

‘THE ARMOR OF GOD: ST. PAUL’S EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS’ DR. STEVEN C. SMITH

PRESENTATION ONE: INTRODUCTION, EPHESIANS 1.

I. *Approaching Saint Paul Today*

a. WHO WAS PAUL (SAUL)?

i. A ‘HEBREW OF THE HEBREWS’

1. *Phil. 3:5* “...Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, *a Hebrew born of Hebrews ...*”
2. Paul was a fearlessly faithful first-century Jew. Judaism governed all of his belief and morality.
3. His was a robust *monotheistic* faith—in the one true God, *the God of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob*, who revealed Himself to His covenant people Israel.¹
4. It was to *Yahweh*—and Him alone—that Paul devoted all of his prayer, his energies, his entire being. His *love for God* undergirded *a love of the things of God*, especially Torah, Temple, and Tradition.
5. Later, as a Christian, his robust prayer life was re-directed towards God in Jesus through the Holy Spirit. “Fervent prayer” was at the heart of Paul’s message, as seen at the close of our book, *Ephesians*.²
 - “Pray at all times in the Spirit ... that utterance may be given me *in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel*, for which I am an ambassador in chains; *that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.*”³

ii. HELLENISTIC & ROMAN INFLUENCES

1. Paul was born and raised in Tarsus⁴ in 8 A.D.,⁵ an important city in the Roman province of Cilicia in southeastern Asia Minor. Prior to Roman rule, Tarsus was a self-governing Greek state.⁶

¹ E.g. *Rom. 9:3-5* “For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race. *They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs*, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, be blessed for ever. Amen.” Also: *Rom. 11:28-32* “*What advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews are entrusted with the oracles of God.*”

² See: Peter Williamson, *Ephesians*. Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009). Williamson’s commentary is recommended as a sound place to begin the study of Ephesians from a distinctively Catholic perspective and we will interact with it considerably in this study. Also recommended on *Ephesians*: Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians*. Trans. Matthew L. Lamb. Aquinas Scripture Series 2 (Albany, NY: Magi, 1966); Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*. Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1990). Lincoln, a Protestant biblical scholar, has keen insights into Paul’s thought.

³ *Eph. 6:18-20* (emphasis added).

⁴ *Acts 9:11, 30; 11:25; 21:39; 22:3.*

2. The influence of Hellenistic education and civilization made the city a center of Greek intellectual culture. Paul himself received a thoroughly classical / Greek education. As such, he was immersed in Hellenistic and Roman culture, politics, religion & philosophy—which were all around him from birth.⁷ Yet, to be immersed in it is not to say that he embraced it.⁸
 3. Paul was likewise immersed in the Roman world:
 - a. He enjoyed Roman citizenship,⁹ and a number of his epistles involve Roman-style rhetoric.¹⁰
 - b. Numerous Pauline expressions were politically saturated:
 - “But if you confess with your lips that *Jesus is Lord* and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”¹¹
 - *Jesus Kyrios* sounds purely religious. Yet, for Paul it was counter-cultural—fighting words. Throughout the Roman empire, all those who said ‘*Kaiseros Kyrios*’ swore allegiance to Caesar and his power.
 - N T. Wright: “*When Paul said, ‘Jesus is lord’ ... his hearers must have known at once that this meant, ‘So Caesar isn’t.’ And that was the ‘good news’, the euangelion that Paul announced around the world. Was that a subversion of the symbolic world of the empire? How could it not be?*”¹²
- iii. **A PHARISEE ZEALOUS FOR GOD:**
1. “...As to the law a Pharisee.”¹³
 2. Paul’s love of Torah & faithful adherence to it guided him to become a leading Pharisee: “I am a Jew, born at Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city

⁵ *Ephesians* was written in 60–62 A.D., making Paul about 52–54 years old when he wrote the epistle.

⁶ The renowned Roman statesman, Cicero, was governor of Tarsus in 50 B.C.

⁷ One cannot read *Ephesians*—or any of Paul’s epistles without sensing Greek influence. Yet it was his faith in Christ, undergirded by Jewish beliefs, that drove Paul’s preaching, and persuaded many Jews as well Greeks. E.g. *Acts* 17: 1–4 “Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and for three weeks he argued with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, saying, ‘*This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.*’ Some of them were persuaded, and joined Paul and Silas; as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.”

⁸ But see: *I Cor.* 1:17–21 “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart. *Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?* For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.”

⁹ *Acts* 22:27–29 “So the tribune came and said to [Paul], ‘*Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?*’ And he said, ‘Yes.’ The tribune answered, “I bought this citizenship for a large sum.” Paul said, ‘*But I was born a citizen.*”

¹⁰ See below for the styles of rhetoric in *Ephesians*.

¹¹ *Rom.* 10:9–10.

¹² N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 4, Christian Origins and the Question of God (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 384 (emphasis added).

¹³ *Phil.* 3:5.

[Jerusalem] at the feet of Gamali-el, *educated according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as you all are this day.*"¹⁴

3. Paul's mentor, Gamaliel, was a philosopher opposed to violence towards / oppression of Jewish heretics.¹⁵
4. Like his mentor, Paul was a brilliant scholar of the Law. But unlike Gamali-el, he held a fervent, take-no-prisoners approach to Judaism and persecuted "heretical Jews," including many Christians:¹⁶
 - a. "You have heard of my former life in Judaism, *how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it*; and I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers."¹⁷
 - b. N.T. Wright: "Saul may have learned a lot from Gamali-el, but he did not share his particular position."¹⁸

b. THE CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL

i. MEETING THE RISEN CHRIST: THE GAME-CHANGER¹⁹

- "But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, that if he found any belonging to *the Way*, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he journeyed he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, '*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*' And he said, '*Who are you, Lord?*' And he said, '*I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; but rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.*' Saul arose from the ground ... they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus ... Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias ... But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many ... how much evil he has done to thy saints at Jerusalem ...'

But the Lord said to him, '*Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.*' So Ananias [laid] his hands on him ... *And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized, and took food and was strengthened.*"²⁰

ii. WHAT DID THIS MEAN FOR PAUL? THREE THINGS:

¹⁴ *Acts* 22:3.

¹⁵ See: *Acts* 5:34-39.

¹⁶ Saul was responsible for the death of the first Christian martyr, Stephen, as recorded in *Acts*: "But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together upon [Stephen]. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him; *and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul*" (*Acts* 7:57-58).

¹⁷ *Gal.* 1:13-14.

¹⁸ N.T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 30.

¹⁹ Though described matter-of-factly in *Acts*, this was the seminal event of his life:

²⁰ *Acts* 9:1-19.

1. **PAUL WAS CALLED BY CHRIST AS HIS APOSTLE.** His dramatic encounter with Jesus set him apart. The crucified and risen Lord *saved* Paul—and set him on a mission to proclaim the Good News as His chosen apostle. Though not one of the Twelve, Paul’s mission was identical: to proclaim the kingdom of God.
2. **PAUL WAS TOTALLY TRANSFORMED BY CHRIST.** Paul became fully devoted to Jesus, and he was radically changed—in mind and heart. Everything he longed for had met him in the person of Jesus. At the center of his apostolic message was that *a truly transformed life* was now possible through faith in Christ.
3. **PAUL WAS CAUGHT UP IN THE GREAT MYSTERY.** He came to see that Christ was the great mystery of God *in the flesh*. Christ himself was “the great reversal”—undoing Adam’s sin through His death on the cross. He recognized that in Jesus, *God definitively revealed His faithful love for all men*. Salvation was now possible—for both Jews *and* Gentiles.

c. PAUL’S NEW PERSPECTIVE: WHAT CHANGED AFTER HIS CONVERSION?

- i. Following his dramatic encounter with the risen Christ, Paul became a missionary and evangelist of volcanic intensity ... *but not immediately*:
 - “But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach Him among the Gentiles. I did not confer with [men], nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, *but I went away into Arabia*; and again I returned to Damascus. Then *after three years* I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas [Peter] and remained with him fifteen days.”²¹
- ii. What was Paul doing in Arabia ... for three years? Meditating on what had happened to Him, now that he was “in Christ.”
 1. Notwithstanding his dramatic conversion to Christ, the roots of Paul’s Jewish theology remained intact. His Jewish worldview of Yahweh “*becoming king over all Israel and all creation*” were in no way diminished—but rather, found their true home in Christ.
 2. To his astonishment, Paul came to realize that Israel’s hopes and destiny had been summed up and achieved in Jesus the Messiah.
 3. The term(s) “*call / calling*” fit better than “*conversion*,” which suggests a “pulling away” from his Jewish roots. Such is not the case.
 - Krister Stendahl agrees that ‘conversion’ is inadequate—it implies Paul “*changed his religion: the Jew became a Christian.*”²² As he explains, the ‘I’ in Paul’s letters is “*not the Christian but the Jewish Apostle to the Gentiles.*”²³

d. CONCLUSION: A ‘NEW PERSPECTIVE.’

- i. Previously, ‘Saul the Pharisee’ (like the OT prophets) expected that at the end of time, God would vindicate Israel, right the world’s wrongs—and only then—usher in the new age of the kingdom of God.

²¹ *Gal.* 1:15-18.

²² Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Fortress Press, 1976), 11.

²³ Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, 12.

