been "deliberately ambiguous." See H. Whittaker, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Wigan, United Kingdom: Biblia, 1992), p. 30.

Third, in Ephesians 2:21, Paul taught that the temple grows. That suggests movement and activity. The growth of the temple occurs as new "living stones" are added as a result of God working through the preaching activities of individuals and their ecclesias. ¹⁶³

Fourth, the Apostle did not describe the Ephesians as each being their own individual temple. He wrote of believers as a group comprising one temple. He was quite explicit in Ephesians 2:22. He wrote, "ye also are builded *together* for an habitation of God" (emphasis added). The Ephesians formed a temple together. They needed one another.

Spiritual Growth: The temple where God intends to dwell

The Bible is full of references to and descriptions of the Temple that was in Jerusalem, but God never intended to dwell there permanently. Acts 7 states:

Howbeit *the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands*; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things? (Acts 7:48-50, emphasis added).¹⁶⁴

Isaiah 66, which is where the Acts quote comes from, then provides the answer of where God will dwell. It will be with faithful people: "but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isaiah 66: 2).

Think of all the care that went into the building of the Temple in Jerusalem in its various stages. That is an indication of the even greater planning, effort, and attention that is going into building the temple where God intends to dwell. We have been called to be part of that temple.

II.3. "For this cause I bow my knees"

Paul thought it was important that the Ephesians adopt "the temple mindset;" therefore, he included a prayer about it in Ephesians 3. Paul introduced the prayer at the beginning of the chapter:

For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles (Ephesians 3:I, emphasis added).

Recall that Paul had finished writing about the temple at the end of Ephesians 2. The idea of the temple is, therefore, the "cause" (or "reason")¹⁶⁵ he was referring to when he wrote "For this cause" in verse I. The end of Ephesians 2 and the beginning of Ephesians 3 are connected, therefore. The chapter break between them is somewhat misleading.

Paul did not get far in his introduction to the prayer before he interrupted himself. He started a digression in Ephesians 3:2 that runs through Ephesians 3:13. In those verses, he wrote about his role as a preacher to the Gentiles (verses 2-12), and he asked the Ephesians not to faint at the thought of the

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¹⁶³ Preaching is described used the language of temple building in I Corinthians 3:10-16.

¹⁶⁴ These are words that Paul personally heard Stephen speak.

¹⁶⁵ See the English Standard Version.

tribulations he had suffered because of his work (verse 13). The Apostle's digression contains very straightforward language about Gentile inclusion in the Hope of Israel (e.g. Ephesians 3:6-7). He returned to his prayer after he made those parenthetical comments.

Ephesians 3:14 clearly marks the end of Paul's digression. He repeated the phrase "For this cause," signaling that he was returning to the train of thought he had started in verse I:

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 3:14, emphasis added).

Paul wrote that he bowed his knees in verse 14, which indicates that the words that come next are a prayer for the Ephesians.

Paul then offered a model prayer that followed the basic construction of the Lord's Prayer. ¹⁶⁶ It began by ascribing glory to God:

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named (Ephesians 3:14-15).

Next, Paul petitioned God for the spiritual well-being of the Ephesians (Ephesians 3:16-19). Then the prayer concluded with praise to God:

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen (Ephesians 3:20-21).

Spiritual Growth: Modeling prayer

Prayer is an important component of the spiritual life of a believer, and Paul followed the example of the Lord in his prayer. To aid us in our prayer lives, we might want to consider memorizing verses that comprise the beginnings and endings of Bible prayers, such as the above passages in Ephesians 3. Building a memory bank of Bible prayers can help us to align our prayers with those offered by faithful men and women of the Bible.

There is another aspect of Paul's prayer that is worth noting, which is his use of temple language. Paul's desire that the Ephesians would live up to the promise of becoming a living temple prompted his prayer; therefore, it is not surprising that there are temple references in it.

Not all of the references to the temple in Paul's prayer are immediately obvious. For example, Paul wrote about "the Father" and His Name. His use of language might be an echo of God's promise to David regarding the house of God in 2 Samuel 7. Compare

He shall build *an house* for *my name*, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his *father*, and he shall be my son (2 Samuel 7:I3-I4, emphasis added).

and

¹⁶⁶ J. Knowles. Epistle to the Ephesians. Unpublished manuscript, p. 30.

¹⁶⁷ J. Allfree, An Exposition of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (Vancouver, Canada: VCE Publications, 1978), p. 39.

For this cause I bow my knees unto *the Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth *is named* (Ephesians 3:I4-I5, emphasis added).

More straightforward references to believers as a living temple are contained later in the prayer in Ephesians 3:17-18. In verse 17, Paul prayed that the Ephesians would be "rooted and grounded in love." "Rooted" means "to grow roots," like a tree. "Grounded" means "to lay the foundation" of a building. 169 Paul's imagery, therefore, is of a temple that grows, which is what he wrote about in characterizing the temple in the previous chapter:

In whom all the building fitly framed together *groweth unto an holy temple* in the Lord (Ephesians 2:21, emphasis added).

Paul referred to the dimensions of the temple in verse 18: He prayed that the Ephesians:

May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height (Ephesians 3:18).

Given the context, Paul wanted his readers to realize the size of the temple, as it were. He wanted the Ephesians to understand that the living temple included believers besides those in the particular group – Jew or Gentile – to which they belonged.

II.4. "The unity of the Spirit"

Ephesians 3:2I is the conclusion of Paul's prayer. The chapter break occurs thereafter, and its placement is fitting. Paul indicated that there was a transition in thought at that point by using the word "therefore:"

I *therefore*, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called (Ephesians 4:I, emphasis added).

Commentaries often state that the first three chapters of Ephesians are about doctrine and the last three chapters are about conduct.¹⁷⁰ (The use of the word "walk" in Ephesians 4: I is an indicator of that change in emphasis.¹⁷¹) The word "therefore" that Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:I, however, was a signal Paul's that what Paul wrote next followed as a result of what he had already written. The exhortations in Ephesians 4 to 6 are very much linked to the ideas presented in Ephesians I to 3. They offer practical guidance on achieving the unity - implied by the symbol of believers as a living temple - which Paul had proclaimed to be an integral part of the faith in the first half of the epistle.

Paul taught that endeavoring to keep unity in the ecclesia entailed following the example of the Lord. Christ displayed humility of mind. He was gentle and submissive, especially under trial. He said,

¹⁶⁸ The Greek word is *rhizoo*. It is Strong's Number G4492. See R. Jamieson, A. Fausset, and D. Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*. e-Sword 9.9.0.

¹⁶⁹ The Greek word is *themelioo*. It is Strong's Number G2311. The definition is from J.H. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testatment*. e-Sword 9.9.0.

¹⁷⁰ See, for example, , J. Carter, *The Letter to the Ephesians: An Exposition* (London, United Kingdom: The Christadelphian, 1944), p. 74 and J. Knowles. Epistle to the Ephesians. Unpublished manuscript, p. 34.

¹⁷¹ "Walk" is a key word of the second half of the epistle. It appears in Ephesians 4:1, 17; 5: 2, 8, and 15.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am *meek and lowly* in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls (Matthew II:29, emphasis added).

Paul wrote that believers should be the same way:

With all *lowliness and meekness*, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love (Ephesians 4:2, emphasis added).

It would be much easier for the Ephesians to be understanding and accommodating of others in their ecclesia when they were being "meek and lowly" and not attempting to establish our own importance.

Paul wrote that the Ephesians should "forbear" one another. The word means "to bear with or to endure." It suggests that the process of getting along with others in the meeting is not always going to be easy, but it also indicates that there are spiritual benefits to be gained from interacting with those in the meeting who are different from us.

The ecclesia at Ephesus contained a mix of people. It had brothers and sisters from a wide variety of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. As a result, the composition of the meeting created an opportunity for valuable knowledge and experience to be gained by its members. They could develop by working together and bearing with one another in love.

Spiritual Growth: Learning from one another

Paul's words to the Ephesians are a reminder that it is not necessarily good for us to be in a meeting with people who are exactly like us. Spiritual growth can occur by having to interact with people who have different backgrounds and abilities than we do, provided that we follow the principles of Christ in what we say and do.

Even though the members of the Ephesian ecclesia were different from one another from man's perspective, God had established unity among them. Paul wanted that unity preserved because it was from Him. That is why he termed it "the unity of the Spirit" in verse 3:

Endeavouring to keep *the unity of the Spirit* in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3, emphasis added).

The Spirit had created the unity. 173 It was not man's place to disrupt it.

Paul next identified a number of characteristics that the ecclesia needed to have for unity to be preserved:

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are 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 (Ephesians 4:4-6).

¹⁷² The Greek word is *anechomai*. It is Strong's Number G430. The verb is used in the middle voice. See J. Knowles. Epistle to the Ephesians. Unpublished manuscript, p. 36.

¹⁷³ J. Carter, *The Letter to the Ephesians: An Exposition* (London, United Kingdom: The Christadelphian, 1944), p. 78.

The first characteristic is suggested by the term "one body" in verse 4. It brings to mind God's plan to have believers be one with Christ. The fulfillment of that plan is represented by the one "like unto the Son of man" in Revelation I who symbolizes Christ and the immortalized saints:

And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle (Revelation I:12-I3).

Paul's reference to "one body" in Ephesians 4 was a reminder that identification with God's plan and purpose, as opposed to the wishes of people, is a necessary condition for unity in the ecclesia.

"One Spirit," which is the second term the Apostle listed, brings to mind how important adherence to the teachings of the Lord is in preserving unity in the ecclesia. The Lord referred to his words as "spirit:"

It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: *the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit,* and they are life (John 6:63, emphasis added).

The teachings of the Lord should be the "one Spirit" that directs the ecclesia (c.f. Ephesians 2:2).

The third term Paul used is "one hope." It is reminder for believers not to get distracted by the false hopes offered by the world, like the promise of a better life through "following our heart" or through a permissive lifestyle. Those false hopes will cause discord if they are permitted into the ecclesia.

The fourth term is "one Lord." The pagan world had many lords. They were represented by idols. The lords of our world are less tangible than that, but they are just as present in our society as the pagan temples were in ancient Ephesus. The desire for pleasure and ease can seek to be lords over our minds. The companies that we work for can try to make us bow down, as it were, and be lords over our time, but they must all be suppressed to the lordship of Jesus Christ if the ecclesia is to be united.

The fifth term is "one faith." It was a reminder of the dangers that distortions to the faith posed to the unity of the ecclesia. Paul wanted the Ephesians to recognize perversions of the faith for what they were and to oppose them.

The sixth term is "one baptism." It is possible that Paul wrote about baptism to distinguish Christianity from worship under the Law.¹⁷⁴ Whereas Christians only needed to have one valid baptism, the Law of Moses had many washings. Attempts to impose ordinances from the Law on Gentile Christians were one of the sources of discord in the first-century ecclesia. The members of the ecclesia at Ephesus needed to understand what God's requirements really were and not add to or subtract from them. The same is true for us.

The last term that Paul used was "one God." There are at least two important – and related – concepts that are essential to ecclesial unity, which those words imply. One of those concepts is pertinent for all times; the other applied more specifically to the first century. The first concept relates to Christ's

 $^{^{174}}$ The Lord also used "baptism" as a term to represent his suffering. "One baptism," therefore, can convey the idea that "if we suffer , we shall also reign with him" (2 Timothy 2:12).

desire for believers to be one, just as he and the Father are one (John 17:11). If members of a meeting are not working towards that goal, the unity of the ecclesia will not be preserved.

The second concept implied by "one God" relates to a first-century issue, which is the belief in salvation by works of the Law. Paul addressed that teaching in Galatians 3 where he wrote that while the aim of the Promises was to unite people with God, that was not the intent of the Law:

Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but *God is one* (Galatians 3:19-20, emphasis added).

It is likely that Paul was reinforcing that point when he wrote about the oneness of God in Ephesians 4.175

Paul's call to unity was going to entail challenges for the Ephesians. What he was asking for was not going to come naturally to them, nor will it always be easy for us. That is why he included a reminder that God was with them in all things at the conclusion of the section. He wrote that the Father "is above all, and through all, and in you all" at the end of Ephesians 4:6.

II.5. "The gift of Christ"

Paul next discussed the practical realities that were important to the application of the principles that he had established. He first recognized that while "endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit" was a goal of the ecclesia, it did not necessarily follow that everyone in the ecclesia was going to be the same. In fact, the opposite was true. Indeed, God had added diversity to the ecclesia at Ephesus by giving Holy Spirit powers to some in the ecclesia and not to others. Plus, those who had received Holy Spirit powers could do different things. Paul acknowledged this situation:

But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ (Ephesians 4:7).

Then Paul explained it.

In his explanation of the giving of the Holy Spirit powers, Paul drew heavily from the history of the children of Israel - and how it is characterized in the Psalms - in what he wrote.

In the Old Testament, God's deliverance is associated with the idea of God "coming down:"

And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; And *I am come down* to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites (Exodus 3:7-8, emphasis added).

Once the deliverance has been accomplished, God is characterized as ascending:

¹⁷⁵ J. Carter, *The Letter to the Ephesians: An Exposition* (London, United Kingdom: The Christadelphian, 1944), p. 81.

God is gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet (Psalm 47:5).

In a passage that Paul quoted in Ephesians 4, the Psalmist used the language of God descending and ascending in describing the deliverance he gave to the children of Israel when he brought them out of Egypt and led them to the Promised Land:

The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place. *Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea,* for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them. Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. Selah (Psalm 68:17-19, emphasis added).

The "gifts" that God had received in the Wilderness, which are referred to in Psalm 68:18, were the Levities, who were appointed to do the service of the tabernacle:

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, And I, behold, I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of all the firstborn that openeth the matrix among the children of Israel: therefore the Levites shall be mine; (Numbers 3:II-I2).

Under inspiration, Paul quoted from Psalm 68 in Ephesians 4. He applied the principles from that time in Israel's history to the first-century ecclesia and the subject of the Holy Spirit:

Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:8-II, emphasis added).

There are a few points about Paul's quotation that are worth noting. First, he explained what the ascension of God implied in Ephesians 4:9. The fact that God ascended meant that he must have first descended, which is the language that is used for deliverance. Paul was saying that the fact that God had ascended signified that deliverance had been accomplished.

Second, Paul indicated that the deliverance that was relevant to the Ephesians was accomplished through the Lord Jesus. One of the reasons that the Lord said that he "came down from heaven" during his ministry was that he was signaling that his work was for deliverance. He was sent to deliver people from sin and death, so he taught, for example:

For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me (John 6:38, emphasis added).

Paul signaled quite strongly that he was writing about the work of the Lord Jesus in this section of the epistle by quoting from a prophecy about the Lord's birth:

My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth (Psalm I39:I5, emphasis added).

Paul echoed that prophecy when he wrote that the Lord "descended first into the lower parts of the earth:"

(Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into *the lower parts of the earth*?) (Ephesians 4:9, emphasis added).

Third, "led captivity captive," which is a phrase that Paul quoted from Psalm 68 and used in verse 8, does not give the clearest sense of what Paul's message was. The marginal rendering of the Authorized Version is easier to understand. It renders the phrase as "led a multitude of captives." Paul was stating that God's deliverance in Christ had resulted in the leading forth of a multitude of people to freedom who had previously been captives to sin and death. The Ephesians had been among those captives.