- ii. Now, ‘Paul the Christian’ came to see that somehow, God *already did this* in Jesus Christ ... not at the end of time, but in the middle of history, in his present moment, and for all future ages, until He comes again.
- iii. In other words, Paul grasped that the new age of God had definitively begun in Jesus Christ—and continued through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This *really was Good News*—for all humanity—and he became preoccupied with its urgent proclamation to Jew and Gentile alike.

II. *Ephesians*: Opening Contextual Remarks

a. AUTHOR / DATE: St. Paul.²⁴

- i. Paul previously lived in Ephesus (54-57 A.D). *Ephesians* was written in approx. 60-62 A.D.; thus, 3-5 years lapsed between Paul’s presence there, and the letter.
- ii. *Ephesians* was written during Paul’s imprisonment,²⁵ most probably in Rome.²⁶
- iii. Paul’s prior ministry at Ephesus was extensive and is described in some detail in the book of *Acts*.²⁷ His time there was remarkably successful, and kept him there longer (3 years) than any other place he lived: “This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.”²⁸
- iv. St. Luke describes a “farewell scene” between Paul and the Ephesian elders at the end of time there—and it is evident that there was a powerful bond between them.²⁹

b. AUDIENCE: The Christian Church at Ephesus.

²⁴ Paul’s authorship of *Ephesians* was not contested until the modern period. The patristic and medieval world of biblical scholarship was unanimous as to Pauline authorship. However, today, six of Paul’s thirteen letters—including *Ephesians* (as well as: *Colossians*, *II Thessalonians*, *I-II Timothy* and *Titus*) are disputed as to their authorship, and referred to by modern scholars as ‘Deutero-Pauline’ epistles. Nevertheless, there are substantial reasons for asserting Pauline authorship, as we do. See: Williamson, *Ephesians*, 14 for a brief discussion. For a more extensive essay, see: Lincoln, *Ephesians*, lix- lxxiii.

²⁵ Mentioned explicitly by Paul in *Eph.* 3:1 4:1; 6:21-22.

²⁶ A postscript in Greek reads *egrāphē egrāphē apó Rōmēs* (“written from Rome), yet this only appears in a few minor manuscript copies of *Ephesians*. Four Pauline epistles—*Ephesians*, *Philippians*, *Colossians* and *Philemon*—are known as the “prison epistles” since they were written while Paul was jailed (*Eph.* 3:1; *Phil.* 1:13-14; *Col.* 4:3; *Philemon* 1). There is broad agreement that Paul’s imprisonment was at Rome (see: *Acts* 28). However, an *earlier* imprisonment of Paul—at least two years in length at Caesarea Maritima—is described in *Acts* 23:33-26:32. Some scholars believe other biblical references point to a still earlier time of imprisonment— at Ephesus (*Acts* 20:18-19; *I Cor.* 15:32; *II Cor.* 1:8-10)—although none of the latter passages are explicit about such; it may only be inferred, and there are various plausible meanings, some of which would not involve earlier imprisonment. What *is* certain is that Paul was imprisoned in Rom from approximately 60-63, and may well have composed the “prison epistles” there (or possibly in the earlier imprisonment in Caesarea Maritima. To be clear—the evidence is not cut-and-dried as to Paul’s possible imprisonment in Ephesus (prior to the later / definitive imprisonments described above).

²⁷ *Acts* 18:19-20:1, 17-38. As Williamson describes, “so successful was Paul’s ministry that believers who had previously practiced magic burned their books ... The effects of the church’s growth began to be felt in the wider community. Demetrius, a leader of the guild of silversmiths who had made miniature shrines of the Temple of Artemis, started a riot against Paul because of the threat that his preaching posed to the sale of shrines and to the cult of Artemis.” (*Ephesians*, 16).

²⁸ *Acts* 19:10.

²⁹ *Acts* 20:16-37.

- i. Many were Gentile Christians.³⁰
- ii. Based on the content of *Ephesians*, many were new to the faith and in need of being strengthened in both: (a) their *individual identity* as Christians; and (b) their *corporeal identity* as members of the “Body of Christ,” the Church.
- iii. Unlike his other epistles, *Ephesians* does not address a specific problem; it presents an apostolic catechesis on “what God had done for them through Jesus Christ.”³¹

c. SETTING:

- i. Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Asia. It was a key port city, and as such, had enormous diversity: extremely affluent, wage-laborers, the very poor.
- ii. Its population at the time of the letter was approx. 200,000. Many of its inhabitants were not native Ephesians, but worked there, were passing through, etc.
- iii. Ephesus was one of the most revered cities of antiquity, largely because of the beautiful Temple of Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.³² As such, there was much pagan activity in Ephesus.
- iv. Today, remnants remain of the spectacular Marble Way—the main street that was paved of marble, was 35 feet wide and a half-mile in length (see: photo).
- v. Curetes Street connected the harbor and the famed theater at Ephesus, which seated 24,000. Another key feature was the bustling Agora (marketplace), southeast of the massive harbor.³³
- vi. Finally, there are two Johannine connections:
 - 1. According to sound tradition, St. John (and the Blessed Virgin Mary) resided here, likely in the latter years of her life.



³⁰ *Eph.* 3:1-3 “For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus *on behalf of you Gentiles*— assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.” Lincoln adds: “A further question that arises is why the writer apparently only addresses Gentile Christians. *Were there only Gentile Christians in the churches addressed?* Or could it be that the writer is not addressing whole churches in a particular locality but only Gentile Christian members of them or perhaps Gentile Christian house churches? What was the relationship of the recipients to Jewish Christians? Again, the letter itself gives the contemporary reader no help in answering such questions” (*Ephesians*, lxxxiv), emphasis added.

³¹ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 18.

³² Allen C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 341.

³³ In the first century A.D., civic structures included the agora with its stoa and town hall. This spilled out onto Curetes Street, which contained monuments to important citizens such as Pollio and Memmius. Curetes St. led to the commercial agora neighboring the theater; this large market square could be entered through the *Mazaeus* and *Mithradates* Gate (erected in honor of their patrons Caesar Augustus and Marcus Agrippa). Shops lined this agora and part of Curetes St. A building across the street from the agora appears to have been a brothel (although some question this). On the way to the Artemis temple from the theater, one would have passed the huge stadium renovated or built under Caesar Nero (A.D. 54–68). [Source: ESV Study Bible].

2. Ephesus is one of the 7 churches addressed in *Revelation*.³⁴ The Ephesian church is praised more than the other 6 mentioned.³⁵

d. **STRUCTURE:**

- i. There is a threefold structure to *Ephesians*:
 1. 1:1—2:3 Introduction of Epistle
 2. 2:1—6:20 Body of Epistle
 3. 6:21—24 Conclusion of Epistle³⁶
- ii. It can further be seen that ch. 1-3 is distinctively theological / doctrinal in content, whereas ch. 4-6 is ethical in this regard.³⁷

e. **PURPOSE / THEOLOGY:**

- i. “The Epistle to the Ephesians is the *most eloquent of the letters attributed to St. Paul* and contain some of the *richest theological writing* in the Christian tradition.”³⁸
- ii. Williamson suggests five crucial themes undergird the letter.³⁹
 1. **Christ.** Paul uses the term *Christos* (“Christ”) forty-five times⁴⁰ in the letter. “Through Christ, God has saved believers from spiritual death caused by sin, from the power of Satan, and from the flesh.”⁴¹
 2. **Union of Believers with Christ.** *Ephesians* emphasizes that through Baptism, believers are profoundly united to Christ; yet, perfecting this “union” with Christ remains the goals of every Christian.
 3. **Christian Identity.** In Christ, the believer has put off the old self and has put on the “new man.”⁴² Believers are brought together into “a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”⁴³
 4. **Holy and Righteous Conduct.** The new life of every believer, made possible by the death and resurrection of Christ, demands that Christians “*become what you*

³⁴ *Rev.* 2:2-3. The remaining six churches to which *Revelation* is addressed are: Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea (see: *Rev.* 2-3).

³⁵ *Rev.* 2:3-4 “I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, *that you have abandoned the love you had at first.*”

²⁹ A more detailed outline of *Ephesians* is found below (Appendix I). See also: Williamson, *Ephesians*, 23-24; for a thorough discussion of the structure of the epistle, see: Lincoln, *Ephesians*, xxxvi-xlvii.

³⁷ “The letter to the Ephesians falls into two distinct, though not totally separate, parts—chs. 1-3 and chs. 4-6—with the “Amen” at the end of chap. 3 and the change to direct exhortation at the beginning of chap. 4 as clear division markers. Recognition of these two parts is determinative for discussion of each of the areas of content, structure, genre, and style. The two parts reflect the writer’s two major concerns, often described loosely as theological or doctrinal and ethical” (Lincoln, *Ephesians*, xxxvi).

³⁸ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 13.

³⁹ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 20-21. Helpfully, he includes in his commentary an “Index of Pastoral Topics” addressed in the letter—there are more approximately *seventy* (pp. 215-26).

⁴⁰ *Eph.* 1:1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 12, 17, 20; 2:5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 20; 3:1, 4, 6, 8, 11, 17, 19, 21; 4:12, 13, 15, 20, 32; 5:2, 5, 14, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 29, 32; 6:5, 6, 23, 24.

⁴¹ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 20.

⁴² *Eph.* 4:22-24 “Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, ²³ and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

⁴³ *Eph.* 2:21-22.

are,” beloved children of God.⁴⁴ “They are to renounce their former, Gentile way of life ... Instead they are to speak the truth and live in love in a way that *imitates God and Christ’s self gift.*”⁴⁵

5. **The Church.** “Ephesians develops the theology of the *universal church* more than any of the other Pauline writings ... the community that composes the Church is a holy temple, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, which Christ Jesus as the “cornerstone.”⁴⁶

III. Chapter One: Introduction of Epistle

a. 1:1-2 GREETING

- i. In customary fashion,⁴⁷ Paul greets the believers at Ephesus; already in his salutation, he reminds them that they are “holy ones” (or “saints”)—made so through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- ii. Aquinas: “They were not initiated into the faith by the Apostle Paul but he did strengthen them in it ... [His] intention is to strengthen them in good habits and spur them on to great perfection.”⁴⁸
- iii. Paul is an *apostolos* (Gk: “apostle”) of Jesus Christ. Just as the Father “sent” Jesus Christ into the world,⁴⁹ to do the will of the Father,⁵⁰ so are his chosen apostles “sent”⁵¹ to do the will of the Father and the Son—in the power of the Spirit.
- iv. In proclaiming ‘*grace to you,*’ a great theme of the epistle is introduced—grace (Gk. *charis*)—the unmerited gift of friendship with God through Jesus.⁵²

b. 1:3-14 TRINITARIAN BLESSING—THE PLAN OF SALVATION

- i. This concluding section of ch. 1 is Paul’s blessing to the *Ephesians*. In the Greek, 1:3-14 is *one long sentence*—the longest in the entire NT!
- ii. Much of Paul’s theology can be seen by studying his prayers—and this passage is no exception.
 1. The prayer is “Trinitarian” in that *the Father, Son and Holy Spirit* are each invoked.
 2. The prayer presents, in concise form, the plan of salvation:
 - v. 3—Paul extends “peace and grace” from God and Jesus Christ.
 - vv. 4-6—He summarizes the Father’s plan of salvation.

⁴⁴ “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (*Eph.* 4:1-3); see also *Eph.* 5:1.

⁴⁵ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 21, emphases added.

⁴⁶ Ibid; see *Eph.* 2:20.

⁴⁷ See: *Rom.* 1:1-7; *I Cor.* 1:1-3; *II Cor.* 1:1-2; *Gal.* 1:1-5, etc.

⁴⁸ Aquinas, *Ephesians*, Lecture 1, p. 42.

⁴⁹ *John* 5:23-30; 6:29; 7:16-18; 17:3, 18; see also: *Luke* 1:43; 9:1-3.

⁵⁰ *John* 4:34; 5:30; 6:38-40; see also: *Matt.* 12:1-11.

⁵¹ *John* 20:21-23 “Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. *As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.*’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

⁵² Other occurrences of “grace” in *Ephesians*: 1:6, 7; 2:5, 7-8; 3:2, 7, 8, 32; 4:7, 29; 6:24.

- **vv. 7-10**—He then explains how Christ fulfilled the Father’s plan.
- **vv. 11-14**—Finally, Paul describes how those who believed in the Gospel, the “word of truth,” were sealed by the Holy Spirit.

3. Several additional points:

- v. 3**— *who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens.* Above all, the blessing is the gift of the Holy Spirit itself.⁵³ The origin of all grace is in heaven, from God, who bestows them on His children, through Christ, with his angels and saints who cooperate with Him.
- vv. 3, 5**—*destined us ... before the foundation of the world.* Before creation, God’s plan for us was already set in motion.
- v. 5**—*in love ... through Jesus Christ.* The Father’s plan is a manifestation of His boundless love for humanity. It is through Jesus—and Him alone—that we can become “sons.” In Christ, we are all “adopted” children of God.⁵⁴ The phrase “through his blood” (Gk: *dia autou tou haimatos*) is Paul’s shorthand for Christ’s atoning death on the cross, by which our trespasses are forgiven.
- v. 7**—*redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.* “Redemption” refers to the freedom gained, e.g., in the paying of a ransom. In 2:1-3, Paul describes the reasons for which “redemption was needed—namely, our sin and disobedience.
- v. 8**—*the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us* [Latin: *superabundare*, “super-abounded”]. Aquinas indicates that “us” refers to the apostles: “Whence the rashness—not to say error—of those who dare to equate the grace and glory of some saints with that of the Apostles. For this passage openly asserts that the Apostles were more graced than the other saints, except for Christ and His Virgin mother ... Greater dignity was preordained by God to some saints, and hence he infused grace more abundantly into them ... God’s grace super-abounded on the Apostles [enriching them with all wisdom]. For the Apostles were set over the Church to be her pastors.”⁵⁵
- v. 10**—*he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will.* Aquinas: “That is, the sacred secret, hidden from the beginning, the mystery of the Incarnation ... So, the cause of the Incarnation was concealed from everyone except those to whom God revealed it through the Holy Spirit, as the Apostle mentions: ‘But to us, God hath revealed them, by the Spirit.’”⁵⁶
- v. 13**— *In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.*
 - Euangelion* (The Gospel): Paul’s entire worldview—their entire hope:

⁵³ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 31.

⁵⁴ On the theme of “children” in *Ephesians*, see: 2:3; 4:14; 5:1, 8; 6:1-4. See also: *John* 1:12; 11:52; *Rom.* 8:16, 21; 9:8; *Phil.* 2:15; *I John* 3:1, 10; 5:2.

⁵⁵ Aquinas, *Ephesians*, Lecture 3, p. 56.

⁵⁶ Aquinas, *Ephesians*, Lecture 3, p. 57. See *I Cor.* 2:10-11.

- ii. “For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is *not man’s gospel*. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, *but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ*.”⁵⁷
- iii. N.T. Wright: “Put all this together, and what do we have, as ... the worldview of Saul of Tarsus? We have precisely *the gospel*, the *euangelion*, the ‘good news’, rooted in the ‘good news’ spoken of in the Great Prophet (Isa. 52:7) confronting the ‘good news’ carved in stone around Caesar’s empire. We have the symbol by which Paul declared that he was himself defined, the anchor of his own vocational mindset: Paul, an apostle, set apart for the *good news of God*; I am not ashamed of the good news, because it is *God’s power for salvation to all who believe* ... woe to me *if I do not announce the good news*; I do it all *for the sake of the good news*; let me remind you of *the gospel which I announced* to you, which you received, in which you stand firm, through which you are saved; *the gospel of the glory of the Messiah*, who is the image of God; your confession of faith in the Messiah’s gospel has brought you into proper order; let me remind you that *the gospel which was gossiped by me* was not something I received from other people; I did it so that *the truth of the gospel* might be preserved for you; my calling is *to gospel to the Gentiles* the unsearchable riches of the Messiah; what has been happening to me has been *for the advancement of the gospel*; let your public life be *worthy of the gospel of the Messiah*; don’t move away from *the hope of the gospel*; our *gospel was not in word only*, but in power, in the holy spirit, and in full conviction ...”⁵⁸
- iv. Wright summarizes, “*The gospel, the gospel, the gospel. It defined Paul. It defined his work. It defined his communities*. It was the shorthand summary of the theology which, in turn, was the foundation for the central pillar for the new worldview. *It carried God’s power* ... the worldview, and those who lived by it, were going to need it.”⁵⁹
- h. v. 12—*We who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory*. Here, Paul is talking about the Jewish people that God’s purpose for them is that His glory would be revealed through them, now in an unprecedented way, for those Jewish believers in Christ.
- i. v. 13—*Sealed with the promise of the Holy Spirit*. “In the ancient world, when a letter or legal document was marked in wax with the seal (*sphragis*) of its author, the seal gave evidence of its authenticity ... the gift of the Spirit that Christians have received functions as a seal. It marks us as belonging to God and under His protection; it is the proof of our adoption as sons and daughters (*Gal. 4:6*).”⁶⁰

⁵⁷ *Gal. 1:11-12*.

⁵⁸ N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 4, Christian Origins and the Question of God (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 410.

⁵⁹ Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 411.

⁶⁰ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 40-41. He adds a note of application: “Catholics today should aspire to experience as fully as they can the seal of the Spirit in a way that is visible to all by manifesting the [gifts] (*I Cor. 12*) and the fruit of the Spirit (*Gal. 5:22-23*),” p. 43.

c. **1:15-23 PAUL'S PRAYER—KNOWING GOD & ONE'S PLACE IN THE BODY OF CHRIST**

- i. vv. 15-23 are one sentence—and the longest single sentence in the Greek NT! Overall, it expresses Paul's desire that the Ephesians grasp the glorious future God has in store for them & the might of His power to bring it about.
- ii. v. 15—I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints. Above all, Christians are to be known by these two distinguishing characteristics, reminiscent of the 'Golden Rule.'⁶¹
- iii. v. 18—that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints. Aquinas identifies four qualities of the spiritual gifts to the Church:
 1. First—"riches" implies that they abundant.
 2. Second—with respect to "glory," they are sure, i.e. all who do the good will receive "glory and honor" (Rom. 2:10).
 3. Third—"inheritance" implies that they are most enduring.
 4. Fourth—they will be seen in the future time to be most profound: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."⁶²
- iv. v. 20—Which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places. "The language of the Apostle, acknowledging the power of God, refers to future things as though they have already happened. For the things which are to be performed already subsist in their fullness in Christ, in whom is all fullness."⁶³
- v. v. 21—far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named. "Although these terms can refer to political authorities, here, as elsewhere in *Ephesians* (3:10; 6:12; also *Col.* 1:16; 2:15) Paul uses these words to refer to heavenly, spiritual powers, either good or evil that direct or influence human affairs."⁶⁴
- vi. v. 22—he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church. Aquinas observes that "everything is subject" to Christ; the just person does so voluntarily, by embracing the will of God; the unjust will be subjected to Him in the final judgment.⁶⁵

⁶¹ *Luke* 10:27 (and par.): "And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." See also: *Matt.* 7:12 "So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets."