Fourth, just as there had been a giving of gifts during the Exodus, so also was there a giving of gifts associated with deliverance in Christ. Under inspiration, Paul changed "received gifts for men," which is how that passage is rendered in Psalm 68 to "gave gifts unto men" in Ephesians 4: 8. That change demonstrates an incredible insight that Paul had into what happened with the Levites in the Wilderness. While the Psalmist was correct that the Levites were a gift to God, Paul was also correct in that they were a gift from God.¹⁷⁶ The Levites were intended to be a gift to the priests to help in their service to God:

And I have taken the Levites for all the firstborn of the children of Israel. And I have given the Levites *as a gift* to Aaron and to his sons from among the children of Israel, to do the service of the children of Israel in the tabernacle of the congregation, and to make an atonement for the children of Israel: that there be no plague among the children of Israel, when the children of Israel come nigh unto the sanctuary (Numbers 8:18-19, emphasis added).

Paul explained that just as the Levities were a gift from God given after the deliverance from Egypt, so also were the Spirit-gifted members of the ecclesia a gift from God. They were given following Christ's deliverance, and they were gifted to the members of the meeting, who had been called out to be "an holy priesthood" (I Peter 2:5).

It is for this reason that Paul next gave examples of people who had the Holy Spirit:

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:II).

This verse makes clear that Paul had been talking about people with Holy Spirit powers in verses 8 to 10.

Paul followed the pattern of the Old Testament account in Ephesians 4:II. He did not write that the powers of the Holy Spirit were gifts. Instead, he described *the people* who had the Holy Spirit as gifts.¹⁷⁷

Following that list of Spirit-gifted individuals, Paul explained the reason why they had been given to the ecclesia:

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: *Till we all come in the unity of the faith*, and of the knowledge of the Son of

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¹⁷⁶ J. Knowles. Epistle to the Ephesians. Unpublished manuscript, p. 37

¹⁷⁷ J. Carter, *The Letter to the Ephesians: An Exposition* (London, United Kingdom: The Christadelphian, 1944), p. 89.

God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ (Ephesians 4:12-13, emphasis added).

Helping the ecclesia to preserve unity in Christ was an important goal of the people who had been given Holy Spirit powers. Thus, even though there was diversity in the ecclesia because of the Holy Spirit, unity was still one of the aims of its use.

12. "Put on the new man"

Paul exhorts the Ephesians to overcome evil in their lives by replacing it with good. He first states the principle in general terms then he applies it to specific sins.

12.1. Individual discipleship is essential even in an active ecclesia

In Ephesians 4, Paul urged the Ephesians to endeavor to keep the unity in the ecclesia that God had created. He listed principles that the members of the meeting needed to recognize for unity to be preserved, and he explained that even though God had added diversity to the ecclesia through the giving of the Holy Spirit powers, promoting unity was a reason why those powers had been given.

Paul warned the Ephesians that the presence of the Holy Spirit gifts in their midst did not necessarily mean that they were all leading Christ-like lives. He wrote:

This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind (Ephesians 4:17).

The Ephesians still had to decide - on an individual basis - to follow the Lord. They each had to make the choice not to act like those in the world around them.

Spiritual Growth: Examining our individual service

The situation that the Ephesians were in is very similar to the one in which we find ourselves today. Although we do not have people with the Holy Spirit in our meetings, many ecclesias have active Bible classes and support Gospel proclamation efforts. Those activities perform some of the same roles as the Holy Spirit did in the first century. Just like the Ephesians, therefore, we need to be on our guard so that we do not allow the positive activities occurring around us in our ecclesia to lull us into a less vigorous examination of ourselves as individuals. If we are not honest in our self-examination, we can end up with serious problems in our individual service to the Lord, even if our ecclesia resounds with the message of the Spirit-Word.

12.2. Replacing evil with good

Paul was aware that some of the Ephesians had moral struggles that they needed to address. What Paul wrote to them in Ephesians 4 and 5 is incredibly valuable because it inspired guidance on how to overcome sins in their lives. There is a theme to Paul's counsel, and it stems from the following parable of the Lord:

When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh

with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation (Matthew 12:43-45).

The house in this parable is a representation of our minds. The "unclean spirit" is a sin against which we struggle. The Lord's parable is a reminder that we should not contend against sin by just trying to drive it out through repression. It is not enough for us to just try to suppress desires and to berate ourselves for having them. That approach will leave a hole in our lives, symbolized in the parable by the clean, vacant house. That empty house ultimately gets filled with the original problem, plus new ones. The Lord's symbolism is a powerful reminder that when repression fails and the sin returns, we can be left feeling discouraged. Then the spiritual struggles in our lives can be magnified.

Paul wanted the Ephesians to end inappropriate thoughts and behaviors in their lives, not by merely repressing them, but rather by replacing them with something better. Paul wanted his readers to follow this advice; therefore, he repeated it over and over again in the fourth and fifth chapters of the epistle. In a similar section of Romans, Paul wrote:

Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12: 21).

That statement summarizes the guidance that he offered on this subject in Ephesians 4 and 5.

In Ephesians 4, Paul first gave his advice about replacing sin with Christ-like behavior in general terms. Then he applied it to specific sins. Starting as he did, with the general case, Paul wrote that the Ephesians should put off the old man, which represented their former way of life:

That ye *put off* concerning the former conversation *the old man,* which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts (Ephesians 4:22, emphasis added).

It was not enough for them to stop there, however. The Ephesians needed to endeavor to make the change permanent by putting on the new man. That is, they needed to fill the void by doing positive things that brought glory to God instead:

And that ye *put on the new man*, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness (Ephesians 4:24, emphasis added).

Paul then applied the principle to the case of specific sins.

12.3. The principle applied to specific sins

Lying was the first sin that Paul addressed.

Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another (Ephesians 4:25).

Note that Paul did not just tell the Ephesians to stop lying, which is a negative. He also told them to speak the truth, which is a positive. His words were a reflection of the mindset that they should have when combating sin. If they filled their heads with "don't lie," "don't lie," "don't lie," then they would constantly think about lying. Lying would dominate their thoughts, which could even make them more prone to telling lies.

The implication of Paul's advice was for them to focus on something positive instead. In the case of lying, it was speaking the truth. Paul recommended that the person who struggled with lying should make a conscious effort to do something positive – speak the truth.

Paul magnified the exhortation in verse 25 by incorporating a quote from the Old Testament in what he wrote. The phrase "speak every man truth with his neighbor" comes from Zechariah 8:16. Zechariah taught that speaking the truth was part of the process of recognizing God's active presence in the body of believers:

So again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah: fear ye not. These are the things that ye shall do; *Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour*; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD (Zechariah 8:15-17, emphasis added).

By harkening back to that passage, Paul was placing the importance of speaking the truth into its larger context. If we believe that God is actively working among us, then, as Zechariah taught and Paul echoed, we will not do things that God hates.

The next problem that Paul addressed was sin stemming from anger:

Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath. Neither give place to the devil. (Ephesians 4:26-27).

Paul did not directly identify a positive thought or action with which to replace sins driven by anger. Instead, he provided an example to consider. An example can be incredibly instructive, particularly when it comes to anger. The example that Paul offered is identified by means of the Old Testament passage that he quoted in Ephesians 4:26. Paul quoted the Greek-language, Septuagint rendering of Psalm 4:4:¹⁷⁸

Be ye angry, and sin not; feel compunction¹⁷⁹ upon your beds for what ye say in your hearts (Psalm 4:4, LXX).

Placing Psalm 4 in its historical context indicates why Paul quoted it. The preceding Psalm, Psalm 3, is about David's flight from Absalom.¹⁸⁰ Psalm 4, which is linked to Psalm 3 by the "Selah" at the end of Psalm 3, is also about David's flight.¹⁸¹

When David fled from Absalom, he was grievously cursed by Shimei, a man of the house of Saul. David's nephew, Abishai, was present at the time, and he was incensed by what was happening. He asked David's permission to cut off Shimei's head (2 Samuel 16:9).

¹⁷⁸ E. Sponberg, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians: An Epistle of Love* (Kingsgrove, Australia: Christadelphian Scripture Study Service, 1967), p. 83.

¹⁷⁹ "Compunction" means "a feeling of remorse, guilt, or regret." World English Dictionary. http://dictionary.reference.com. Accessed June 13, 2011.

¹⁸⁰ Note the heading to Psalm 3 in the King James Version and the Septuagint, for example.

¹⁸¹ J. Carter, The Letter to the Ephesians: An Exposition (London, United Kingdom: The Christadelphian, 1944), p. 105 and E. Sponberg, The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians: An Epistle of Love (Kingsgrove, Australia: Christadelphian Scripture Study Service, 1967), p. 83.

David was emotionally raw from the experience of having his beloved son, Absalom, rebel against him and attempt to take his life, and by cursing the king, Shimei was in clear violation of the Law, which states:

Thou shalt not revile the gods, *nor curse the ruler of thy people* (Exodus 22:28, emphasis added).

David was undoubtedly angry, and his feelings were justified, but he did not let his indignation get the better of him. David had retained the lesson he had learned during his encounters with Nabal and Abigail many years before, and he did not seek to avenge himself with his own hand (I Samuel 25:31, 33). David did not sin by sending Abishai to take Shimei's head. In fact, he rebuked Shimei for suggesting the idea (2 Samuel 16:10). (There is an echo of Abishai in "the devil" referred to in Ephesians 4:27 - the one believers should not "give place to.")

Anger can touch off a torrent of negative impulses in a person, and the words of Psalm 4 can be incredibly helpful when believers experience those feelings. The lines of that Psalm provide insight into David's thinking during the episode with Shimei, and they reveal the thoughts that helped to calm the waves of fury in his mind. They show how he was able to be angry and sin not.

Psalm 4:4 reveals that when David was angry at Shimei, he contemplated the negative, improper thoughts of his own heart, and he felt regret for them. He felt compunction. It is a reminder that recognizing our own failings can help us to respond more appropriately to the failures of others.

Psalm 4:5 reveals that David also focused on what his obligations to God were. His role was to "Offer the sacrifices of righteousness." Shimei's cursing gave David an opportunity to do exactly that by responding to it appropriately.

David also placed his trust in God. "Put your trust in the LORD," he wrote at the end of verse 5. He reminded himself that God was in charge of the situation and that God would care for him. "Thou hast put gladness in my heart," he wrote of God in verse 7, "more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased."

With these thoughts in mind, David was able to sleep after Shimei's cursing:

I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety (Psalm 4:8).

That is probably why Paul made reference to night in Ephesians 4:

Be ye angry, and sin not: *let not the sun go down upon your wrath* (Ephesians 4:26, emphasis added).

Paul's advice regarding anger was I) to seek to replace it with humility based on recognition of our own failings, 2) to focus on the responsibilities that God has given to us, and 3) to trust in God who cares for us.

Spiritual Growth: Handling anger If we follow David's example, the sun will not go down on their wrath. We will be able to sleep. We will be able to rest soundly with our trust placed firmly in God instead of tossing and turning, thinking, for example, of the zinger we wished we had unleashed on the person who said something unkind to us earlier in the day.

After addressing anger, Paul identified a number of sins and the positive thoughts and actions that believers should replace them with. The table below summarizes the sins and the replacements Paul identified for them in Ephesians 4 and 5:

Sin	Replacement
Stealing (4:28)	Working to provide for others who are less fortunate (4:28)
Corrupt communication (4:29)	Speech that builds up (4:29)
Bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil speaking, malice (4:31)	Kindness, tenderheartedness, forgiveness (4:32)
Lust – fornication, uncleanness, covetousness; filthiness; foolish talking; jesting (5:3, 4)	Giving thanks (5:4)
Keeping company with those who walk in darkness (5:7, 11)	Reproving wrongdoers and showing them the light (5:11-16)
Being unwise (5:17)	Understanding the will of the Lord (5:17)
Drunkenness (5:18)	Being filled with the Spirit-Word; singing uplifting, spiritual songs to yourself; giving thanks; and submitting yourself to others (5:18-21)

In Ephesians 5:21, Paul encouraged the Ephesians to submit "one to another in the fear of God." Submission to one another is part of the positive replacement that Paul recommended for drunkenness. When people drink heavily, they are typically thinking about themselves, not the needs of others. (Drunkenness often starts with self-seeking behavior, like "I'm ready to relax" or "I want to have a good time.") As the amount of alcohol that a person consumes increases, the help that he or she is able to offer to other people decreases. Moreover, when some people drink, they can become brash and self-assertive. To avoid falling into those kinds of behaviors, Paul encouraged the practice of submitting to others. A commitment to putting others' needs above one's own would certainly help to steer a person away from drinking too much.

Paul devoted a considerable amount of text to the subject of submission. The section spans from Ephesians 5:21 to 6:9. His remarks are structured as a three-fold application of the principle of submission. Paul first addressed the relationship between wives and husbands:

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord (Ephesians 5:22).

Next, he wrote about children and parents:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right (Ephesians 6:I).

Then he turned to servants and masters:

Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ (Ephesians 6:5).

Paul selected those three relationships – wives and husbands, children and parents, and masters and servants - as illustrations – at least in part – because they characterize our relationship to God. God is a husband to us:

For thy Maker is *thine husband*; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called (Isaiah 54:5, emphasis added).

He is also our Father, and He is our Master. Malachi I makes both points in one verse:

A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: *if then I be a father*, where is mine honour? and *if I be a master*, where is my fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name? (Malachi I:6, emphasis added).

Practicing principles of submission in our day-to-day interactions is a perfect way to understand God better and to learn to be more obedient to Him.

Paul wrote next about "the whole armour of God." That section spans from Ephesians 6: II-I7.

13. "The Whole Armour of God"

Paul draws lessons based on a Roman soldier's armor. He reminds the Ephesians of their obligations to God and the spiritual resources they have at their disposal.

13.1. Word cloud

This image below is a "word cloud." Word clouds are an excellent tool for examining a text, like a section of the Bible. The font size of each word in the image indicates how often that word appears in the text compared to the other words. Word clouds can provide an indicator of what key words of a passage are.

INSERT IMAGE: WORD CLOUD

This particular word cloud shows the section of Ephesians 6 where Paul wrote about "the whole armour of God." Two words that stand out are "God" and "ye." That indicates that this portion of the epistle has to do with a believer's relationship to God. Some other key words are "able" and "stand." Those words identify the particular aspect of the Ephesians' relationship to God that this section is about, which is what they needed to be "able" to "stand" for God.

The Greek word translated "stand" means "to stand immovable." The word can also mean "to stand ready or prepared." If the Ephesians were standing prepared and unwavering for God, it meant that they were holding their ground in the face of pressure to do things that they knew were not right. It meant that they were not cowering from opportunities to share their hope with others.

Standing for God can be a challenge. The pressures that believers face in the world can seem intimidating. They can push us to surrender our ground. They can come at us like an advancing army. To help us maintain our position, God has provided us with "armor." As the word cloud shows, that armor is a topic of this section of Ephesians. Paul described the advantages that would accrue to the Ephesians from choosing to "take" it and put it on.

Spiritual Growth:

What does our word cloud look like?