⁶² Aquinas, *Ephesians*, Lecture 7, p. 72; *Rom.* 8:18.

⁶³ Hilary of Portiers, *On the Trinity* 11.31. St. Hilary (315-67); Bishop of Poitiers. Referred to as the "Athanasius of the West" because of his fine defense against heretics (Arians) regarding the common nature of the Father and the Son.

⁶⁴ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 53.

⁶⁵ Aquinas, *Ephesians*, Lecture 8, p. 80-81.

PRESENTATION TWO: EPHESIANS 2-4

I. *Introduction.*

- a. The previous lesson ended with Paul's detailed prayer for the Ephesians (1:15-23), which concludes his introductory section of the letter.
- b. We now move into the "body" of the epistle (2:1-6:20).⁶⁶ In this presentation, we will examine *Eph.* 2-4; in the subsequent presentation we will examine the final two chapters (*Eph.* 5-6).
- c. Another way of understanding the body of the epistle is in two parts, the first part primarily concerns Paul's *proclamation* (theology / doctrine); the second part concerns *exhortation* (moral instruction).
 - i. Part A: Proclamation: The Extravagant Grace of God in Christ (2:1—3:21)
 - ii. Part B: Exhortation: Being 'Imitators of God' in All Christian Living (4:1—6:20)⁶⁷

II. *Salvation —By Grace, Through Faith for Good Works (2:1-10)*

- a. **v. 1**—*made alive ... you were dead.* By his glorious Cross Christ has won salvation for all men. He redeemed them from the sin that held them in bondage. *Catechism*: "For freedom Christ has set us free' (*Gal.* 5:1). In Him we have communion with the '*truth that makes us free*' (*John* 8:32). The Holy Spirit has been given to us and, as the Apostle teaches, '*Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom*' (*II Cor.* 3:17). Already we glory in the '*liberty of the children of God*' (*Rom.* 8:21)."⁶⁸
- b. **v. 2**—*the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.* Here again the theme of "spiritual warfare" is introduced into the letter. Chrysostom: "Why does he call the devil the ruler of this world? Because virtually the whole of humanity surrendered to him. All are his voluntary and willing slaves. Few pay any heed to Christ, who promises unnumbered blessings. Rather they follow after the devil, who promises nothing but leads them all to hell. He rules in this age, where he has ... more subjects than God, more who obey him rather than God. All but a few are in his grasp on account of their laxity."⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Paul employs the ancient art of rhetoric in the epistle. Paul effectively used two types of Greco-Roman rhetoric in the letter. In ch. 1-3, he makes use of *demonstrative speech* (also called "epideictic" rhetoric), which has the pattern of "praising the good and / or denigrating the bad. In particular, ch. 1-3 is saturated by praise of God and what God has done. In this way, the praise has the effect of "moving the heart / emotions," In this case toward their growth in sound doctrine and love of God. In chs. 4-6, Paul makes use of *deliberative speech*, in which the author attempts to persuade the audience by "moving the intellect" towards the right course of action, in this case, moral teaching.

⁶⁷ See Appendix I for detailed outline.

⁶⁸ CCC #1741 (emphases added). Surely in Paul's language of being "made alive," he has in mind Christian baptism. CCC #977: "Our Lord tied the forgiveness of sins to faith and Baptism: 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. *He who believes and is baptized will be saved*' (*Mark* 16:15-16). Baptism is the first and chief sacrament of forgiveness of sins because it unites us with Christ, who died for our sins and rose for our justification, so that 'we too might walk in newness of life' (*Rom.* 6:4).

⁶⁹ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily on Ephesians* 4.2.1-3.

- c. v. 5—*made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).*
- i. A great paradox: the Christian is “made alive” by no other means than the death of Christ. Note that Paul’s concept of salvation is not merely “individualistic” by corporal: “together” implies the mystery of salvation that belongs to the whole Church—and not just the Ephesians.
 - ii. Suddenly, Paul interrupts his own thought to call attention that “this initiative on God’s part was *totally gratuitous, undeserved* . . . this salvation is depicted as *something that has already taken place*. In the Greek, the word ‘*saved*’ is used in the perfect tense, which describes a past event whose effects *continue* into the present.”⁷⁰
 - iii. **Vv. 8-10**—“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”
 1. “The structure of verses 8-9 leaves no opportunity for misunderstanding. Paul begins with the assertion that *by grace’ you have been saved*. Then he denies that we had anything to do with it: *and this is not from you*. Then he repeats the point—our salvation *is the gift of God*—and again he denies that it proceeds from human effort—*it is not from works*. Finally, he states a reason for this fact: *so that no one may boast*.”⁷²
 2. Ambrose: “Do not rely on your own efforts but on the grace of Christ. ‘You are,’ says the Apostle, ‘saved by grace.’ Therefore it is not a matter of arrogance here but faith when we celebrate: We are accepted! This is not pride but devotion.”⁷³
 3. *Catechism*: “The grace of Christ is the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of his own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it. It is the *sanctifying* or *deifying grace* received in Baptism. It is in us the source of the work of sanctification.”⁷⁴
 4. Augustine: “Indeed we also work, *but we are only collaborating with God who works, for his mercy has gone before us*. It has gone before us so that we may be healed, and follows us so that once healed, we may be given life; it goes before us so that we may be called, and follows us so that we may be glorified; it goes before us so that we may live devoutly, and follows us so that we may always live with God: *for without him we can do nothing*.”⁷⁵

III. *Reconciliation—of Jews & Gentiles into the One Body of Christ (2:11-22)*

⁷⁰ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 60-61.

⁷¹ CCC #1996: “Our justification comes from the grace of God. Grace is *favor*, the *free and undeserved help* that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life.”

⁷² Williamson, *Ephesians*, 63. His commentary includes a very section on the application of this important passage. Williamson, a convert from Protestantism, nicely explains the question often put to Catholics, “*Are you saved*”—and provides a thoroughly Catholic response (pp. 66-68).

⁷³ St. Ambrose, *On the Sacraments*, 5.4.19.

⁷⁴ CCC #1999.

⁷⁵ St. Augustine, *De natura et gratia* (“The Nature of Grace”), 31.

- a. Paul explains to this largely Gentile church that it was the sacrificial death of Jesus the Messiah that made their salvation possible, “reconciling” them to God. Not only that, but Christ’s death on the cross ‘reconciles’ Jews and Gentiles in God’s new creation.
- b. **vv. 11-12**—*Gentiles in the flesh ... separated from Christ ... strangers to the covenant.* Here, Paul is not putting Jews over Gentiles—but he is reminding them that in salvation history, God covenanted with the children of Abraham—Israel. As Gentiles, they were “outside” of this economy of salvation. Circumcision alone did not “save” the Israelites, individually or collectively, but it did mark them off as “belonging to God.” Now—in Christ, salvation is possible for both Jews and Gentiles, beginning with the grace of baptism, which is a kind of “circumcision of the heart,” a divine action affecting the person at the deepest level.
- c. **v. 14**—*for he is our peace.* Aquinas makes the point that Paul means that Christ is the *cause* of our peace: “Whatever peace we possess is caused by Christ, and as a result, whatever [peace] men have with one another.”⁷⁶
- d. **v. 15**—*that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace.* Chrysostom: “Don’t you see? The Greek does not have to become a Jew. Rather *both enter into a new condition.* His aim is not to bring Greek believers into being as different kinds of Jews but rather *to create both anew.* Rightly he uses the term *create* rather than *change* to point out the great effect of what God has done. Even though the creation is invisible, it is no less a creation of its Creator.”⁷⁷
- e. **v. 18**—*for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.*
- i. “Both Jews and Gentiles “have access to the Father” through Christ himself. *But how? ‘In one Spirit.’* For the Spirit, who is one with Christ, enters into us when we believe in Christ. We then feel God’s presence, know God and worship God. Thus we come to the Father in that same Spirit through Christ. No one, whether Jew or Gentile, comes to the Father except through Christ.”⁷⁸
 - ii. “The proof that the Gentiles are co-recipients with the Jews of the messianic peace [above] is that *through him we both have access to the Father.* Through a relationship with Jesus, *both Jews and Gentiles* can experience God as Father (*Gal. 4:6*) and the same Spirit is the [source] of access for both ... Every Gentile and Jewish believer now has ‘access’ in prayer to the king of the universe.”⁷⁹
 - iii. **vv. 19-21**—*So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord.*
 1. Aquinas observes that there seems, at first glance, to be “two foundations”—that of the ‘*Apostles and Prophets,*’ which is a secondary foundation with the primary foundation being Christ himself, the ‘*cornerstone.*’ Yet he explains,

⁷⁶ Aquinas, *Ephesians*, Lecture 5, p. 103.