We should ask ourselves what a word cloud of our conversations in person and online would look like. Would the words "me," "mine," and "I" be in huge font? Would "Christ" be in tiny font over in the corner? Would we see evidence of the word "thankful" being used frequently? Would "kingdom" be prominently displayed? We want to be thoughtful about what we are saying and writing so that our words are a reflection of the mind of Christ.

¹⁸² The Greek word is *histemi*. It is Strong's number G2476. The definition is from J.H. Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testatment. e-Sword 9.9.0.

I3.2. Chained to a soldier

One of the reasons that Paul chose to use the symbol of a soldier to motivate the exhortation in this section of the Epistle was that he was a prisoner of Rome when he wrote to the Ephesians. As a result, he was chained to a soldier (Acts 28:16). The men who guarded Paul were from the imperial guard, otherwise known as "Praetorians." The soldiers who guarded Paul spent about four hours with him at a time before being relieved of their duty. Therefore, Paul had the opportunity to observe and interact with many of them during his imprisonment.

It was Paul's habit to draw spiritual lessons from watching the world around him. He told the people of Lystra, for example, that the rain and the fruits of the earth demonstrated the existence of God. 185 It is not surprising, therefore, that he derived spiritual insights from observing the soldiers he spent the day with and that he shared those thoughts with others, like the Ephesians, to encourage them.

Paul's character must have been an incredible contrast to what the soldiers were used to encountering from the other prisoners. It is probable that many of the soldiers would have asked Paul about his story. They also would have heard him talk about his faith with the visitors who came to see him.

Paul admired certain aspects of a soldier's life. For example, when Timothy was in Ephesus, Paul wrote to him:

Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier (2 Timothy 2:3-4, emphasis added).

When talking to the soldiers, Paul probably used the concepts of armor, duty, and other military ideas to explain his beliefs to them

In the Epistle to the Philippians, Paul mentioned the imperial guard's knowledge of his beliefs:

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that *it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ* (Philippians I:12-I3, English Standard Version, emphasis added).

Philippians was written around the same time as Ephesians, while Paul was a Roman prisoner. This passage indicates the kind of impact the Apostle was having with the soldiers with whom he was spending time.

It is possible that some of Paul's guards may have converted to Christianity. If that happened, they could have been a means by which the Gospel spread to Caesar's household since the Praetorians had access

¹⁸³ Paul may have been imprisoned on the site of the Praetorians' barracks. See "In all the palace." *Vincent's Word Studies*. Biblos.com http://www.biblos.com. Accessed June 25, 2011.

 ¹⁸⁴ J. Carter, *The Letter to the Ephesians: An Exposition* (London, United Kingdom: The Christadelphian, 1944), p. 122. See also "Acts 28. " Dwelling in the Word. http://dwellingintheword.wordpress.com. Accessed June 25, 2011.
 ¹⁸⁵ See Acts 14:8, 17.

to members of the imperial family.¹⁸⁶ At the end if Philippians, Paul mentioned that members of Caesar's family had converted to Christianity:

All the saints salute you, *chiefly they that are of Caesar's household* (Philippians 4:22, emphasis added).

I3.3. A warfare of ideas

Before Paul described the individual items that made up the "whole armour of God," he first wrote about the type of "fighting" in which they would be used. Paul made it clear that the Ephesians were involved in a war of the mind. They were fighting a battle of ideas and feelings:

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

The Ephesians' foes were the values championed by many of the leaders of their society – the "principalities," "powers," and "rulers of the darkness of this world." The world's values are particularly dangerous when they are picked up by believers and advocated within the ecclesia. That is why Paul noted that the Ephesians also wrestled "against spiritual wickedness in high places."

The contest that Paul described was a vigorous one in which there was only one winner. That is why he referred to it as a wrestling contest in verse 12. In first-century wrestling matches, two contestants grappled with each other until one man threw the other and then immobilized him by placing his hand on his neck.¹⁸⁷ Using the symbol of wrestling is a reminder that in the battle for our minds, there is only one winner. Either God's way is going to win – and we will live - or the way of the world is going to win – and we will die.

God wanted His way to prevail in the Ephesians' lives. That is why He has provided them with the armor that Paul described in verses I4 to I7. The armor consisted of equipment used for defense, such as the helmet and the breastplate. They would shield the Ephesians from the world's influences. The armor also included a piece of equipment used for offense - the sword. The Ephesians would use it to persuade others to forsake the world's values and to follow Christ. The sword was incredibly important. Without it, the Ephesians would be little more than moving targets covered in metal, as it were.

IMAGE IDEA: ROMAN SOLDIER WITH EQUIPMENT IDENTIFIED

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¹⁸⁶ J. Carter, *The Letter to the Ephesians: An Exposition* (London, United Kingdom: The Christadelphian, 1944), p. 122. ¹⁸⁷ The Greek word translated "wrestle" is *pale*. It is Strong's Number G3823. Thayer defines it as "wrestling (a contest between two in which each endeavours to throw the other, and which is decided when the victor is able to hold his opponent down with his hand upon his neck)." J.H. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testatment*. e-Sword 9.9.0.

13.4. "Your loins girt about with truth"

Paul listed the pieces of equipment in the order that a soldier would have put them on. ¹⁸⁸ The first piece of equipment that Paul wrote about was the girdle or belt. It is the item that is referred to in Bible verses about "girding up your loins."

"Girding up your loins" was necessary because in ancient times, men wore long, flowing garments called "tunics." If they wanted to do something active, they had to bind up their tunic. Running in a loose tunic was a lot like running in a bathrobe. A man would be in danger of tripping on his tunic, and it could get caught on things. Before they did something active, therefore, men would draw their tunics up tight around them. Then they would belt the loose parts to their body using their girdle. They used their girdle to "gird up."

For a soldier, a girdle did more than just make it possible for him to move with ease, however. It served other purposes as well. It held his breastplate in place, and the leather strips that hung down from it offered extra protection to his lower body. He also suspended the sheaf that held his sword from it.¹⁸⁹

The girdle encompassed a soldier, and it was an essential piece of his equipment. Those are among the reasons why Paul wrote that the girdle represented truth. The association may also be based on Isaiah II:5. That passage is a description of the Messiah that states:

And he shall have *his loins girt* with righteousness, and his sides clothed with truth (Isaiah II:5, LXX, emphasis added).

The symbol of the soldier reminded the Ephesians that if they lacked truth, their lives would be disheveled. They would be in great danger of stumbling in their spiritual walk. They would be at risk of getting caught up by the cares of this life, and they would be without valuable protection.

13.5. "Having on the breastplate of righteousness"

The next item that Paul mentioned was the breastplate. To understand its importance, imagine that you are in the midst of a raging battle. You and the man you are facing are both fighting for your lives. He raises his sword and brings it down on you with incredible might. You try to parry the blow with your sword, but you swing and miss. Then you make a final desperate attempt to push it to the side with your shield. Again, you miss.

Your mind flashes with what you believe will be your last thoughts as the man brings his sword crashing into your body. You brace yourself.

Then you hear, "CLANG!!!" Instead of delivering a death blow, however, the man's sword slams harmlessly into your breastplate. You step back unharmed. You are still alive. You are still standing. You have been saved by your breastplate. You raise your sword and plunge back into the battle.

Paul wrote that the breastplate represented righteousness, which is an echo of Isaiah 59:

¹⁸⁸ E. Sponberg, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians: An Epistle of Love* (Kingsgrove, Australia: Christadelphian Scripture Study Service, 1967), p. 116.

¹⁸⁹ "The Belt of Truth." Bible Study Guides. http://www.freebiblestudyguides.org. Accessed June 25, 2011.

For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke (Isaiah 59:17, emphasis added).

Righteousness would save the Ephesians from the blow of sin, the enemy, as it were. But it was not the Ephesians' righteousness that would do that:

But we are all as an unclean thing, and *all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags*; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away (Isaiah 64:6, emphasis added).

As Romans 3 and 4 explain, we are saved by the righteousness that is imputed to us based on our belief in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Even though sin may strike us hard, we are still counted righteous in God's sight because of our faith. And we live.

13.6. "Your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace"

The next item that Paul wrote about was a soldier's shoes. When people in the twenty-first century think about armor, they do not tend to pay much attention to footwear. Our focus is usually on the "high-profile" equipment, like the sword and the shield. When my sons play soldier, for example, they are very concerned about having swords and shields. I have never heard them express any concern about having the "right" soldier shoes, however.

Shoes were extremely important to a Roman soldier, however. To see why, image what a battlefield looked like to someone in the Roman army. There were dead and wounded men lying all around, and their sharp metal equipment was strewn all over the ground. An ancient battlefield could be an extremely dangerous place for a man's feet.

A soldier would be greatly hindered in battle if he sliced his foot open, and while fighting, he could not constantly scan the ground for every object that threatened his feet. A proper pair of shoes was essential to his success, therefore.

In addition to offering protection, a Roman soldier's shoes often had nails or spikes on the bottom. They helped him to hold his ground.¹⁹⁰

To Paul, the soldiers' shoes represented "the gospel of peace." His words are an echo of a prophecy concerning the Lord Jesus in Isaiah 52:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet *of him* that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth (Isaiah 52:7, emphasis added)!

Paul took those words concerning the Lord and applied them to believers in Romans 10:

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¹⁹⁰ "The Shoes of the Preparation of the Gospel of Peace." Bible Study Guides. http://www.freebiblestudyguides.org. Accessed June 25, 2011.

And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things (Romans I0:15, emphasis added)!

Under inspiration Paul changed "him" in Isaiah 52 to "them" in Romans 10. Paul was making the point that believers have a responsibility to continue the work of the Lord by proclaiming the Gospel. That change from Isaiah to Romans is a powerful reminder that the actions that defined the character of the Lord should be manifest in his followers as well.

A commitment to preaching would help keep the Ephesians from stumbling into frivolous pursuits that could harm them. Gospel proclamation was an important part of their walk, and they often literally used their feet to do it. Shoes were an incredibly fitting symbol, therefore, for "the gospel of peace."

13.7. "The shield of faith"

Paul next wrote about the shield. His words were:

Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked (Ephesians 6:16).

Paul did not mean "above all" in the sense of importance. He was not saying, "Above all else, take your shield." The Greek phrase means "over all" in the sense of covering. Roman shields were large. 191 They covered almost all of a soldier's body. The Greek word for shield is derived from the word for "door." The idea was that the shields that the Romans used were almost as big as a door. 192

Roman shields were not flat like doors, however. They were curved on the outside, and they were often covered in oiled animal hide. Consequently, when arrows, spears, or swords struck them, they would be deflected. The soldier bearing the shield would not feel the full force of the blow. He also would not be left with a shield that had arrows and other objects sticking out of it. Having a shield with arrows and blades lodged in it would be hard for a soldier to use. It would also be dangerous to those around him.

The Psalmist wrote about the spiritual meaning of the shield:

He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: *his truth shall* be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day (Psalm 91:4-5, emphasis added).

The Psalm used the shield as a symbol for God's truth. In Ephesians 6, Paul wrote that the shield represented faith. The idea is connected to the Psalms' passage: a believer's faith is in God's truth.

Paul taught that faith was a shield that could quench "the fiery darts of the wicked." Fire arrows were terrifying weapons in the ancient world. A soldier could catch fire if he were struck by one.

¹⁹¹ Roman shields could have a height of three-and-a-half feet and a width of nearly three feet. See "The Shield of Faith." Bible Study Guides. http://www.freebiblestudyguides.org. Accessed June 30, 2011.

¹⁹² E. Sponberg, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians: An Epistle of Love* (Kingsgrove, Australia: Christadelphian Scripture Study Service, 1967), p. 118.

¹⁹³ R. Abel, *Quenching All the Fiery Darts of the Wicked: Lessons from Ephesus, the Ecclesia of the Cayster River* (Grand Valley, Ontario: Christadelphian Study Notes, 1981), p. 68 - 69.

Even if he was not directly hit, the flames of fire arrows could spread, and he could still find himself engulfed. Fire arrows could be an effective strategy for making a foe panic.

For believers, "the fiery darts of the wicked" represent all of the ideas that the world develops to try to terrify us into not believing in God. For example, members of the scientific community make claims that call into question the existence of God. Many intellectuals, members of the media, and even religious leaders plainly state or strongly imply that belief in the inspiration of the Bible is naïve and antiquated. Those assertions could be frightening, but faith extinguishes their challenge. It deflects their force away, just like a shield.

Paul's use of the Romans' shield to represent faith was also a powerful reminder of the benefit that the Ephesians gained from being a part of a community of believers. The Romans had an incredibly effective battle formation known as "the tortoise." It involved the collective use of their shields. The men in a unit would close ranks and form a rectangle. The soldiers on the perimeter of the rectangle would hold their shields up in front of them. The soldiers in the interior of the rectangle would hold their shields above them. The result was a shell in which everyone inside was protected from the enemy's projectiles. 194

Roman soldiers kept themselves a much safer in battle by using their shields to protect one another. Paul's choice of imagery was a powerful reminder for the Ephesians to stand ready to share their faith with one another. It was also an encouragement for them to lean on one another for strength.

I3.8. "And take the helmet of salvation"

The next item that Paul wrote about was the "helmet of salvation." His words are an echo of Isaiah, who prophesied that the Messiah would put on a "helmet of salvation:"

For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and *an helmet of salvation* upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke (Isaiah 59:17).

By hearkening back to that passage, Paul was encouraging the Ephesians to develop themselves spiritually, as Christ did, so that their thinking would become like his.

A helmet protects a soldier's head, which is the source of his thoughts. There are many threats to the Ephesians' minds. They include pride, stress, disappointment, and spiritual indifference. The hope of salvation could serve as a wonderful protection against those dangers.

13.9. "And the sword of the Spirit"

The final item that Paul identified was the soldier's sword. It was the only offensive weapon that he included in the description of "the whole armour of God."

There were many offensive weapons that Roman soldiers carried that Paul could have selected for the symbol. Roman soldiers used spears. They also had bows and arrows, but Paul selected a sword to use

¹⁹⁴ "The Shield of Faith." Bible Study Guides. http://www.freebiblestudyguides.org. Accessed June 30, 2011.

as a symbol. In fact, he chose a particular kind of sword. ¹⁹⁵ It was the *machaira*. ¹⁹⁶ The *machaira* was not a long broadsword like knights use to carry in the Middle Ages. Instead, it had a curved blade that was about 18 inches long. The *machaira* was essentially a large knife. *Machairas* were used in close hand-to-hand fighting – the kind of struggle where a soldier looked his opponent in the eye. They were not used to strike someone in the distance who could barely be seen.

Paul wrote that the *machaira* represented the "word of God." The Greek word that is translated "word" is *rhema.*¹⁹⁷ It means "the spoken word," which is the Word of God that we speak to others. Paul's imagery is an echo of Isaiah 49:

And *he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword*; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me (Isaiah 49:2).

Paul chose to represent the spoken word of God by the *machaira* because it is most effective when used at the same range as the *machaira* – when a person is up close to another, looking him in the eye. That is the kind of interaction that Paul envisioned the Ephesians having. He wanted them to engage in personal conversations with people about the Bible. He wanted them to use the skills they had developed with the Word to persuade people on a one-to-one basis.