⁷⁷ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily on Ephesians*, 5.2.13-15 (emphases added). Williamson indicates that the “dividing wall of enmity” in v. 14 likely refers to the Temple in Jerusalem and the Law of Moses (*Ephesians*, 71).

⁷⁸ St. Marius Victorinus, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, 1.2.18. Marius Victorinus (b. 280): A grammarian of African origin who taught rhetoric at Rome and translated works of Platonists. After his conversion (c. 355), he wrote works against the Arians and commentaries on Paul’s letters.

⁷⁹ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 77.

“In meaning, however, they are in no way different since it is the same to say that Christ is the foundation, and the teaching of the Apostles and Prophets, is, after all, they proclaimed Christ alone, and not themselves. *To accept their doctrine is to accept Christ crucified: ‘We preach Christ crucified (I Cor. 1:23); and ‘We have the mind of Christ’ (I Cor. 2:16).”*⁸⁰

IV. Evangelization—Paul’s Ministry: Preaching God’s Secret Plan (3:1-13)

a. v. 1—*prisoner of Christ*. A double meaning: first, Paul was physically imprisoned at the time of the writing of the letter; second, and on a deeper spiritual level, this is Paul’s total-belonging to Christ.⁸¹

i. v. 8—*to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ*. “The [New American Bible’s] ‘*inscrutable*’ becomes clearer when supplemented by the other translations of the same Greek word: ‘*unsearchable*’ [Revised Standard Version], ‘*boundless*’ [NRSV], ‘*unfathomable*’ [New Jerusalem Bible]. Paul is saying that in Christ there is found a treasure *without limits* and that it is his special privilege to share that treasure with the Gentiles.”⁸²

ii. vv. 9-10—*the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places*.

1. *Catechism*: “From the beginning until “*the fullness of time*’ (Gal. 4:4) the joint mission of the Father’s Word and Spirit remains *hidden*, but it is at work. God’s Spirit prepares for the time of the Messiah. Neither is fully revealed but both are already promised, to be watched for and welcomed at their manifestation. So, for this reason, when the Church reads the Old Testament, she searches there for what the Spirit, ‘*who has spoken through the prophets*,’ wants to tell us about Christ.”⁸³

2. Aquinas calls attention to a puzzle in this passage:

a. It is clear that the manifold wisdom comes “through the Church.”

b. But Paul does not say that it is manifest to the Gentiles (though it is). Rather, he says that it is manifest *to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places*. In other words, the angels.

c. Aquinas asks: *does this mean that the Apostles taught the angels?* He entertains the possibility, since the Apostles were, according to *John 1:18*, taught directly by God.⁸⁴ Yet, Aquinas settles instead on the solution that the angels were “instructed through the church, that is, through the apostolic preaching ... in such a way that they were not

⁸⁰ Aquinas, *Ephesians*, Lecture 6, p. 114.

⁸¹ “[Paul] can use the term “prisoner” in both a literal and metaphorical sense at the same time, so that his physical imprisonment can be seen as simply the consequence of his spiritual captivity to Christ. This latter metaphorical sense is similar to Paul’s use of *doulos*, “slave,” to speak of his unconditional allegiance to his Lord” (Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 173).

⁸² Williamson, *Ephesians*, 91.

⁸³ CCC #702.

⁸⁴ *John 1:18* “No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he [The Father] has made him [that is, Christ] known [to the Apostles].”

taught *by* the apostles, but *in* them.”⁸⁵ In other words, certain mysteries are not “revealed” to the angels (or any person) but known only to God. “They are hidden in God,” Aquinas says, “and gradually unfold in external [things]. Clearly, the angels will understand them neither in themselves, nor in the Word, nor by the Apostles, nor any other wayfarer. Rather they know [the mysteries of grace] hidden in the Divine mind *as they unfold in the Apostles themselves*. This is like the case of a house, or the concept of a house to be built, in the mind of an architect. *As long as it remains hidden in the mind it can be known to no one—except God, who alone penetrates into human souls*. However, once the concepts are realized externally in the construction, *in the house after it is built*, anyone can learn from the building what previously concealed in the architect’s mind. Yet they are not taught *by* the house but *in* the house.”⁸⁶

V. *Divinization—Paul’s Prayer & Petitions for the Ephesian Church (3:14-21)*

- a. Paul brings to a close the “proclamation” section in 3:14-21. He does so in the form of a prayer—*‘kneeling before the Father’* (3:14), for their continual spiritual growth and spiritual intimacy with God—culminating in their total union with God (i.e. *divinization*).
- b. **vv. 16-19**—Williamson correctly points out that there are *five petitions* in this passage:
 - i. *To be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man*—“Paul does not merely say ‘strengthened’ but ‘strengthened with power.’”⁸⁷
 - ii. *and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love*—“But why is Paul praying that the Messiah dwell in the hearts of his readers *if they are already ‘in Christ’* and therefore already have Christ living in their hearts? The fact is that there are *degrees* of living in Christ and having Christ live in us. There is plenty of room for growth here, and Paul is praying that his readers will *go all the way*, allowing Christ to live in them to the fullest and to shape their thinking, feeling and acting.”⁸⁸
 - iii. *To comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth*—“The larger context suggests Paul is referring ... to the immensity of God’s plan explained earlier in the chapter (3:1-10).”⁸⁹
 - iv. *And to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge*—“Paul prays that his readers may realize—may have personal experiential knowledge of—Christ’s *love for them*.”⁹⁰
 - v. *That you may be filled with all the fullness of God*—“The fifth petition sums up all the others and expresses the real goal of Paul’s prayer ... There is an implicit

⁸⁵ Aquinas, *Ephesians*, Lecture 4, pp. 133.

⁸⁶ Aquinas, *Ephesians*, Lecture 4, pp. 133-34.

⁸⁷ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 98.

⁸⁸ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 98.

⁸⁹ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 99.

⁹⁰ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 99.

metaphor here. Paul's readers are likened to *containers*, which, Paul prays, will be filled up to the maximum level."⁹¹

c. In summary, it could be said that:

- i. Paul's prayer is a prayer of total transformation, "becoming containers *as full as God's fullness*." Though perplexing as it sounds to some, the end of this process is known in Catholic theology as *theosis* (or divinization / deification).
- ii. This should not be understood as though the perfecting of our union with God ends in our "becoming God"—no.
- iii. But it does mean that the Christian hope is that "we become god," inasmuch as we are fully transformed into His image: "Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that *when he appears we shall be like him*, for we shall see him as he is."⁹²

VI. *Become What You Are—Unity within the Church in Word and Deed, Toward Full Maturity (4:1-16)*

- a. This section (4:1-16) begins the second part of the body of the epistle, that of "exhortation." As such, the content moves from "proclamation" (of doctrine / theology) to that of moral teaching (i.e. exhortation).
- b. Here, Paul urges the Ephesians to be "imitators of God" in all facets of Christian living (4:1—6:20).
- c. **v. 1**—Paul repeats his imagery of "prisoner" from earlier in the letter (see: 3:1).
- d. **v. 3**—*maintain the unity*. Aquinas notes that there are "three incentives" for keeping the unity:
 - i. The devotedness of Paul's love for them;
 - ii. The remembrance of his imprisonment / suffering;
 - iii. The consideration of "divine favors."⁹³ The first two of these are self-explanatory. As to the third, he explains: "When persons are called together to possess something in common and mutually enjoy it, they usually live and travel together. Thus in a spiritual way, [Paul] says, Because you are called to one and the same reality, namely, *the final reward*, you ought to walk with a unity of spirit in the *one hope of your calling ... 'Blessed are they that are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'*"⁹⁴
- e. **v. 4**—*called to one hope*. "If the Father's house has many mansions, how are we to say that we are called to one hope? One reply is that the one hope of the calling is the kingdom of God. It is as though we were to speak of the one house of God or say that in one house are many mansions ... at the end and consummation of all things *everything is to be restored to its original condition, when we are all made one body and formed anew into a perfect man.*"⁹⁵

⁹¹ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 99.

⁹² *I John 3:2*. For an excellent discussion of *theosis* / divinization, see; Daniel A. Keating, *Deification and Grace*, Introductions to Catholic Doctrine (Naples, FL: Sapientia, 2007).

⁹³ Aquinas, *Ephesians*, 147.

⁹⁴ Aquinas, *Ephesians*, 154 (emphasis added).

⁹⁵ St. Jerome, *Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.3-4* (emphasis added).

- f. v. 5—*one Lord, one faith, one baptism.*
- i. **One Lord:** “We have one Lord, namely Jesus ... In the early Church, the affirmation ‘*Jesus is Lord*’ was a way of acknowledging Jesus as supreme ruler and God, and of confessing allegiance to Him over every other power.”⁹⁶
 - ii. **One Faith:** Irenaeus: “Indeed, the Church, though scattered throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, having received the faith from the apostles and their disciples ... guards [this preaching and faith] with care, as dwelling in but a single house, and similarly believes as if having but one soul and a single heart, and preaches, teaches, and hands on this faith with a unanimous voice, as if possessing only one mouth.”⁹⁷
 - iii. **One Baptism:**
 1. Nicene Creed: “We acknowledge *one baptism* for the forgiveness of sins.”
 2. *Catechism*: “Our Lord tied the forgiveness of sins to faith and Baptism: ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved’ (*Mark* 16:15-16). Baptism is *the first and chief sacrament of forgiveness of sins* because it unites us with Christ, who died for our sins and rose for our justification, so that “we too might walk in newness of life’ (*Rom.* 6:4).”⁹⁸
- g. vv. 8-10—*He ascended / also descended ...*
- i. These are some of the most opaque verses in *Ephesians*.
 - ii. Paul seems to be referencing *Psa.* 68:10 “Blessed be the Lord day by day, God, our salvation, *who carries us.*” Paul’s main point is that to speak of “God ascending” is to acknowledge that He has already “descended.”
 - iii. Three interpretations are possible with regard to Christ’s “descent”:
 1. The first possibility is in reference to Christ’s incarnation—emptying Himself of heavenly glory and “dwelling among us” (*John* 1:14).
 2. A second possibility concerns Christ’s death, i.e. His descent into the earth in burial.
 3. A third possibility concerns the descent of Christ into the realm of the dead, when He “preached to the spirits in prison” (*1 Pet.* 3:18-22).
 4. In regard to the meaning of “descending,” Aquinas considers the first and third solutions (above) as the most likely.⁹⁹ Regardless, “*the one who descended*” is the same person who has now “*ascended far above the heavens*” – that is, Christ. “Paul marvels that the one who came *so far down* has now been *raised so high up*. God had a purpose for this” *that He might fill all things ... so that the Messiah might be Lord over all.*”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 111.

⁹⁷ St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1, 10, 1–2. See also: CCC #173: “Indeed, the Church, though scattered throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, having received the faith from the apostles and their disciples ... guards [this preaching and faith] with care, as dwelling in but a single house, and similarly *believes as if having but one soul and a single heart, and preaches, teaches, and hands on this faith with a unanimous voice, as if possessing only one mouth*” (emphasis added).

⁹⁸ CCC #977.

⁹⁹ Aquinas, *Ephesians*, Lecture 3, p. 161.

¹⁰⁰ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 116.

h. **vv. 14-15**—*carried about by every wind of doctrine.*

- i. “From this entire passage is furnished the clearest proof of the existence of an *external* authority in the Church. For the office of Apostles (v. 11), must be exercised *externally*—an authority which is to last *to the end of time*; (v. 13), an authority gifted with *infallibility*, since, it could not otherwise attain the end of its institution (v. 14). That is to say, it could not protect us against the wiles of deceitful men, who, with the nicest subtlety, assail the truth and endeavour *to lead men after them into error*—an authority armed and vested with *summary power*, for the same reason; otherwise, it could not prevent the growth of error.”¹⁰¹
- ii. “New believers, and sometimes older ones who should know better, quickly embrace the latest fashions of thought and action, whether secular or religious, *without measuring them against Scripture and the faith of the Church*. Stability in the truth is a mark of maturity.”¹⁰²

i. Imitators of God—Putting on *Ho Kainos Anthropos* [“the New Self”] (4:17-5:2)

- i. Paul, having concluded his opening exhortation to the Ephesians, on “unity” and “maturity” in the Church, now turns to other matters.
- ii. **4:1-2**—*you must no longer live as the Gentiles do.*
 1. Paul’s choice of the Greek word *ethné* (“Gentiles”) is an interesting one. It is highly unlikely that he is talking to the minority of Jewish Christians here, and context bears this point. Actually, he *is* talking to Gentiles—that is, telling the former Gentiles not to “live as Gentiles” any longer.
 2. Here, he distinguishes the new identity of those formerly Gentile believers, who are now “in Christ”—from their previous ways. For Paul, it is not a matter of “pulling up one’s bootstraps” or merely trying harder, but of embracing the entirely new identity brought about through the grace of the sacraments.
 3. As such, Paul is admonishing the believers, “*become what you are.*” He has earlier spoke of the “new man” (2:15), the Christian believer, such that the one man of the “new creation” takes the place of what were two men (i.e., Jews and Gentiles).
- iii. **4:21-22**—*put off the old nature / put on the new nature.*
 1. Along the same lines as above, he reminds the former-Gentiles what that way of living leads to: “*hardness of heart*” (v. 18), and being given over to every form of ungodliness (v. 19: “*they have become callous and have given themselves up to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness.*”
 2. “Although baptism is not explicitly mentioned, there is little doubt that Paul is referring to this event, since his other writings speak about baptism using this vocabulary.¹⁰³ Moreover, the verbs he uses, i.e., “put off” and “put on” are commonly used in regard to undressing and dressing—clothing. As such, Paul may be asking them to visually remember their own baptism, or, at least, the

¹⁰¹ John MacEvilly, *An Exposition of the Epistles of St. Paul and of the Catholic Epistles*, vol. 1 (Dublin; New York: M. H. Gill & Son; Benziger Brothers, 1898), 435 (emphases added).

¹⁰² Williamson, *Ephesians*, 121 (emphasis added).

¹⁰³ See: *Rom.* 6:3, 6; *Gal.* 3:27-28; *Col.* 2:12; 3:9-11.

practice of baptism, in order to actively “wear” the new nature that belongs to them in Christ.

iv. **4:26**—*Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.*

1. It is mistaken to conclude that Paul is “conceding” to anger in any expression, as long as it does not “get out of hand,” i.e., lead to sin. This is not so:
 - a. “[Paul] is not granting permission to be angry. Although v 26b recognizes that anger will occur, v 27¹⁰⁴ indicates how dangerous it is and v 31 repudiates all anger (see also: 6:4¹⁰⁵). The focus of v 26a, then, is on *not sinning* by indulging in anger.”¹⁰⁶
 - b. “*Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*”¹⁰⁷
2. Chrysostom: Do you wish to have your fill of anger? *One hour, or two or three is enough for you.* But do not let the sun go down and leave you both as enemies. It was God’s goodness that did not leave us in anger. He did not let us part in enmity. He shed his light upon those of us who were sinners. So when evening is coming on, be reconciled. Quell the evil impulses while they are fresh. For if night overtakes you, the next day will not be enough time to extinguish the further evil which has been increasing overnight.”¹⁰⁸

v. **5:1-2**—*be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

1. “We cannot imitate God’s omnipotence and omniscience, *but we can imitate his forgiveness and generous love toward those who wrong us ...* Christ’s sacrifice on the cross provides the pattern for how we are to offer ourselves to God and others in *self-giving love.*”¹⁰⁹
2. *Catechism*: “Incorporated into *Christ* by Baptism, Christians are ‘*dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus*’ and so participate in the life of the Risen Lord (see: *Rom.* 6:5, 11). Following Christ and united with him, Christians can strive to be ‘*imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love*’ (*Eph.* 5:1-2) by conforming their thoughts, words and actions to the ‘mind ... which is yours in Christ Jesus,’ (*Phil.* 2:5) and by following his example.”¹¹⁰
3. N. T. Wright: “[This] passage, too, grows out of the command to unity, and goes on at once to speak of the need for holiness. ‘Religion’ in general was all about *the*

¹⁰⁴ *Eph.* 4:27 “and give no opportunity to the devil.”

¹⁰⁵ *Eph.* 6:4 “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” CCC# 2223: “Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by *creating a home* where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for *education in the virtues*. This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery—the preconditions of all true freedom. Parents should teach their children to subordinate the “material and instinctual dimensions to interior and spiritual ones.”³¹ Parents have a grave responsibility to give good example to their children.”

¹⁰⁶ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, vol. 42, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1990), 301.

¹⁰⁷ *Eph.* 4:31–32.

¹⁰⁸ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily on Ephesians* 14.4.25–27.

¹⁰⁹ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 137.

¹¹⁰ CCC #1694 (emphasis added).

unity of the community; first-century Jewish 'religion', always with Exodus and Temple in mind, was all about holiness. Paul scoops up the whole package, reshapes it around the Messiah, and sets the lively metaphors scampering around in celebration."¹¹¹

- vi. **CONCLUSION.** "It is striking how much of Paul's practical instruction about our conduct is based on what God has done for us *in Christ* rather than on divine commands or ethical reasoning (as in ancient or modern moral philosophy). How we are to live derives from the fact that that through faith and baptism we have acquired a 'new self' that has been 'created' (v. 24) to be like God, which unites us to Christ and to the other members of Christ's body."¹¹²

¹¹¹ Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1344 (emphasis added).

¹¹² Williamson, *Ephesians*, 137.

PRESENTATION THREE: EPHESIANS 5-6; CONCLUSION

I. *Introduction.*

- a. In the previous section, Paul's emphasis was on "imitating God" and living out our new identity in Christ.
- b. Now, he sharply contrasts the light and grace of the Christian life with the darkness and evil of pagan society. This discussion of "life in the Spirit" (5:3-20) leads to a discussion of expectations for "Christian family life" (5:21-6:9) and finally, an admonition about the "spiritual battle" in which all Christians are engaged (6:10-20).