Spiritual Growth: Wielding the machaira

The symbol of the *machaira* is an incredible call to action. It is a call for to us to learn the Bible and understand its lessons, to develop the skills to persuade others about the Bible through our words, and to seize the opportunity to talk to others, face-to-face, about the hope that is in us.

The Ephesians were in the midst of a raging battle. God wanted them to overcome their spiritual foes. He wanted them to live and to help others to live as well, so He provided them with a magnificent array of armor. Roman soldiers were protected from head to toe. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, all of that equipment was available to them. They just needed to take it, put it on, and use it as God had directed.

¹⁹⁵ There were different kinds of swords that Roman soldiers could carry. Two types of swords appear in Revelation. There is the *machaira* (e.g., Revelation 6:4) and the longer *rhomphaia* (e.g., Revelation 1:16). *The New Testament Greek Lexicon* defines *machaira* as "a small sword, as distinguished from a large sword." See "Machaira." *The New Testament Greek Lexicon*. http://www.studylight.org. Accessed June 30, 2011.

¹⁹⁶ It is Strong's Number G3162. J. Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1995).

¹⁹⁷ It is Strong's number G4487. J.H. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testatment*. e-Sword 9.9.0.

14. Concluding the epistle

Paul concludes his epistle by asking the Ephesians to pray for him. His final words are about their love for the Lord Jesus.

14.1. "That ye also may know my affairs"

After writing about "the whole armour of God," Paul asked the Ephesians to include him in their prayers:

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak (Ephesians 6:18-21).

Then Paul told the Ephesians that Tychicus could provide them more details about his circumstances:

But that ye also may know my affairs, and how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things: Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that ye might know our affairs, and that he might comfort your hearts (Ephesians 6:21-22).

The placement of those thoughts side-by-side is probably significant. The connection seems to be that Paul wanted Tychicus to provide the Ephesians with specific information about his circumstances so that the Ephesians could use that information in their prayers for Paul to make specific requests on his behalf. This connection seems to be yet another reminder that Paul wanted the first-century believers to include specifics in the prayers that they offered.

I4.2. "In sincerity"

Paul then concluded the Epistle. The ending does not contain a list of greetings like so many of Paul's other letters. Paul's final words were:

Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in *sincerity*. Amen (Ephesians 6:24, emphasis added).

Paul did not use the Greek word rendered "sincerity," which appears in verse 24, in the ending of any of his other epistles. He did use that word elsewhere, however. It appears in passages such as Romans 2:7, for example. There it is rendered "immortality." ¹⁹⁸

"Immortality" was a gift that the Ephesian believers hoped to have one day, and Paul's words reminded them that the character that they hoped to have at that time needed to be in development then.

¹⁹⁸ The Greek word is *aphtharsia*. It is Strong's Number G861. It is translated "incorruption" four times and "immortality" two times. It is rendered "sincerity" two times. J. Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1995).

Their love for the Lord Jesus needed to be incorruptible. They were to strive to make it like that of an immortal.

15. "The time of my departure is at hand"

Paul is released from prison but is arrested again during the Emperor Nero's savage persecution of the Christians. The ecclesias of Asia turn from Paul in terror. Paul writes to Timothy to encourage him not to fear, citing the example of a faithful brother from Ephesus. Knowing that his life is drawing to a close, Paul exhorts Timothy, who assumes the leadership of the ecclesia at Ephesus.

15.1. July 19, 64 AD

Paul wrote the Epistle to the Ephesians while he was a Roman prisoner. His Epistles to Titus and his Second Epistle to Timothy reveal that he was released from prison for a time and indicate that he was able to move about freely. For example, Titus 3 mentions him going to the city of Nicopolis:

When I shall send Artemas unto thee, or Tychicus, be diligent to come unto me *to Nicopolis*: for I have determined there to winter (Titus 3:12, emphasis added).

He also made reference to a trip to Miletum in 2 Timothy:

Erastus abode at Corinth: but Trophimus *have I left at Miletum* sick (2 Timothy 4:20, emphasis added).

INSERT MAP: NICOPOLIS, MILETUM

Paul's situation (and that of all the Christians) changed dramatically in 64 AD, however. On the night of July 19, the Great Fire of Rome occurred. It damaged or destroyed 70 percent of the city. The Roman Emperor Nero sought to be regarded as a great artist, and the Roman historian Cassius Dio claimed that while the fire raged, Nero put on a stage costume and played a dirge for the burning city on his lyre. Pegardless of whether that was part of his reaction, the Roman populace was enraged at Nero because they believed that he had started the fire. Seeking to shift their fury away from him, he blamed the fire on the Christians, and he began a savage persecution of them. The historian, Tacitus, who was alive at the time, describes what happened as follows:

Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians [or Chrestians] by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius

¹⁹⁹ Cassius Dio, Roman History LXII.18. http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cassius Dio, Accessed December 30, 2011.

²⁰⁰ Tacitus wrote that Nero opened public buildings and his private gardens during the fire to shelter people who had been made homeless. He stated that the charge that Nero had played on the lyre while the city was in flames was "a rumor" that "had gone forth everywhere." See *The Annals*. Book 15. Section 39. http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The Annals (Tacitus). Accessed December 30, 2011.

²⁰¹ Tacitus, *The Annals*. Book 15. Section 44. http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The Annals (Tacitus). Accessed June 22, 2010.

²⁰² The fire permitted Nero to rebuild sections of the city according to his design and to purchase land that he wanted cheaply. See E. Knox. "Julio-Claudian Emperors: Fires, Friends, Foes." *History of Western Civilization*. https://boisestate.edu. Accessed December 30, 2011.

Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car. Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed.²⁰³

The Romans apprehended Paul and put him in prison. He realized that he was going to be executed, and he wrote 2 Timothy as the time of his death drew near. The epistle reveals how much Paul and the members of the ecclesia at Ephesus were affected by Nero's persecution, and it shows how the Ephesians were very much on the mind of the Apostle during that challenging time.

15.2. "He oft refreshed me"

During his ministry, the Lord Jesus taught the importance of caring for those who were imprisoned for his sake. In speaking of his Second Coming, the Lord said:

Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, *or in prison*, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me (Matthew 25:37-40, emphasis added).

During the time of Paul's final imprisonment, however, many believers did not show him the kindness of a visit and were unwilling to lend him their support. Paul wrote that at his preliminary hearing before the authorities, none of his Christian friends were willing to appear with him:

At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge (2 Timothy 4:16).

Paul's was left to stand alone even though his old foe, Alexander the coppersmith, who was from Ephesus, testified against him:

²⁰³ Tacitus, *The Annals*. Book 15. Section 44. http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The Annals (Tacitus). Accessed June 22, 2010.

Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words (2 Timothy 4:14-15).

Nero was trying to suppress the rebellion that was seething against his reign at this time, so Alexander probably claimed that Paul had been the cause of a great public disturbance – the Silversmiths' Riot - in Ephesus. Especially given the political climate, that charge certainly would not have given the Emperor a favorable impression of the Apostle.

Many Christians were terrified of being associated with Paul during Nero's persecution. Paul wrote to Timothy, who was in Ephesus, that all of the ecclesias in Asia had turned away from him:

This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me; of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes (2 Timothy I:15).

Their abandonment of Paul must have been heartbreaking for him. Yet Paul maintained his reliance on the Lord, and he tried to strengthen the faith of those who were faltering.

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. And 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! (2 Timothy 4:17-18)

The Christians feared the cruel persecutions that Nero was meting out against them. Even Timothy was showing signs of timidity. Paul wrote:

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner. but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God (2 Timothy 1:7-8, emphasis added).

To encourage Timothy, Paul wrote about the wonderful example of a brother from the ecclesia at Ephesus. His name was Onesiphorus, which means "profit bringer."²⁰⁴

The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain: But, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me. The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day: and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well (2 Timothy I:16-18).

Onesiphorus had ministered to Paul while he was in Ephesus, but that service was probably easy and safe compared to what he did while Paul was a prisoner in Rome. Onesiphorus traveled to the capital of the Empire, and there he sought out the Apostle. Visiting the prisons of Rome and inquiring about a well-known Christian prisoner was probably extremely dangerous during the final years of the region of mad Emperor Nero. But not only did Onesiphorus seek out Paul, he also did it "very diligently" (2

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²⁰⁴ J. Rutherfurd. "Onesiphorus." *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. http://www.searchgodsword.org. Accessed June 25, 2010.

Timothy I:17). He kept asking and looking until he located the Apostle. Once he found Paul, Onesiphorus cared for him. Paul wrote that Onesiphorus "refreshed" him and that he did so often (2 Timothy I:16). Onesiphorus was not put off by Paul's circumstances. Paul wrote that Onesiphorus was "not ashamed of my chain" (2 Timothy I:16).

Spiritual Growth: Visiting those "in prison"

It is unlikely that many of us will have the opportunity in the near future to visit a person who has literally been imprisoned and faces execution for his or her beliefs. However, that does not mean that we cannot show kindness to those who are "in prison," as it were. There are many believers who are bound with the chains of sickness, loneliness, poverty, and the distresses of this life and whose prognoses look grim. Some of them may even have a death sentence, as it were, from a grave illness or accident. It can be all too easy to allow brothers, sisters, and young people in those circumstances to slip our minds, especially when their difficulties keep them from attending services regularly. Nevertheless, we have a particular obligation to reach out to them and not to forget them:

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world (James 1:27).

We must resist the temptation to allow our own busyness - or whatever else gets in the way - from preventing us from ministering to those who are bound with chains. Onesiphorus found it in his heart to visit Paul even when it meant risking his life to do so. Sometimes comforting those "in prison" requires us to sacrifice something of ourselves, but whatever it may take, that sacrifice is worth making because, ultimately, it is for the Lord Jesus.

Paul mentions Onesiphorus by name again in 2 Timothy 4:

Salute Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus (2 Timothy 4:19, emphasis added).

The wording in this verse is note worthy. Paul asked Timothy to salute Onesiphorus' household but not Onesiphorus himself. Likewise, in 2 Timothy I, Paul implored God to show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus now, but he asked for mercy for Onesiphorus "in that day" two verses later (2 Timothy I:16, 18). "In that day" is probably a reference to the Resurrection.²⁰⁵

It is likely that Onesiphorus had died by the time that 2 Timothy was written.²⁰⁶ It is possible that he lost his life because of his service to Paul, which is a sobering thought to consider. Nonetheless, Onesiphorus knew what he was doing when he did it. He was a man of faith, and he will rise in the Resurrection. He set an example of courage and unselfishness for Timothy, for the ecclesia at Ephesus, and for believers throughout the ages. The Bible's short record of his life speaks volumes.

²⁰⁵ This is not a prayer for the dead. It is an expression of hope. See T. Barling. 1973. "Onesiphorus." *The Christadelphian*. 110, electronic edition. Logos Library System. Christadelphian Magazine and Publishing Association.

²⁰⁶ Note as well that the emphasis in the record is on what Onesiphorus had done and not on what he was doing.

15.3. "I charge thee therefore"

Paul warned Timothy that his death was near.

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand (2 Timothy 4:6, emphasis added).

Paul asked Timothy to come to Rome quickly before winter arrived (2 Timothy 4:21). That request suggests that Paul probably wrote in the fall, probably the autumn of 67 AD. According to tradition, Paul was executed shortly before Nero was forced to commit suicide in the summer of 68 AD.²⁰⁷

Even though Paul was facing execution and had been abandoned by many friends, his thoughts were still on others. He wanted Timothy to ensure that the Gospel was being passed on to "faithful men:"

And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also (2 Timothy 2:2).

Paul also continued to be concerned about the rise of false doctrine in Ephesus. For example, some in the ecclesia were teaching that the resurrection had passed:

And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, *saying that the resurrection is past already*; and overthrow the faith of some (2 Timothy 2:17-18, emphasis added).

This corruption of the Gospel – Paul literally calls it "gangrene" in verse 17^{208} - was part of the rise of a group of false doctrines and associated practices that later came to be known as Gnosticism. The Gnostics did much to undermine the beliefs and the lifestyle that were taught in the first century ecclesias by the Apostles. Gnosticism endured for a thousand years, and its influence persists to our day. (See Appendix 6.2 for more information on Gnosticism.)

With Paul's death impending, it was going to be up to Timothy to lead the ecclesia in Ephesus. Paul warned him that resisting false doctrine was to be a major component of that role:

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears (2 Timothy 4:I-3, emphasis added).

To be successful, Timothy would have to lead by word and by example.

2 Timothy was Paul's final epistle, and many of his last recorded words in it are about those who were or who had been members of the ecclesia at Ephesus. He mentioned Titus in 2 Timothy 4:10. He wrote of dispatching Tychichus to Ephesus in 2 Timothy 4:12. He referred to Alexander in verses 14 and

²⁰⁷ T. Constable. 2010. Notes on 2 Timothy. Sonic Light. http://www.soniclight.com. Accessed June 26, 2010.

²⁰⁸ The Greek word is gaggraina. It is Strong's Number GI044. J. Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1995).

²⁰⁹ J. Allfree. 1995. "Ephesus: The Loss of First Love." *The Testimony* 65(775), p. 253.

15. Priscilla, Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus were the subjects of verse 19. He wrote of Erastus and Trophimus in verse 20:

Be diligent to come to me quickly; 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 come²¹⁰--and the books, especially the parchments. *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. 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. And 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! Greet *Prisca and Aquila*, and the *household of Onesiphorus*. *Erastus* stayed in Corinth, but *Trophimus* I have left in Miletus sick (2 Timothy 4:9-20, emphasis added).

Paul had spent years interacting with the Ephesians. That ecclesia was obviously affectionately recalled and very much on his mind at the end of his life.

Tradition records that Timothy assumed the leadership of the ecclesia at Ephesus following Paul's death and that he labored there for many years. It is said that he was killed by an angry mob of Diana worshippers whom he tried to reprove.²¹¹

I Timothy indicates that Timothy had not initially felt up to the task of leading the ecclesia at Ephesus (e.g., I Timothy I:3). He was young, sickly, and naturally retiring. At least some in the meeting resisted his leadership at first (I Timothy 4:12). The Scriptures' record also indicates that he had a major challenge before him because false teachers, in particular, were looking to make inroads in the ecclesia at Ephesus.

Nonetheless, the Bible characterizes Timothy as a man of tremendous faith, and Paul, whom he strived to follow, taught him not to trust in his natural abilities or in other people, but to lean on God instead (e.g., 2 Timothy 4:17).²¹² It is interesting, therefore, to consider the indication that the Bible provides of the success that Timothy ultimately experienced as an elder in the ecclesia at Ephesus. When the Lord addressed the eldership of that ecclesia in the Apocalypse nearly thirty years later, Ephesus was commended as a doctrinally sound meeting (Revelation 2:2, 6). That assessment is no doubt, in part, a reflection of Timothy's work as an elder among them.²¹³

²¹⁰ Verse I3 contains the only practical matter pertaining to Paul's personal comfort.

²¹¹ T. Benson, 1970. "A Study in the Life of Timothy, (8) Conclusion." The Testimony 40(472), p 159.

²¹² These concluding words of Paul were undoubtedly meant to help prepare Timothy for the task ahead of him.

²¹³ Some commentators have suggested that Timothy was "the angel," or the elder, of the ecclesia at Ephesus to whom the message of Revelation was sent. T. Benson, 1970. "A Study in the Life of Timothy, (8) Conclusion." *The Testimony* 40(472), p 160.