II. *Children of Light— Life in the Spirit (5:3-20)*

- a. **v. 3**—*But fornication and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is fitting among saints.*
 - i. Here, Paul is very clear and very firm: immoral behavior has no place in the "holy ones" of God.
 - ii. Aquinas marshals an array of OT texts which urge Israel to avoid all immorality:
 1. "I have made *a covenant with my eyes*; how then could I look upon a virgin?"¹¹³
 2. "My people inquire of a thing of wood, and their staff gives them oracles. For *a spirit of harlotry has led them astray, and they have left their God to play the harlot.*"¹¹⁴
 3. To these he adds Paul's own words, "*flee from fornication.*"¹¹⁵
 - iii. Aquinas adds that In Latin, the term '*fornication*' is from the term '*fornix*,' the triumphal arch where brothels are located.¹¹⁶
- b. **v. 4**—*no filthiness, nor silly talk, nor levity, which are not fitting; but instead let there be thanksgiving.*
 - i. "Sexual immorality defiles the worship a Christian offers to God in '*the temple of the Holy Spirit*,' the Christian's body (*I Cor.* 6:18-19)."¹¹⁷ Williamson adds that sexual joking "is incompatible with the '*new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness*' (*Eph.* 4:24)." Additionally, he adds that coarse joking / conversation about sexuality "*diminishes what sexual intimacy is all about: an expression of the mutual self-gift of a man and a woman in marriage, a sign of the relationship between Christ and the Church* (*Eph.* 5:25-32)."¹¹⁸ Finally, he adds, "sexually suggestive speech and humor—common on television, in movies, and in many social settings—contributes to sexual misconduct because it *coarsens us* and gives immorality a *false attractiveness.*"¹¹⁹

¹¹³ *Job* 31:1.

¹¹⁴ *Hosea* 4:12.

¹¹⁵ *I Cor.* 6:18.

¹¹⁶ See: Aquinas, Lecture 2, *Ephesians*, 197. The Greek term for '*fornication*' in the Greek is *porneia*.

¹¹⁷ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 139 (emphasis added).

¹¹⁸ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 139 (emphasis added).

¹¹⁹ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 139.

- c. v. 10—*try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord*. The English Standard Version has “try to discern,” from the verb *dokimazō* (“examine, interpret, test”).
- d. v. 14—*Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light.*”
- i. “By *sleep* he signifies a stupor of the mind. The sleepers are lost from the true path. This estrangement is a kind of death, from which he calls them to rise that they may repent and acknowledge the truth, which is Christ. Thus the faithless and vicious, steeped as they are in mud without hope of life, are called to rise and come out and have a share in life with Christ, so as to pass from the shadows out to the light and from death to life.”¹²⁰
- e. v. 18—*do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit.*
- f. Two errors are often committed here:
 - i. On the one hand, some Christians go beyond Paul, as if he does not permit the taking of a drink. Yet, this is neither the letter nor the spirit of the text. Jesus’ first miracle was *turning water into wine*—at a Jewish wedding feast (*John 2:10-11*). Paul does not rebuke them for the drinking of alcohol—but for being “drunk” with wine.
 - Chrysostom: “Immoderate indulgence makes one rash, passionate, prone to stumbling, anger and severity. *Wine was given to gladden us, not for intoxication.*”¹²¹
 - ii. On the other hand, some err in seeing this as a license to “do things in moderation.” This is mistaken inasmuch as it reads into the text as well. Moderation in behavior is commendable. But that is not the argument of the text. The text is contrasting *two dispositions*—first, the man “intoxicated” through excessive alcohol; and second, the man who is, properly speaking, *imbibed in and through the Holy Spirit*. Seen in this way, the text is not a “mandate for moderation” (as to drinking, etc.) as much as it is an admonition to *drink deeply*—of the right libation, that is, the Holy Spirit.

III. *Christian Family Life—Marriage in Christ; Parents and Children’ Masters and Slaves (5:21-6:9)*

a. *Introduction.*

- i. This penultimate section of the letter is often known as the “Household Code” inasmuch as it takes up the nature of various “relationships” between Christians—of husbands to their wives (and vice versa), of parents to their children and of masters to their slaves.
- ii. We will limit our discussion on this first mentioned of these sets of relationships, for two reasons.¹²²
 1. First, Paul simply has more to say on the marriage relationship than the other two types of relationships—though all are important in their own way.

¹²⁰ Ambrosiaster, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, 5.14. Ambrosiaster (c. 366–384) was the name given to the author of an anonymous Pauline commentary once thought to have been composed by St. Ambrose.¹²⁰

¹²¹ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily on Ephesians* 19.5.18.

¹²² For excellent analysis of the relationship of parents / children and masters / slaves in the Christian economy, see: Williamson, *Ephesians*, 179-88.

2. Second—it is specifically the marriage relationship that Paul hones in on in a spiritual / mystical way, in order to explain the relationship of Christ and the Church to one another.
 3. A third reason could easily be added to the above: there has been much confusion about Paul’s teaching on marriage / “submission” and we will attempt to clarify what he does and does not say on this topic.
- b. **5:21—33.**
- i. ***The first key*** to unlocking the mystery of this much-aligned passage is to read it through—and not rip a phrase or sentence out of the literary context in which it was placed by the author. * *This is an important principle not only for studying Ephesians—but also for all the books of the OT and NT!* (When one carefully reads the passage in its entirety, many popular mis-interpretations will quickly evaporate as so much nonsense.)
 - ii. ***The second key*** to understanding the text is to realize that Paul is, strictly speaking, talking about marriage. He is of course talking about the proper marriage relationships between Christians—but as we will see, this is not his primary subject. His main topic is Christ—and the relationship of Christ to the Church. Here, the “spousal union” provides Paul with a “living metaphor”—taken from real life, but whose meaning far transcends human relationships.
 - iii. ***The third key*** to the passage is bound up with a key term, in the Greek *hypotassō* (to submit). The first point is that the occurrence of the verb occurs in what is known as the ‘middle voice’ (*hypotassamenoi*) in which the subject acts upon the verb in a reflexive way, i.e., “to submit oneself.” This is crucial to our interpretation, as it implies a *strictly voluntary action* of giving oneself to another—not coercion or any such thing.
 - iv. **v. 21—*Be subject to one another* ...** Paul says that the man and woman should *hypotassamenoi*—give themselves freely to one another. This is not a “one-way” action, i.e. where the wife “submits herself” to her husband, with no directive for him—no. From the outset, Paul calls for a *mutual submission*—Of one to another.
 - v. The next phrase in v. 21 is crucial: ... *out of reverence for Christ*. The Greek verb for ‘reverence’ is *phobos*—fear. Many Christians misunderstand “*the fear of the Lord*”—but it has little to do with panic, dread or punishment. In Scripture, “*fear of the Lord*” has everything to do with love: lovingly doing the will of God; seeking to please God; desiring to keep His commandments, etc. Paul is calling the Ephesian Christians to give themselves to their spouses in a full and voluntary way.¹²³

¹²³ This passage contains much rich teaching about Christian marriage, much of which cannot be covered here. It may only be mentioned that the Apostle’s exhortation here—to give oneself to the other in a free and voluntary way—is embedded in the liturgy of the Sacrament of Matrimony (marriage). This “self-giving” language is in the vows, and importantly, in the questions of matrimonial consent: e.g. “Have you come here freely to give yourself to one another in marriage?” For more on the truth and beauty of Catholic marriage, of human sexuality, and of “self-gift,” especially as it relates to spousal love, see: St. John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Boston: Pauline, 2006), esp. 465-515. Also: Mary Healy, *Men and Women are from Eden* (Cincinnati: Servant, 2005).

- vi. **vv. 23-27.**¹²⁴ Often, it is v. 22-24 that is isolated from the remainder of the entire passage: “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.”
1. Wives are called to “subject themselves” to their husbands—*hōs tō kuriō*—“as unto the Lord.” This last phrase is crucial. Wives are *called* to give themselves freely and fully to their husbands in a “belonging” way, which is how Paul conceives of their relationships with Christ—they fully belong to Him and are at home in His love. Women disciples (as men) are called to give of themselves wholeheartedly to Christ. To “reserve part of oneself from Christ” would be seen as a weak, perhaps half-hearted, disciple, would it not? Christ does not give part of Himself to the disciple – and the disciple is called to give of their whole self to Christ. This “self-giving” is not done reluctantly—but with joy and confidence in the One to whom it is entrusted.
 2. In the same fashion is a wife to give herself to her husband ... “as to the Lord.” Note that Paul uses the word ‘*in everything*’ (v. 24): “[These words] need to be understood as a statement of *principle* rather than *a norm that allows no exception*. For instance, Paul would not say that a wife should cooperate with her husband in what she knows to be sin, nor should he be interpreted as enjoining acquiescence to abuse.”¹²⁵
 3. Paul is developing a beautiful paradigm of marriage based upon our relationship to Christ, which is *freeing, life-giving* and rooted in *agapae* (unconditional, self-giving love). “Paul is pointing to the *ideal* responsiveness of the Church to her head *when she is true to her identity, the loving surrender of a bride to a bridegroom*, anticipating the marriage imagery that unfolds in the following verses.”¹²⁶
 4. But there is more—much more. In *complementary* fashion, Paul turns now to husbands, in vv. 25-27: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”
 5. Those who end the passage at verse 24 miss the “reciprocal gift” as it concerns wives: *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her* ... In a sense, properly speaking, that while ether is truly a complementary relationship, the husband has “headship” in the same way that Christ is “head of the Church.”