Spiritual Growth: Following the example of Timothy

There are many valuable lessons for believers in considering the story of Timothy and the Ephesian ecclesia. One of them stands out in particular. That is, no matter what our start is like, no matter what natural abilities and inclinations we have, and no matter what the obstacles that confront us are, we can still serve God and bring glory to Him through the things that we do if we chose to look past ourselves, place our trust in Him, and persevere, as Timothy did.

16. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life"

The Apostle John moves to Ephesus later in his life. He is imprisoned by the Romans on the nearby island of Patmos. The Lord directs him to send a letter in symbol, Revelation, to seven ecclesias in Asia, including Ephesus. The letter contains a specific message to the Ephesian ecclesia.

16.1. "I John, who also am your brother"

The Bible's reference to the ecclesia at Ephesus extends beyond the life of the Apostle Paul. The Ephesian ecclesia appears again in the opening chapters of Revelation, approximately 30 years after 2 Timothy was written.

According to tradition, the Apostle John made his way to Ephesus after he left Jerusalem and spent many years there. The Bible provides some evidence to support this claim. When John was imprisoned by the Romans, he was sent to the island of Patmos, which is about 60 miles from Ephesus.²¹⁴ (It seems reasonable that John would have been imprisoned not far from where he had been living.) If John was in Ephesus near the end of his life, then the Gospel of John and I, 2, and 3 John were probably written from there.^{215,216} (See Appendix 6 for an overview of the Apostle John's later years and the evidence that he lived in and around Ephesus during that time.) John was also the writer of the Book of Revelation.

At first glance, Revelation is a somewhat intimidating book. It is helpful to remember, therefore, that it is fundamentally a letter. It is a letter from the Lord Jesus Christ to seven ecclesias in Asia, including Ephesus.

Revelation was a circular letter; that is, it was intended to be read and then passed from ecclesia to ecclesia. John wrote the letter from Patmos, one of the Greek Islands in the Aegean Sea, which is to the south of Ephesus. John was a prisoner on Patmos when he received the Apocalypse:

I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was *in the isle that is called Patmos*, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ (Revelation I:9, emphasis added).

Ephesus was the closest ecclesia to Patmos. It had most likely been John's base of operations, and it was the center from which the other ecclesias that are mentioned in Revelation were probably established. Ephesus is the first ecclesia addressed in Revelation. If the letter traveled in the order in which the ecclesias in Revelation are addressed, then from Patmos the letter went to Ephesus, then Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatria, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. That is a logical route that would have brought the letter

²¹⁴ The people of Ephesus erected a temple to Domitian during whose reign John was imprisoned. H.P. Mansfield. 1974. "Ephesus: City of Splendor." *Logos.* 40(August), p. 359.

²¹⁵ D. Wallace. "I John: Introduction, Argument, and Outline." Bible.org. http://bible.org. Accessed June 29, 2010.

²¹⁶ Some commentators also believe that Jude was written to the Ephesians, although the Biblical and external evidence is weak. (But note Jude I7 - 18 and compare it to Paul's final address to the elders of Ephesus.) See D. Wallace. "Jude: Introduction, Argument, and Outline." Bible.org. http://bible.org. Accessed June 29, 2010.

from the coast to the interior of Asia. It was then spread throughout the Christian world. For these reasons, it is likely that Ephesus was the first ecclesia to receive the Apocalypse.²¹⁷

INSERT MAP: PATMOS, EPHESUS, 7 ECCLESIAS

16.2. A message in symbol

There are a lot of negative statements about Rome in Revelation. The Apocalypse warned the ecclesias that the Roman authorities were going to persecute them, and it showed that the Roman Empire would be punished and ultimately overthrown. Revelation also warned the ecclesias that the false beliefs they had been encountering were going to spread. Eventually, false Christianity was going to take over the government of Rome, and the result would be a political power founded on false beliefs. This political power would exist for centuries and would persecute believers. The passage of time would force it to change its appearance, but it would continue to oppose God until it was overthrown by Christ at his return. The destruction of the city of Rome itself would be part of that process.

It is easy to imagine how the Roman authorities would have reacted if they had intercepted a circulating letter, which clearly stated that their government was in opposition to God and was going to be destroyed, along with their beloved city. They would immediately have struck out with all of their might against Christianity, which was at that time still a very small and fragile movement.

To keep the authorities oblivious to its message and to require effort given in faith on the part of believers to understand it, the Lord Jesus gave his message to the ecclesias in symbol. In Revelation 2, for example, he used the term "the devil" to describe the Roman authorities:

Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, *the devil* shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life (Revelation 2:10, emphasis added).

Later in the chapter, he used the term "Satan" in referring to Rome:

And to the angel of the church in *Pergamos* write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; I know thy works, and *where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is*: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth (Revelation 2:12-13, emphasis added).

Revelation was initially sent to Christians in Asia, who were familiar with Pergamos as a center of Roman administrative activity in the province.²¹⁸ The use of the phrase "where Satan's seat is" to describe the city of Pergamos in the context of the Lord's message to the elders of the ecclesia there would have strongly suggested that the term "Satan" represented Rome.

In Revelation 12, the Roman Empire is symbolized by "a great red dragon."

²¹⁷ R. Abel, *Quenching All the Fiery Darts of the Wicked: Lessons from Ephesus, the Ecclesia of the Cayster River* (Grand Valley, Ontario: Christadelphian Study Notes, 1981), p. 83.

²¹⁸ G. Tsetskhladze. "Anatolia" in *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece*. N. Wilson, Editor. (New York, New York: Taylor & Francis, 2006) p. 43.

And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a *great red dragon*, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads (Romans 12:3, emphasis added).

The draco, a dragon, was the standard of the late Roman military.²¹⁹ The period of its use by the armies of Rome coincides with the time symbolized in Revelation 12.

Many of the symbols used in Revelation were first used in the Old Testament. Those that are unique to Revelation are defined within the Book. The Christian communities that received the Apocalypse would have devoted an incredible amount of time to pondering its meaning. (It was, after all, a message from the Lord Jesus.) Although some of the Book's message would require the passage of time to be fully grasped, the early Christians would have understood much of what it was signifying. (The same is true of our day. We read and think about the prophecies related to the return of Christ. We know that he is coming back, and we know the signs of his coming. But there are many details of Christ's return that we will only learn by actually experiencing them as they happen.) The Roman authorities would have never devoted the time necessary to understanding the symbols of the Book.²²⁰ They would have quickly dismissed the Apocalypse as nonsense.

To the Ephesian ecclesia and other early believers, however, the Apocalypse was of tremendous value. It illustrated the extent to which God cared for them. The first century Christians would have seen in the many visions of the book how God was going to cause kingdoms to rise and to fall for the purpose of developing the characters of His people. They would see that the mighty rulers and powerful kingdoms that would capture the imaginations of millions of the world's people were only instruments in the hands of God for saving those who believed in Him.

Spiritual Growth: Perspective on tumultuous times

The process of God working in the nations to refine the character of His people and to set the stage for the return of His Son to the earth is continuing in our day. When we see tumult in the world around us, we need to remember that the things that are occurring are taking place with God's glory and our salvation as their end. In 2 Corinthians, Paul writes,

For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God (2 Corinthians 4:15, emphasis added).

16.3. "Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write"

In addition to describing the rise and fall of political powers in symbol, the Book of Revelation also contains specific messages from the Lord Jesus Christ to seven of the ecclesias in Asia. The first ecclesia addressed was Ephesus. The content of that letter spans Revelation 2:I-7:

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²¹⁹ R. Vermaat. 2010. "The Draco, the Late Roman military standard." Fectio. http://www.fectio.org.uk. Accessed January 8, 2011

²²⁰ Even today, the agents of Rome have no idea what the Apocalypse is about.

Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God (Revelation 2:I-7, emphasis added).

The Lord's message to "the angel," or eldership, of Ephesus began with him calling himself "he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." The Lord used those words because they were taken from the first vision that John received in Revelation I

And *in the midst of the seven candlesticks* one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle (Revelation I:13, emphasis added).

And *he had in his right hand seven stars*: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength (Revelation I:16, emphasis added).

The vision in Revelation I is of Christ and the immortalized saints in the future. The Lord referred to components of that vision in every one of the letters to the seven ecclesias. He did so to remind the ecclesias why he was writing to them: he was giving them a message that would develop their characters and make them fit to be kings and priests in the Kingdom of God, as symbolized in the vision in Revelation I.²²²

The symbol of the Lord walking among the ecclesias was taken from the Old Testament. There it is used to signify God's protection, as well as His detailed awareness of what is going on among His people:

Because the LORD your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and to give up your enemies before you, therefore your camp must be holy, so that he may not see anything indecent among you and turn away from you (Deuteronomy 23:14, English Standard Version, emphasis added).

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²²¹ See Psalm 18:35 and 20:6 for the use of the right hand as a symbol for God's saving strength.

²²² By using the symbol of walking among the ecclesias, the Lord demonstrated that he was not merely judging them from a distance. Instead, he was there to help them, if they would turn to him and seek the aid that he was willing to provide.

Spiritual Growth: The Lord in our midst

It is of the utmost importance that we remember that the Lord Jesus Christ continues "to walk" in our ecclesias today. What we do is observed by him. That awareness should certainly guide what we say and do. Moreover, we also want his feet to tread, as it were, in the little ecclesias of our homes. Therefore, we should ask ourselves if there is "anything indecent" there that could cause him offense and which should be removed.

16.4. The Ephesians' labors

In Revelation 2:2, the Lord stated that he was aware of the labor of the ecclesia, and he commended it. The Greek word used in this verse is essentially the same Greek word rendered "labouring" in Paul's farewell address to the elders of Ephesus:²²³

I have shewed you all things, how that so *labouring* ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35, emphasis added).

The connection indicates that the Ephesians had heeded Paul's instructions regarding following the example of the Lord and caring for the weak. They had listened to him and responded accordingly.

The Greek word that the Lord used to describe the Ephesians' labors is vivid in the Greek. It is from the Greek word that means "a cut" but which can be used for "toil." The sense behind that rendering is that is that there is a kind of exhausting labor that pains a person and drains him – just like a deep cut would. That is the kind of work the Ephesians were doing. The Lord's approval of their determined efforts is a theme of his message to them. Their labors are mentioned again in verse 3 where the important detail is given that they did their work for the sake of the name of Christ. They were not just doing the right thing, therefore. They were also doing it for the right reason, which was to honor Christ.

The Ephesians' labor did not just occur in erratic bursts. It was continual and had been sustained over a long period. The Lord commends their "patience" in verse 2. Strong defines the word as meaning "cheerful (or hopeful) endurance, constancy."²²⁵ That same word appears again when that commendation is repeated in verse 3 for emphasis.

One of the areas where the Ephesians' labors had paid off was in their resistance to false teaching. The Ephesians "tried" the teachings that people were introducing into the ecclesia (verse 2). Strong

²²³ In Acts 20, the Greek word is *kopiao*. It is Strong's Number G2872. It is from a derivative of *kopos*, which is Strong's Number G2873, and the word used in Revelation 2:2. J. Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1995).

²²⁴ Kopos is from the Greek word kopto, which is Strong's Number G2875. J. Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1995).

²²⁵ The Greek word is *hupomone*. It is Strong's Number G5281. J. Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1995).

defines the Greek word used for "tried" as "to test (objectively)."²²⁶ The Ephesians had compared people's teachings with the Truth, and because they knew the Truth so well, they could tell the difference between the Gospel message and corruptions of it. Consequently, they were able to reject the errors promulgated by false apostles.

Spiritual Growth: Trying false teachers

In our day, the Gospel is, in general, less frequently opposed in the ecclesia by those advocating firmly held, clearly articulated errors, such as claims that the Resurrection has already passed. Instead, the doctrinal soundness of our community is probably more imperiled by the teachings of indifference, humanism, and materialism, which are frequently conveyed subtlety by example. There are some notable departures from the clear teachings of Scripture that are being forcefully advocated in certain circles, but the doctrines of "it doesn't really matter" and "I can do what I want" are certainly among our greatest threats. We cannot reject false teachings, such as these, if we cannot even identify them as such. It is essential to our continued success as a community, therefore, that each of us understands what we claim to believe. Thorough knowledge of the Bible can help us to assess the messages conveyed in our ecclesias against the standard of Scripture, and, when necessary, it can expose them as false, just like it could for the errors that appeared in the first century ecclesia in Ephesus.

I6.5. Hate and love

In verse 6, the Lord commended the Ephesians, in particular, for hating "the deeds of the Nicolaitans," which he also hated. "Nicolaitans" means "vanquishers of the people."²²⁷ The Bible reveals nothing more about them. The Lord Jesus considered the beliefs and practices of the group to be very wrong. The fact that the specific teachings advanced by the Nicolaitans are not identified in the Bible makes the Lord's message concerning them generalizable to believers in all places and times.²²⁸ We all have some Nicolaitan inclinations in us, and the world is full of Nicolaitan-ism. We need to hate those behaviors that dishonor God, just as the Lord Jesus did. Of him, it is said:

Thou hast loved righteousness, *and hated iniquity*; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows (Hebrews I:9, emphasis added).

Although the Ephesians had done right in their persistent toil in the name of the Lord and in opposing false teaching, deficiencies had nonetheless developed in their service. The Lord said:

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²²⁶ The Greek word is *peirazo*. It is Strong's Number G3985. J. Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1995).

²²⁷ H.P. Mansfield, *The Book of Revelation: Verse by Verse Exposition* (West Beach, Australia: Logos), p.43.

²²⁸ See A. Barnes. *Notes on the Bible. e-Sword 9.9.0* for a summary of the evidence on the beliefs and practices of the Nicolaitans from outside of the Bible. For a summary of beliefs the Nicolaitans may have held see J. Thomas. *Eurkea*. Volume I. (New York, New York: John Thomas, I861), p. 197-204. Commonly cited historical sources on the Nicolaitans include Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*. Book I. Chapter 26. http://www.ccel.org/ Accessed December 30, 2011 and Eusebius Pamphilius, *Church History*. Book 3. Chapter XIX. http://www.ntslibrary.com. Accessed December 30, 2011. Irenaeus lived from approximately 125 to 202 AD. Eusebius lived from approximately 263 to 339 AD.

Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because *thou hast left thy first love* (Revelation 2:4, emphasis added).

The word "somewhat" seems to minimize the importance of this failing, but that word is not in the original, so it should be omitted. The Ephesians had lost their "first love." That was a serious deficiency.

Recall that Paul had once praised the Ephesians love of the saints:

Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints (Ephesians I:15).

Indeed, love is a theme of the Epistle to the Ephesians. The word appears fourteen times in the six chapters of that letter. In the decades that had passed since Paul wrote those words to them, the Ephesians had lost their fervent love of righteousness and perhaps the strong attachment and depth of feeling that the elders of the ecclesia had, for example, displayed in Miletus forty years earlier. As a result, perhaps their consciences were no longer as pricked when their behavior departed from God's commandments. Maybe they were subconsciously thinking that all of their labor and all of the hardship they had endured compensated for wrongs in their thinking and behavior.

John wrote what "love" is in his second epistle:

And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it (2 John:6, emphasis added).

The "love" that the Lord Jesus referred to in Revelation 2 was keeping his commandments:

If ye love me, keep my commandments (John 14:15).

It appears that the Ephesians were not keeping the Lord's commandments. They were certainly being "busy" with the things of the Truth. They were even contending against those who were promoting false teachings about the commandments of Christ, but they were having problems keeping Jesus' commands themselves. They were not living as he taught them to live. There was something wrong with the way that they were speaking, with the way that they were acting, and with the thoughts on which they were dwelling.

It was necessary, as the Lord stated in verse 5, for the Ephesians to "repent" and to "do the first works." That was an exhortation for them to recall the earnestness and excitement that they had felt when they first accepted the Gospel message. It is important for us to do the same.

Spiritual Growth: Remember, repent, "do the first works"

Christ's message to the Ephesians teaches us that we cannot just be "busy" with ecclesial activities. We need to be obedient to the Lord.

Particularly for those of us who have been baptized for a number of years, it may be necessary for us to fan the flame of enthusiasm that we had for our Lord when we first believed. Just like the Ephesians needed to do, it is important for us to "remember" (verse 5). That is one of the reasons why participation at spiritually focused events is so good for our spiritual health. Talking to young people and new converts can be particularly encouraging because we can see

in them the passion for the things of God that perhaps we once felt and which we need to experience again.

16.6. "The right to eat the fruit from the tree of life"

In his salutation to them, Christ told the Ephesians that he held the seven stars, representing the eldership of the seven ecclesias, in his right hand (cf. Revelation I:20, 2:1). The ecclesias were cared for by him. But, in verse 5, the Lord warned that he would extinguish the ecclesia in Ephesus if they did not repent.

The ecclesias were held firmly, but the Lord could let go, as it were. This should be a warning to us. We cannot take the continued existence of our ecclesias for granted. Even Ephesus, the site of so much Apostolic activity and the first ecclesia addressed in Revelation, could have its lampstand removed. The same could certainly happen to us.

The Lord had words of warning to the ecclesia at Ephesus, but he concluded his message to the individual Ephesians with words of encouragement. He began by stating, "To him that overcometh" (verse 7). The Revised Standard Version renders the phrase as "To him who conquers." Note that the appeal is made at the individual level - "to him." Salvation is ultimately a personal matter, and our obligations to Christ stand regardless of the state of our ecclesia.

The Ephesians had to address their deficiencies and to continue their spiritual warfare. They had to ensure that they had put on the whole armor of God. Those who would succeed in conquering the spiritual obstacles before them were truly striving to serve God. They were living for the reason for which God initially created people, which was to honor Him. God will be pleased to offer the people who do so the reward of eternal life in a world that is the perfection of what was begun in the Garden of Eden. It is for that reason that the Lord ends his message to the Ephesians using the symbols of the Garden of Eden in describing the reward of the righteous:

Every person who has ears should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. To those who win the victory I will give the right to eat the fruit from the tree of life, which is in the garden of God (Revelation 2:7, New Century Version).

17. Epilogue

The Ephesian ecclesia's reputation for doctrinal soundness persists. Yet error eventually triumphs, and the Truth is lost. Today the once marvelous city lies in ruins, and the members of its ecclesia await the return of the Lord.

There is evidence from outside of the Inspired Record that the Ephesians did, in fact, repent, at least for a time, after receiving Revelation. The ecclesia continued, and its reputation for doctrinal soundness persisted. A man named Ignatius of Antioch, who, according to tradition, was a disciple of the Apostle John penned a letter to the Ephesians. Writing about twenty years after the Apocalypse was given, he commends the continued doctrinal soundness and walk of those in the Ephesian ecclesia:²²⁹

Now Onesimus of his own accord highly praiseth your orderly conduct in God, for that ye all live according to truth, and that no heresy hath a home among you: nay, ye do not so much as listen to any one, if he speak of aught else save concerning Jesus Christ in truth.²³⁰

False doctrine did eventually prevail in Ephesus,²³¹ and the city's demise accompanied the decline of the Truth. In 262 AD, the Goths attacked the city and sacked it. The Temple of Diana was a particular object of their fury, and they destroyed it. Today only one pillar of it remains.

IMAGE IDEA: THE TEMPLE OF DIANA TODAY

Ephesus never fully recovered from the onslaught of the Goths.²³² Moreover, the silt from the Cayster River that made the fields around the city fertile contributed to its undoing. Over time, Ephesus' harbor filled with silt, chocking its usefulness. Today the ancient harbor is landlocked and sits several miles from the coast.²³³ After it lost its utility as a port, the city of Ephesus was abandoned. Today it lies in ruins.

²²⁹ W.H. Boulton. 1958. "What the Spirit Saith to the Churches' 7 – The Church that is in Ephesus (b) The Letter." *The Christadelphian* 95, electronic edition. Logos Library System. Christadelphian Magazine and Publishing Association.
²³⁰ Ignatius of Antioch. *Letter to the Ephesians*. Chapter 6. http://www.earlychristianwritings.com. Accessed June 29, 2010. The theme of the Ephesians' resistance to false doctrine continued in Chapter 9: "But I have learned that certain persons passed through you from yonder, bringing evil doctrine; whom ye suffered not to sow seed in you, for ye stopped your ears, so that ye might not receive the seed sown by them; forasmuch as ye are stones of a temple, which were prepared beforehand for a building of God the Father, being hoisted up to the heights through the engine of Jesus Christ, which is the Cross, and using for a rope the Holy Spirit; while your faith is your windlass, and love is the way that leadeth up to God." It is interesting to note that Ignatius referred to the Ephesians as "stones of a temple."

²⁵¹ The city of Ephesus had a strong association with Mary in the eyes of the Roman Catholic Church; therefore, it was selected as the meeting place for a gathering of bishops who assembled in 43 I AD to determine Mary's exact status. It was at that counsel that Mary was officially declared to be the "Mother of God." See A. Moore. 1973. "Ephesus." *The Christadelphian* I IO, electronic edition. Logos Library System. Christadelphian Magazine and Publishing Association.

²³² H. P. Mansfield. 1974. "History of Ephesus." *Logos*, (July), p. 332.

²³³ "Where is Ephesus?" Ephesus.us. http://www.ephesus.us. Accessed June 29, 2010.

The fate of the city will not be shared by our faithful brothers and sisters who were in the ecclesia at Ephesus, however. They had a wonderful hope of living and reigning with Christ as kings and priests in the Millenium. We have the assurance that we will join them if we hold fast to the faith that was once delivered to them and if we follow example set by the Lord Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul, Apollos, Priscilla and Aquila, Timothy, Trophimus, Onesiphorus, the Apostle John, and the faithful men and women in the ecclesia at Ephesus who strived to live as they did.

May it be our privilege to meet them soon and to share in their reward.

AI. Prophecy and the Roman province of Asia

Daniel 8 symbolizes important events in the history of the city of Ephesus. Those events are the reason why the region around Ephesus was called "Asia" during the time of the New Testament.

Ephesus and its environs are important in Bible prophecy. The vision of Daniel 8 shows how the history of Ephesus was part of important developments in God's plan for the earth. Daniel 8 also provides insight on what the region called "Asia" in the New Testament is and how it got that name. It is important to know what "Asia" is to understand the New Testament's history of the ecclesia at Ephesus. "Asia" is a term that is used fairly frequently in the New Testament.²³⁴ It is the name of a Roman province that included Ephesus.

Daniel 8 describes the prophet's well-known vision of the two-horned ram being smitten by the goat from the west with the great horn. The interpretation of that vision is provided at the end of the chapter:

The ram which thou sawest having two horns are the kings of Media and Persia. And the rough goat is the king of Grecia: and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king (Daniel 8:20-21).

IMAGE IDEA: RAM SMITING THE GOAT

Bible students from a wide variety of backgrounds regard this prophecy as being about Alexander the Great conquering the Medo-Persian Empire. Even Alexander shared that interpretation.

In Book II of *The Antiquities of the Jews*, the Jewish historian, Josephus, who lived in the first century AD, tells the story of when Alexander the Great came to the Promised Land. Alexander was rapidly taking over the Persian Empire at the time, and his army intended to destroy Jerusalem. When the elders of the Jews showed the Book of Daniel to him, Alexander saw himself in it. In response, he not only decided to spare Jerusalem, but he also granted religious freedom to the Jewish people. Josephus tells the account as follows:²³⁵

And when the Book of Daniel was showed him wherein Daniel declared that one of the Greeks should destroy the empire of the Persians, he supposed that himself was the person intended. And as he was then glad, he dismissed the multitude for the present; but the next day he called them to him, and bid them ask what favors they pleased of him; whereupon the high priest desired that they might enjoy the laws of their forefathers, and might pay no tribute on the seventh year. He granted all they desired.

²³⁴ The word appears 21 times in the New Testament.

²³⁵ F. Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 11, Chapter 8, Section 5. http://www.gutenberg.org. Accessed January 1, 2012.

The fulfillment of this portion of Daniel's prophecy is a compelling indicator of the inspiration of the Bible. The fact that many people from different cultures and different points in history have understood it the same way is a message that is worth sharing with interested friends. This is especially true, since as the rest of the vision goes on to show, the events depicted are part of the developments that will result in the return of the Lord. Daniel 8:25, for example, makes reference to Christ, the Prince of princes:

And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many: he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand (Daniel 8:25, emphasis added).

Daniel 8 relates to the history of Ephesus as follows: Alexander began his invasion of the Persian Empire because he wanted to liberate the Greek-speaking people who were under the dominion of the Persians. Those people were known as Ionian Greeks. (The name "Ionian" comes from Javan, their forefather. He was the son of Japheth and is listed in the genealogy of the sons of Noah in Genesis 10:2.) The Ionian Greeks lived along the coast of the Mediterranean in what is now the country of Turkey. Ephesus was one of the principal cities of Ionia.

Alexander's first major triumph over the Persians occurred near Ephesus at the Battle of the Granicus River. He visited Ephesus after that victory and was warmly received by its people. In fact, Alexander was so pleased by his stay in Ephesus that he offered to finance the re-construction of their lavish temple to their goddess, Artemis, who is also known as Diana.

Alexander's life was not long. He died at the age of 33, and his empire was divided among four of his generals, Lysimachus, Cassander, Ptolemy, and Seleucus. Those events are symbolized in Daniel 8 by the breaking of the great horn of the goat, representing Alexander, and its replacement by four "notable" horns, which symbolize his four generals:

Therefore the he goat waxed very great: and when he was strong, the great horn was broken; and for it came up four notable ones toward the four winds of heaven (Daniel 8:8).

From one of those horns there arose a little horn that represented a power that would ultimately destroy the Temple:

And out of one of them came forth a little horn, which waxed exceeding great, toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the pleasant land. And it waxed great, even to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground, and stamped upon them. Yea, he magnified himself even to the prince of the host, and by him the daily sacrifice was taken away, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down (Daniel 8:9-II).

Daniel was informed that the period encompassed by the vision he had seen - from the beginning of Alexander's defeat of the Persians to the end of the degradation of Jerusalem - would be 2,300 days:

Then I heard one saint speaking, and another saint said unto that certain saint which spake, How long shall be the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, and the transgression of desolation, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot? And he said unto me, *Unto two thousand and three hundred days*; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed (Daniel 8:I3-I4, emphasis added).

The principle of a day representing a year in prophecy is articulated in Ezekiel 4 and is used throughout the Scriptures. It is, therefore, reasonable to apply it here, and it is interesting to note that 2,300 years after Alexander's defeat of the Persians at the Battle of the Granicus River in 334 BC is the year 1967 AD. That is the year that the Israelis captured Jerusalem in the Six Day War and the city ceased to be trodden down of the Gentiles. This prophecy is a powerful reminder that God rules in the kingdoms of men and is using His power over the nations to set the stage for the return of the Lord.

Arriving at 1967

The last "BC year" is 1. The first "AD year" is 1. There is no "year 0," therefore. The concept of "zero" was not generally accepted at the time the BC-AD dating system came into use. As a result, the transition from BC to AD can be represented as follows:

To compensate for the lack of a "year 0" between 1 BC and 1 AD, it is necessary to subtract -1 from the difference in a "BC year" and an "AD year" when calculating the number of years between them.²³⁶ For example, the number of years between 3 BC and 2 AD is:

$$2 - (-3) - 1 = 4$$

Looking at the timeline above will show that there are, in fact, four years between 3 BC and 2 AD. Therefore, the difference between 334 BC and 1967 AD is:

$$1967 - (-334) - 1 = 2300$$

The little horn of the goat is an important symbol in Daniel 8. The Romans performed the actions ascribed to it. They were the power that destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem in AD 70, thereby causing the offering of the daily sacrifice to cease.

It is quite fitting that the Roman Empire should be depicted as arising out of one of the "notable" horns representing the kingdoms of Alexander's generals. One of those generals, Lysimachus, established his kingdom over the area encompassing much of modern-day Macedonia and Turkey, including Ephesus, after the death of Alexander. In I33 BC, the last of Lysimachus' descendants to reign died. His name was Attalus III, and he had no male heirs. In his life, he had shown little interest in ruling the kingdom. (He

²³⁶ "Calculating Using Dates AD and BC." The Math Forum @ Drexel http://mathforum.org. Accessed April 22, 2010.

preferred medicine, botany, and gardening.) In his will, he left his kingdom to the Roman Republic. That act is represented by the little horn of Rome rising from one of the four notable horns.

Attalus' kingdom was turned into a Roman province the same year that he died. It gave the Romans a foothold in Asia, helped turn their attention to the east, and moved them closer to the Promised Land and, ultimately, the events of 70 AD. Since it was the Romans' first possession in the continent of Asia, they named the territory of Attalus' old kingdom "Asia." ²³⁷

When the term "Asia" is used in the New Testament, it is a reference to that region – the western portion of modern-day Turkey. It included the cities of Pergamos, Laodicea, and Colossae. Its capital and largest city was Ephesus.²³⁸

²³⁷ A.W. Moore. 1973. "Ephesus." *The Christadelphian* 110, electronic edition. Logos Library System. Christadelphian Magazine and Publishing Association.

²³⁸ F.F. Bruce, Commentary on the Book of the Acts (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans, 1955), p. 378.

A2. Understanding "the evil spirit answered"

The language of Acts 19 does not teach the existence of "evil spirits." It does teach that believers should fear the existence and power of God alone.

In the process of describing the events with the sons of Sceva in Acts 19, the Scripture states that "the evil spirit" spoke (verse 15). Illnesses in the Bible are frequently described using the language of demon possession:

When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses (Matthew 8:16-17).

A comparison of verses I6 and I7 shows that possession "with devils" is equated with "infirmities" and "sicknesses." That is what is meant by the term. In Acts I9, therefore, when the text states that the evil spirit answered, it means that the man who was sick spoke.

The Bible is not a scientific textbook. Instead, it is a guide that has been used for thousands of years to lead men and women to salvation. It uses language, for example, about the sun "rising" and "setting." For the past few centuries, people have known that it is the movement of the sun, and not the earth, that causes these phenomena. But that knowledge has not existed for the majority of the time that the Bible has been in use, and the scientific accuracy of the Bible is not really the point. The language in the Bible is intended to teach people about God, not physics or biology.

Indeed, Jesus was willing to work with language that was "incorrect" to make a broader, more important, point that conveyed a spiritual lesson. Consider, for example, Matthew 12:

Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils (Matthew 12:22-24).

In this passage, the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, who was a Philistine god. Many of the Jews had once believed in Beelzebub, as is indicated by 2 Kings I:

And Ahaziah fell down through a lattice in his upper chamber that was in Samaria, and was sick: and he sent messengers, and said unto them, *Go, enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron whether I shall recover of this disease*. But the angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say unto them, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron? Now therefore thus saith the LORD, Thou shalt not come down from that bed

on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die. And Elijah departed (2 Kings I:2-4, emphasis added).

Note that Jesus could have responded to the Pharisees' charge by quoting this passage to them to demonstrate that Beelzebub was not real, but that was not the issue. Jesus was not interested in teaching about the power (or lack thereof) of Beelzebub. Instead, he wanted to teach the people about his Godgiven power to save them. Therefore, he reasoned with the Pharisees as if Beelzebub actually existed:

And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house (Matthew 12:25-29).

By demonstrating that he could cure illness, Jesus indicated the extent of the power that God had given him. Indeed, he was able to save the people from the power of sin and death.

Likewise, in the Acts 19 record, Luke's point is that everything on earth is subject to God's power. It would be folly to worship or to revere anything else other than Him, such as magic or evil spirits. Therefore, it would be a tragedy for someone to misinterpret the language that Luke used about evil spirits speaking to conclude that they exist and are a cause for concern. That would be the exact opposite of the point Luke was trying to make.

A3. The conversion of Sosthenes

Sosthenes was in the ecclesia at Ephesus for a time. The account of his conversion is a remarkable exhortation in persistence and trust in God.

Laboring in the Lord's vineyard is not for the easily discouraged. Regardless of what work we are doing in the service of the Gospel, we frequently encounter obstacles. Sometimes these obstacles seem overwhelming. Yet with the Lord's help, we can often overcome them. To succeed, we must keep laboring, keep seeking God's guidance, and not give up.

One of the finest examples of laboring against obstacles is the Apostle Paul during his time in Corinth. He refused to stop preaching there despite all the reasons he had for doing so. That is not to say that he did not feel discouraged at times. The Scriptures indicate that he did.

While in Corinth, Paul's success with preaching was cyclical. The cycles typically began with Paul facing some challenge. He responded to the obstacle by laboring. The obstacle was then removed; the Apostle experienced success. Then another obstacle appeared, and the cycle began anew.

Some might wonder why Paul did not just give up. Why should he labor so much if one difficulty was just going to be followed by another? The answer is simple, yet profound. As Paul was laboring against obstacles, he was bringing people to the Truth. He was strengthening the faith of those who already believed, and he was providing an enduring example of how we ought to live our lives. Consider what he wrote to the Galatians:

O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, *before* whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? (Galatians 3:I, emphasis added)

When people saw Paul laboring, they saw Jesus Christ crucified, as it were, and they learned a great deal about service to God. Examining Paul's preaching at Corinth shows his persistence, and it shows how that persistence resulted in the conversion of a great number of people, including a very zealous opponent of the Gospel.

When Paul arrived in Corinth, he had every reason to be discouraged about his prospects for teaching men and women there the Truth. He had just come from Athens where the learned men of the day had mocked him for preaching the resurrection of the dead (Acts 17:32). There would have been little about Corinth that would have suggested that Paul's preaching efforts there would meet with much more success. Indeed, the people of Corinth were known for the wicked ways, as Paul plainly stated in a letter to them:

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. *And such were some of you*: but ye are washed, but ye

are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God (I Corinthians 6:9-II, emphasis added).

"And such were some of you" is the key phrase in this quotation. The Corinthians were regarded as a wicked people. Indeed, in the ancient world, Corinth's reputation had led to the use of the proverbial phrase "to Corinthianize" to mean "to act in an immoral way." But Paul did not use that reputation as an excuse not to preach to them.

Instead, Paul quickly began his preaching work in Corinth, and God rewarded him for his efforts. God is mindful of our weaknesses and struggles, and He is quick to help His servants who are in need. The second verse of Acts 18 records that Paul "found" Aquila and Priscilla, two individuals who would be of great support to him in his work in the Truth, shortly after his arrival in Corinth. Since Paul was of the same craft as Aquila and Priscilla, he began to live with them:

And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers (Acts 18:2-3).

Having a place to stay with friends did not cause Paul to relax and to reduce his preaching efforts, however. Instead, the Scriptures record that he spent every Sabbath preaching to the Jews and to the Greeks in the synagogue:

And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks (Acts 18:4).

Then God provided further support for Paul in his preaching efforts. Silas and Timothy came to Corinth from Macedonia. Paul was encouraged by their arrival, and he increased his efforts on behalf of the Truth:

And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ (Acts 18:5).

The verse records that Paul was "pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ." The King James Version's rendering "pressed in the spirit" is quite literal. (It is exactly the same translation as offered by Young's Literal Translation.) However, it does not fully convey the sense of what Paul was feeling. The Greek word translated "pressed" is *sunecho.*²⁴⁰ It is a word associated with very strong emotion. Some examples of its use follow:

Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought him to depart from them; for they were *taken* with great fear: and he went up into the ship, and returned back again (Luke 8:37, emphasis added).

But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I *straitened* till it be accomplished! (Luke 12:50, emphasis added)

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²³⁹ "Corinthianize." Wordnik.com http://www.wordnik.com. Accessed December 27, 2010.

²⁴⁰ It is Strong's Number G4912.

For the love of Christ *constraineth* us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead (2 Corinthians 5:14, emphasis added).

Indeed, the word is also used to convey a variety of types of physical pressure:

And Jesus said, Who touched me? When all denied, Peter and they that were with him said, Master, the multitude *throng* thee and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me? (Luke 8:45, emphasis added)

For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and *keep* thee in on every side (Luke 19:43, emphasis added).

Despite Paul's enthusiasm, the Lord saw fit to let him encounter severe obstacles in his work.

In response to Paul's preaching, the Jews "opposed themselves and blasphemed" (Acts 18:6). The Greek word translated "opposed themselves" is *antitassomai*, and it means, "to set in battle array." It was an intense fury that the Jews felt for Paul. Paul responded by shaking out his raiment and denouncing them:

And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles (Acts 18:6).

Many people would be discouraged at encountering the degree of opposition that Paul had to deal with, particularly if their cause was just. "Where is God?" they would wonder. "Does he even care?" But Paul knew that God was with him and that He cared. Therefore, even after the Jews opposed and abused him, Paul did not give up on them. Instead, he left his comfortable home with Aquila and Priscilla and moved in with a man named Justus because Justus lived close to the synagogue:

And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue (Acts 18:7, emphasis added).

Paul moved there so that he might continue to have the opportunity to interact with the Jews of Corinth and to preach to them, and God rewarded his efforts.

Acts 18 record that Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, was converted, along with his whole family:

And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized (Acts 18:8).

Paul must have been overjoyed at the conversion of Crispus because he departed from his usual practice of not baptizing people²⁴² and personally immersed Crispus. I Corinthians I records:

I thank God that *I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius*; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name (I Corinthians I:I4-I5, emphasis added).

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²⁴¹ E.W Bullinger, *The Companion Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1922), p.1626.

²⁴² It had not been Paul's usual practice to baptize people himself. See I Corinthians I:17.

It is interesting to note that Paul also personally baptized Gaius. He was a significant convert because he was a man of means who would later host Paul and the Corinthian ecclesia in his house. When writing to the Romans from Corinth, Paul notes:

Gaius mine host, and of the whole church, saluteth you. Erastus the chamberlain of the city saluteth you, and Quartus a brother (Romans 16:23, emphasis added).

The Jews' anger with Paul increased, and Crispus was replaced as chief ruler of the synagogue by a man named Sosthenes (Acts 18:17). Sosthenes was presumably selected because the Jews believed that he would take a hard line against Paul and the Christians.

Around that time, something about the situation in Corinth caused Paul to be afraid. We cannot be certain what it was, but it likely had something to do with Sosthenes, the Jews, and their hatred of Paul. To comfort Paul during this difficult time, the Lord appeared to him in a vision:

Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace. For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city (Acts 18:9-10).

This episode in the life of Paul is exhortative for at least two reasons. First, it shows that even a worker in the Truth as great as Paul can get discouraged, so we should not be unduly hard on ourselves if the same thing happens to us. Second, it shows that the Lord Jesus Christ is aware of our spiritual state and will act to strengthen us.

Paul must have been greatly encouraged by knowing that Jesus was noticing his efforts and watching over him. Nevertheless, the fact that God is with us does not mean that we will be without trial. Indeed, after Paul received the vision and was encouraged by the Lord's words, the Jews of Corinth, led by Sosthenes, made an insurrection against him. They rose up with one accord and brought Paul to Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia, to seek judgment against him:

And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat, Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law (Acts 18:12-13).

Paul was about to make his defense when the proconsul cut him off. Gallio told the Jews that he would not be a judge of matters pertaining to their Law, and he drove them from his presence. Then the Greeks took Sosthenes and beat him in the presence of Gallio:

And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters. And he drave them from the judgment seat. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things (Acts 18:14-17).

The Apostle Paul had seen the Lord work many wonders in his life. His rescue from the clutches of the Jews and the heartless Gallio was only the most recent. Paul quickly returned to the work of

preaching to the people of Corinth for he knew the power of the Lord Jesus to work in the lives of others as well. He knew from his own experience that even an opponent of the Gospel as hardened as Sosthenes could be brought to the Truth. Acts 18 records:

And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow (Acts 18:18, emphasis added).

Sometime later the Corinthians received an epistle written by Paul. The introduction to I Corinthians is worthy of note because of who it is from:

Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and *Sosthenes our brother* (I Corinthians I:I, emphasis added),

It is likely that the Sosthenes of I Corinthians I is the same person as the Sosthenes of Acts 18. His appearance in this epistle is a testimony to the perseverance of Paul (and the Corinthian Christians) and the persuasiveness of the Gospel's message. Sosthenes must have been an eager student of the Gospel following his conversion because he is a "co-author" of I Corinthians, an epistle that addresses many challenging topics. The fact that Sosthenes wrote the letter with Paul suggests that he was with Paul in Ephesus. Perhaps Sosthenes had to flee there for a time because of danger that had arisen in Corinth. (The Jews would not have been happy with his conversion.) Or maybe Sosthenes was one of the visitors from Corinth who came to Paul in Ephesus to tell him about what was happening in the ecclesia there.

Regardless of why he came to Ephesus, what is remarkable about Sosthenes' story is that when he arrived in Ephesus, he arrived there as a Christian. His story is a testimony of the power of the Truth to change lives. The Truth is still powerful today, and it can change us. Through our diligent efforts to proclaim it to others, it can change the lives of those around us, even if they are presently enemies of the Gospel.

A4. To whom was the Epistle to the Ephesians written?

The Epistle to the Ephesians may have been written directly to the ecclesia at Ephesus. It may also have been a circular letter for ecclesias in Asia. The Ephesians received it either way.

There is some controversy about whether the Epistle to the Ephesians was written specifically to the ecclesia at Ephesus, although there is little doubt that the Ephesians received it. In the King James Version, the introduction to the epistle reads:

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are *at Ephesus*, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus (Ephesians I:I, emphasis added).

Although the overwhelming majority of ancient manuscripts include the phrase "at Ephesus" in this verse,²⁴³ the earliest manuscripts do not.²⁴⁴ Other than that phrase, there is no other information in the epistle to connect it directly to the ecclesia at Ephesus.²⁴⁵ There are no personal greetings, for example. In fact, the reference to a letter to the Laodiceans, which is not extant, in Colossians 4 has led some to believe that the Epistle to the Ephesians is actually a letter to the Laodiceans:

And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read *the epistle from Laodicea* (Colossians 4:16, emphasis added).

There is, however, very little evidence that supports that theory. There are no ancient versions of the Epistle to the Ephesians in existence that are addressed to "to the saints that are at Laodicea," for example.²⁴⁶ Moreover, the lack of any personal greetings in the epistle gives it the feel of a circular letter that was intended to be shared among the ecclesias of Asia instead of being destined for just one place.

Some commentators on the Greek have offered an explanation for the missing words "at Ephesus" in the early manuscripts that would strengthen the case for the letter being a circular epistle. They note

²⁴³ E. Sponberg, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians: An Epistle of Love* (Kingsgrove, Australia: Christadelphian Scripture Study Service, 1967) p. 6.

²⁴⁴ F. Foulkes, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary* (London, United Kingdom: Tyndale Press, 1963) p. 17.

²⁴⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans, 1984), p. 250.

²⁴⁶ R. Jamieson, A. Fausset, and D. Brown, "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians." *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible.* http://biblecommenter.com. Accessed June 19, 2010. Tertullian states that Marcion, whom he called a heretic, had a version of the Epistle that was addressed "to the Laodiceans." See "Epistle to the Ephesians." International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. http://bibleencyclopedia.com. Accessed June 21, 2010. There is, however, no surviving evidence of Marcion's manuscript. See D. Wallace. "Ephesians: Introduction, Argument, and Outline." NETBible.org. http://net.bible.org. Accessed June 21, 2010.

that the Greek wording used in Ephesians I:I is awkward without a city being named. ²⁴⁷ As the epistles to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians demonstrate, it was Paul's custom to explicitly identify the city to which his epistles were being sent in the introduction. If the earliest manuscripts are accurate, and there is no city listed in the introduction to this epistle, the question arises about why Paul would have changed his practice. The answer could be that if the letter was intended to be a circular epistle that was sent to a number of ecclesias in Asia, the place where the city's name was to be written might have been intentionally left blank in the original. Then as the letter was copied and shared, the names of cities would be filled in and the epistle would be sent off accordingly. This theory suggests that the earliest manuscripts were true to the original epistle and did not list a specific ecclesia in the introduction. With the passage of time, the theory continues, "at Ephesus" began to be filled in because Ephesus was the principal city of the province. The letter eventually became known as "the Epistle to the Ephesians." This theory is supported by commentators from a wide variety of backgrounds. ^{248,249} There is, however, insufficient evidence to arrive at a definitive answer, and regardless of precisely whom it was intended for, the epistle gives a sense of what the situation in Ephesus and the other ecclesias of Asia was like at the time that Paul wrote it.

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²⁴⁷ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans, 1984), p. 250.

²⁴⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans, 1984), p. 250. A similar argument is also made by H. P. Mansfield, *The Story of the Bible, Volume 8* (Kidman Park, Australia: Eureka Press, 2006), p. 442 and "Epistle to the Ephesians." International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. "Epistle to the Ephesians." http://bibleencyclopedia.com. Accessed June 21, 2010.

²⁴⁹ E. Sponberg makes a compelling argument for the epistle to have been written specifically to the Ephesians based on the testimony of the Early Church Fathers. See E. Sponberg, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians: An Epistle of Love* (Kingsgrove, Australia: Christadelphian Scripture Study Service, 1967) p. 5.

A5. Comparing the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians

The Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians have overlapping themes and contain many of the same instructions; however, there are notable differences in the points that are emphasized in these two epistles. These differences relate, in part, to the different Gentile philosophies that had begun to take hold in those ecclesias and which were resulting in different distortions of the Gospel message.

Two prominent Gentile philosophies of the time that are mentioned in the Acts record and which have relevance to the two epistles are Epicureanism and Stoicism:

Then certain philosophers of *the Epicureans*, and of *the Stoicks*, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection (Acts I7:I8, emphasis added).

The Epicureans taught that understanding and pursuing happiness and enjoyment should be the aims of a person's life. The outworking of this philosophy was a self-focused life given to pleasure seeking. The Stoics, in contrast, taught that self-control was the path to a well-lived life. The Stoics sought to live lives of discipline guided by rules of behavior.²⁵⁰

Paul had repeatedly warned the Ephesians with many tears that false teachers would arise in their ecclesia (Acts 20:31). Within four years of his departure, it appears that they had appeared and were beginning to have an effect. They took ideas from outside of the Bible and claimed that they were implied by the teachings of the Scriptures with the result that the Gospel preached by the apostles was being distorted. Individuals with Stoic leanings were inclined to misinterpret the principles of the Law of Moses and to teach salvation by works. This corruption was a particular problem among the Colossians. Therefore, Paul needed to exhort them:

Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men (Colossians 2:20-22, emphasis added)?

In contrast, individuals with Epicurean inclinations were drawn to misinterpret salvation by faith through grace and to teach permissiveness in behavior. This corruption of the Gospel was a particular problem in Ephesus. Therefore, Paul wrote,

This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work

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²⁵⁰ J. Knowles. Epistle to the Ephesians. Unpublished manuscript, p. 2.

all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ (Ephesians 4:17-20, emphasis added).

Paul's epistles drew sharp distinctions between the Truth and the unacceptable blend that resulted from mixing the Gospel with man-made ideas.

A6. John, "the elder," in Ephesus

John's obedience to the Lord is an illustration of faithfulness. After the death of Mary, he journeys to Ephesus. The letters that he pens later in his life offer insight into his character and the issues that he faced.

A6.I. In Jerusalem

The Gospel of John ends with John as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Great things were expected of him as is evidenced by Peter's closing question to Jesus in John 21. Looking upon John, Peter asks, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" (John 21:21).

What John, in fact, did during the years following the ascension of Christ might not have been what many expected of him. In comparison to Peter, James (the half-brother of the Lord), and Paul, John played a fairly minor role during the time of the Acts. (John is only mentioned 9 times, compared to 56 times for Peter and I46 times for Paul). When the activities of John are mentioned in the Acts, there are two features that characterize the way they are recorded. First, John is always mentioned with Peter, and his name is always listed second, suggesting that he played more of a supporting role. It is interesting to think about why that might be. An answer is suggested by the second characteristic, which is that John's location is always given when his activities are recorded, and he is always in Jerusalem. The following verses illustrate these two features:

Then returned they *unto Jerusalem* from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren (Acts I:12-I4, emphasis added).

Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily *at the gate of the temple* which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple (Acts 3:I-2, emphasis added).

Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John (Acts 8:14, emphasis added).

John is mentioned once in Paul's writings, in an historical record found in Galatians 2. There he is (once again) in Jerusalem, and Peter's name is mentioned before his:

Then fourteen years after I went up again *to Jerusalem* with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also. And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision (Galatians 2:I,9, emphasis added).

Why is John so strongly connected to Jerusalem? It seems that he was keeping the Lord's command:

When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from *that hour* that disciple took her unto *his own home* (John 19:26-27, emphasis added).

Jesus was crucified outside of Jerusalem, and John's record records that John took Mary to *his* home from *that* hour. That suggests that John's family (which was affluent) had a house in Jerusalem in addition to their home in Galilee (which could have been one of the reasons they knew the high priest's family).²⁵¹ It appears that John cared for Mary there, which might have been the reason why he appears to have taken a lesser role in the more visible work of preaching and leading the believers in the early years of spreading the Gospel.

Being a man of faith and integrity, John placed more importance on doing the task that Jesus gave him than he did on being engaged in "high-profile" work in the ecclesia. That is a hallmark of individuals of faith: they seek to do the service that has been given to them faithfully rather than seeking the status that is so esteemed of men.

Spiritual Growth: Doing the work before us

It can be very trying for us when we want to do "great things" for God and we find ourselves in school or at work instead. It can be hard when we want to live a life entirely of preaching the Word and instead come home exhausted every day, feeling like we have done nothing for God. But if we are obedient and faithful in our tasks, no matter what they are, we are pleasing to God. Perhaps He is preparing us for something more, but in the meantime, we cannot use the mundane tasks that we have before us as an excuse for complete inactivity. The work of the Truth is not an all-or-nothing enterprise. Although John did less public work in the early years of the Acts than we might have expected of him, he still did work. He still appears in the Acts; he still labored in the Lord's vineyard. He made the most of the opportunities that he had.

A6.2. Combating early Gnosticism from Ephesus

After Mary fell asleep, more responsibilities came for John. Error was creeping into the young ecclesias. The departures from the faith that the apostles warned about came in a variety of forms, and

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²⁵¹ See John 18:15.

John returns to the pages of Scripture to combat one of them, the forerunner to the doctrines that would later be known as Gnosticism.

John wrote his first epistle in response to the teachings of the early Gnostics. This group claimed to have received unique divine revelations that set them apart from other Christians. They said they knew lofty, intangible things that others did not, and they claimed that this knowledge made them special and freed them from the behavioral responsibilities that the apostles taught.²⁵²

John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, could have made a claim to have had unique knowledge that made him special, but he would have no part of such nonsense. Instead, he preached a message of hope available to all based on plainly displayed facts that had been openly revealed. In I John, he contrasted the Truth with the folly of the early Gnostics from the very beginning of the epistle. Notice the emphasis on tangibles, like hearing, seeing, and touching:

That which was from the beginning, which we have *heard*, which we have *seen with our eyes*, which we have *looked upon*, and our hands have *handled*, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have *seen it*, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have *seen* and *heard* declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ (I John I:I-3, emphasis added).

In contrast to the teachings of the early Gnostics, John firmly asserted that the openly revealed truths concerning Christ carry with them profound behavioral responsibilities:

This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. *If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth*: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin (I John I:5-7, emphasis added).

In contending against the early Gnostics, John followed in the footsteps of the spiritual elders of generations past. Knowing the inclinations of the nature which both he and his spiritual children bore, he was careful to identify with them in combating error. Like Nehemiah and Daniel before him, John put himself in the same place as his people. Notice in verse 6 that he wrote, "if we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." He did not write "you," he wrote "we," and he did so again in verses 7, 8, 9, and 10, in chapter 2, and, indeed, throughout the epistle.

John was faithful in combating those who claimed to have received special revelations, and it is interesting to consider that he, in fact, ultimately did receive special revelations in the form of the Apocalypse, which contain strong echoes of the opening words of his first epistle. The phrases "I saw," "I beheld," and "I looked" appear a total of 49 times in the Book of Revelation. "I heard" is found 23 times.

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²⁵² H.P. Mansfield, From James to Jude: Verse by Verse Exposition (Kidman Park, Australia: Eureka Press, date not given), p. 226-227.

There is even an echo of "our hands have handled" when John takes (and handles) a little book of prophecy out of the hand of an angel in Revelation 10:10.

It is likely that I John was, like the Apocalypse, a circular letter written to Ephesus and other ecclesias in Asia. Tradition has it that John made Ephesus his base of operations following the death of Mary.²⁵³ There is evidence from outside the Bible that John wrote the Gospel of John and, by extension, I, 2, and 3 John from Ephesus.²⁵⁴ Revelation was written while he was a prisoner near Ephesus. There is testimony from outside the Bible that John was released from Patmos, returned to Ephesus,²⁵⁵ and died there.²⁵⁶ Examining John's epistles and the Apocalypse offer insight into the later years of his life.

A6.3. 2 John

In supporting truth (a word that appears 17 times in John's epistles), John knew it was necessary not only to reach out to ecclesias, but also to families and to individuals, which is exactly what he did in 2 and 3 John.

In his second and third epistles, John referred to himself simply as "the elder." No other descriptor was necessary. He was the last living disciple when he penned those words. Yet although he was aged and his years of service had been many, these short letters still reveal a mind firmly fixed on the things of the Truth and a heart overflowing with love for the followers of Christ. These short works reveal a great deal about the character of John.

The second epistle was written to a family, "the elect lady and her children." Whether this was a family connected by natural kinship as well as a spiritual relationship, we do not know. We do know from the Epistle that those addressed loved the Truth and had a strong desire to serve the followers of Christ. But in their well-intentioned zeal, they were welcoming deceivers into their home. As a result, they were at risk of being counted as being partakers of their evil deeds (2 John 11).

This family was filled with love but it was misdirected. It was, therefore, a difficult message that John had to deliver to them, and it is helpful to us that we have a record of John's letter for it has served as a model to believers throughout the ages of how to convey an admonishing message to friends who have strayed from right paths despite their good intentions.

²⁵³ For example, Justin Martyr described a discussion that occurred in Ephesus in approximately I35 AD in *Dialogue with Tryphon*. See T. Halton, *Dialogue with Trypho*. Introduction (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2003), p. xv. In that work, Justin Martyr referred to John having lived in Ephesus. See J. Martyr, *Dialogue with Tryphon*. Chapter LXXXI. http://www.ccel.org. Accessed January 2, 2012.

²⁵⁴ For example, Irenaeus wrote, "Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia." Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*. Book III. Chapter I. http://www.ccel.org. Accessed January 2, 2012. Commentaries generally assert that John's epistles were written from Ephesus, based on the evidence that he lived in Ephesus during the time that he wrote the epistles.

²⁵⁵ For example, Eusebius Pamphilius wrote, "It was at this time that the apostle John returned from his banishment in the island and took up his abode at Ephesus, according to an ancient Christian tradition." Eusebius Pamphilius, *Church History*. Book 3. Chapters XX. http://www.ntslibrary.com. Accessed January 2, 2012. See also Chapter XXIII.

²⁵⁶ Eusebius Pamphilius, *Church History*. Book 5. Chapters XXIV. http://www.ntslibrary.com. Accessed January 2, 2012.

John began by plainly telling the family of the love that he had for them: "The elder unto the elect lady and her children whom I love in the truth..." John also comforted them with an assurance of the tremendous love that others have for them as well. His introduction continued:

... and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth; For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever (2 John I - 2)

The reason why this family was held in such high regard was because of the work they did in the Truth, which is why John uses the phrase "for the truth's sake" in verse 2. It is also why he said that he "rejoiced greatly" when he heard the (overall) good report concerning this family:

I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father (2 John 4, emphasis added).

Having acknowledged that they had done much work in the service of the Truth and that the work in which they were then engaged was intended to honor Christ, John stated simple principles and without going into great detail, pointed out to them their error. He told the family that there are times in which their hospitality would be inappropriate:

If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed (2 John 10):

The letter was brief. Much can be accomplished by making a point in few words.

A6.4. 3 John

In his third epistle, John wrote to an individual, the "well-beloved Gaius." John had tremendous love for Gaius as is evidenced by the number of times that he addressed him as "beloved:"

The elder unto the *wellbeloved* Gaius, whom I love in the truth (3 John I, emphasis added).

Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers (3 John 5);

Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God (3 John II, emphasis added).

What John told Gaius in the few words of this epistle provides a great deal of exhortation about what the focus of our interactions with others should be, how it should be reflected in our conversations, and what (in general) our relationships with others in the Truth should be like. When John wrote to Gaius, he once again spoke of "rejoicing greatly:"

For I *rejoiced greatly*, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth (3 John 3, emphasis added).

This verse shows that when John talked to others about Gaius, he wanted to hear of the good things that he was doing, and he wanted to know specifics. "Well, what exactly is Gaius doing?" The answer came to him that Gaius was being hospitable to traveling preachers of the Gospel (3 John 5-6). When John heard that, he said that nothing gave him greater joy:

I have *no greater joy* than to hear that my children walk in truth (3 John 4, emphasis added). *Nothing gave him greater joy.* This was the disciple whom Jesus loved, and nothing gave him greater joy than to hear of the humble service of a brother in Christ.

Spiritual Growth: Rejoicing in good

We should strive to bring this aspect of the beloved disciple's life into our own. When we speak of others, let us focus on the good things that they are doing, and let us talk about specifics. Let us do that so that the good things we hear will encourage us and challenge us in our service, and, more than that, let us, like John, rejoice greatly in what we hear for the angels and our Heavenly Father are rejoicing as well.

It is fitting that this powerfully exhortative epistle should end with an echo of a lesson that John had learned from Jesus for it was Jesus' example that John was following. "Greet the friends by name" was John's closing exhortation to Gaius (3 John 14). Those words are an echo of the parable of the Good Shepherd where Jesus taught that "he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out" (John 10:3).

A6.5. Revelation

The form of John's service to the ecclesias of Asia changed with the brutal persecutions of the Roman Emperor Domitian. John was banished by the Emperor to the isle of Patmos. It was there he received the Apocalypse:

I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ (Revelation I:9).

John speaks of tribulation in this verse, and as Christ had foretold many decades ago, it was a subject that John came to know through personal experience. Tradition has it that John was cast into a cauldron of boiling oil but was miraculously drawn out alive before being banished.²⁵⁷ Regardless of whether or not that story is true, John had certainly endured many difficult things both from the hands of the Roman authorities as well as from false believers. (3 John 9-10, for example, speaks of Diotrephes slandering him and implies that he might have destroyed one of John's earlier letters.)

Yet John did not allow the many hardships that he had endured to make him bitter or to quench his love for the Truth. Like Daniel in his old age, John still had such a love for the things of God that he mourned over knowledge of things spiritual that was not available to him:

And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. And *I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon* (Revelation 5:2-4, emphasis added).

²⁵⁷ Tertullian, *The Prescription of Heretics*. Chapter 36. http://www.ccel.org. Accessed January 2, 2012. Tertullian lived from approximately I60 to 220 AD.

John loved to learn, and he loved to learn because he knew that he needed to learn, right into his old age. He possessed a character that all can admire, but he had the character because he was constantly striving for self-improvement. This aspect of his character is brought forth in the Apocalypse as we see him wanting to learn, and we see him struggling to learn. (We should not deceive ourselves and think that John's nature was somehow different than ours, making it easy for him to grow and to change.) Indeed, in Revelation 19:10, John fell at the feet of the angel with whom he was interacting and worshipped him. John was sincere in what he did, and his action was reflective of his humility, but like the elect lady that he had addressed in 2 John, what he was doing was not appropriate. The angel was his fellow servant; he was to worship God:

And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy (Revelation 19:10).

Yet after seeing the vision of New Jerusalem, John was so overcome, that he once again bowed down and worshipped the angel:

And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things (Revelation 22:8).

Once again, he had to be corrected:

Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God (Revelation 22:9).

John struggled. He had to learn; he had to develop, and he found it challenging. John needed Christ and longed for his return just as we do.

Jesus selected John to hear and to record his final words: "Surely I come quickly. Amen." And with what earnest expectation did John respond to them: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

John needs Christ. John needs him to come, resurrect him, and immortalize him. There is yet work for the beloved disciple to do:

And he said unto me, *Thou must prophesy again* before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings (Revelation 10:11, emphasis added).

We can be there with him in the Kingdom of God. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."