¹²⁴ *Eph. 5:22-27* “For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”

¹²⁵ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 161. On the limits to subordination, see esp.: Pope Pius XI, *Castii* (“On Christian Marriage”), 27.

¹²⁶ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 161 (emphasis added).

6. But this should be no cause for dread. Paul is not setting up a paradigm of “*male oppression*” or “*macho bullying*” of the women by the man. Ask yourself this: what is the love of Christ like with regard to the Church? Now apply that to the husband—that is how the husband is to treat his wife, to love her and serve her, just as Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself up for the Bride. So, let us be clear: the husband has a “leadership” role—He leads himself to the cross, for the sake of his bride.¹²⁷
7. All of this is to clarify the cultural (mis)understanding of *Eph. 5*. This is what Paul expects from wives—and put this way, *what women would resist this?* This is what Paul expects of men ... to lead as Christ leads, as a living sacrifice. *What man would not wish to rise to the challenge to give himself to His bride—in the same manner as Christ gave everything for him?* What a beautiful pattern for healthy, self-giving love in Christian marriage!
8. **Vv. 31-33.**¹²⁸ Finally—as we noted above—for as much as Paul talks of “husbands and wives” his principle subject is Christ—Christ and the Church: ‘*This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the church.*’
 - a. “In these two verses it is as if Paul fits the final piece in the jigsaw puzzle and reveals a picture that is different from the one we thought we were looking at.”¹²⁹
 - b. Just previous to this, Paul quotes *Gen. 2:24* “*Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.*”
 - c. It is this passage in *Genesis*—which he infuses into the discussion he has been developing—that Paul refers to as a great *mustērion*—a “mystery.” Why is it a “great mystery?”
 - d. The mystery refers to “the once hidden plan of God that has now been revealed in Christ:
 - e. *Catechism*: “It is *in the Church* that Christ fulfills and reveals his own mystery as the purpose of God’s plan: ‘*to unite all things in him.*’¹³⁰ St. Paul calls the nuptial union of Christ and the Church ‘*a great mystery.*’ Because she is united to Christ as to her bridegroom, *she becomes a mystery in her turn.*¹³¹ Contemplating this mystery in her, Paul exclaims: ‘Christ in you, the hope of glory.’”¹³²
 - f. Paul is saying that *human marriage instituted at creation [without the destructive forces of sin] points to a reality greater than itself*, namely the marriage of Christ and the Church ... In *Eph. 5:31* Paul reveals another

¹²⁷ This text is often omitted from critiques of St. Paul / Catholic theology by “secular feminists.” We could speak of “Christian feminism”—just as we could speak of “Christian manhood,” etc. as it pertains to this passage. For a beautiful explanation of the unique giftedness of women, see: St. John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 1988.

¹²⁸ *Eph. 5:31-33*. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”

¹²⁹ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 173 (emphasis added).

¹³⁰ *Eph. 1:10*.

¹³¹ *Eph. 5:32; 3:9-11; 5:25-27*.

¹³² CCC #772. See: *Col 1:27*.

[mystery] ... being married to Jesus! Marriage brings about a *one-body-relationship*. The Church is the body of Christ by virtue of being the Bride of Christ.

- g. *Catechism*: “The unity of Christ and the Church, head and members of one Body, also implies the distinction of the two within a personal relationship. This aspect is often expressed by the image of bridegroom and bride. The theme of Christ as Bridegroom of the Church was prepared for by the prophets and announced by John the Baptist.¹³³ The Lord referred to himself as the “bridegroom.”¹³⁴ The Apostle speaks of the whole Church and of each of the faithful, members of his Body, as a bride ‘betrothed’ to Christ the Lord so as to become but one spirit with him.¹³⁵ The Church is the spotless bride of the spotless Lamb.¹³⁶ “Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her.”¹³⁷ He has joined her with himself in an everlasting covenant and never stops caring for her as for his own body.”¹³⁸
- h. We leave the last word to St. Jerome:
- “Gregory of Nazianzus, a very eloquent man and outstandingly versed in the Scriptures, used to say while discussing this passage with me: *See how great the promise in this passage is!* The Apostle, interpreting it as an analogy of Christ and the church, *does not himself even profess to have expounded it as the dignity of the idea demanded.* He is in effect saying: ‘I know that this analogy is full of ineffable promises. It requires a divine heart in its interpretation. *But in the weakness of my understanding I can only say that in the meantime it should be interpreted as Christ in relation to the church.* Nothing is greater than Christ and the church. *Even all that is said of Adam and Eve is to be interpreted with reference to Christ and the church.*”¹³⁹

IV. *Spiritual Warfare—Gearing Up for Battle (6:10–20).*

- a. “The letter to the Ephesians is a very polished piece of writing and closes with a powerful conclusion. In classical rhetoric the end of a speech, called the *peroratio*, has the goal of *summing up* what has gone before and summoning the listeners to act on what they have heard. Ephesians 6:10–20 is exactly that kind of conclusion.”¹⁴⁰
- b. An important motif throughout the letter has been the spiritual realm. Paul’s theology in *Ephesians* shines a bright light on the immanence / nearness of God and God’s kingdom, through such phrases as: “*spiritual blessings*” (1:3), “*heaven / heavenly places*” (1:10, 3:15), “*authorities and dominions*” (1:21), and “*principalities and powers*” (3:10).

¹³³ *John* 3:29.

¹³⁴ *Mark* 2:29.

¹³⁵ *Matt.* 22:1–14; 25:1–13; *I Cor.* 6:15–17; *II Cor.* 11:2.

¹³⁶ *Rev* 22:17; *Eph* 1:4, 5:27.

¹³⁷ *Eph.* 5:26–26.

¹³⁸ CCC #796. See: *Eph.* 5:29. For a recent treatment of the theme of bridegroom / bride in the OT and NT, see: Brant Pitre, *Jesus the Bridegroom: The Greatest Love Story Ever Told* (Servant: Cincinnati, 2013).

¹³⁹ St. Jerome, *Epistle to the Ephesians* 3.5.32. For additional application of the passage, and important insights from St. John Paul II, see: Williamson, *Ephesians*, 175–78.

¹⁴⁰ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 189.

- c. Now, it 6:10-20, he instructs the Church that they are indeed engaged in a “war”—but it is not merely a human / cultural war, but a war with the devil himself. This is more than confirmed by the charge in verse 12,¹⁴¹ and the sustained “battle” imagery throughout.¹⁴²
- d. “St. Paul’s words here should be read like those of a general to his troops before a battle: the purpose of his words is to inspire, strengthen and guide the attitudes and actions of his soldiers for what lies immediately ahead.”¹⁴³
- e. **v. 11**—*Put on the whole armor of God*. The term for ‘armor’¹⁴⁴ in Greek is *panoplia* (“full / complete armor”). It is found in ancient Greek literature,¹⁴⁵ as well as in various passages of the Greek OT.¹⁴⁶ “Despite the fact that not every piece of the armor will be listed, the emphasis is on the full protection it provides rather than on its adornment or splendor.”¹⁴⁷
- f. **v. 14**—*having girded your loins with truth* ... Aquinas: “In spiritual warfare it is first necessary to check [earthly] desires, just as the nearest enemy must be conquered first ... such *girding* is done through *temperance* which is opposed to gluttony and sensuality ... But this must be done with *truth*, that is, with the right intention and not with pretense.”¹⁴⁸ ... *and having put on the breastplate of righteousness*. “Justice [or righteousness] is referred to as a ‘breastplate’ because it *covers all the virtues* just as a breastplate covers the members of the body.”¹⁴⁹
- g. **v. 16**—*and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace*. “Roman soldiers sometimes wore military sandals and sometimes a half-boot, not to shield their feet from blows but to equip them *for traveling great distances* ... Paul wants his readers to recall *Isa. 52:7*:

*How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the one bringing good news,
Announcing peace, bearing good news,
announcing salvation, saying to Zion,
‘Your God is King!’*¹⁵⁰

- h. **v. 16**—*besides all these, taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one*. Aquinas: “They are ‘fiery’ since evil desires burn: ‘Fire hath fallen on them, and they shall not see the sun’ (*Psa. 57:9*). These are extinguished *through faith*;

¹⁴¹ *Eph. 6:12* “For we are not contending against flesh and blood, *but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*”

¹⁴² In another letter, Paul draws upon similar—but not identical—battle imagery: “But, since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation” (*I Thess. 5:8*). However, it should be noted that the passage in *Ephesians* is much more developed and further, that there is no “correspondence” between the two texts in terms of the types of metaphors used, or the quantity of them employed.

¹⁴³ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 189.

¹⁴⁴ The term *peroratio* (“full armor”) is repeated in verse 13.

¹⁴⁵ See: Polybius, *Histories*, 6.23; Thucydides, *Histories*, 3.114, etc.

¹⁴⁶ E.g. *II Macc. 3:25* “For there appeared to them a magnificently caparisoned horse, with a rider of frightening mien, and it rushed furiously at Heliodorus and struck at him with its front hoofs. Its rider was seen to have armor and weapons of gold.” See also: *Judith 14:3*.

¹⁴⁷ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 442.

¹⁴⁸ Aquinas, *Ephesians*, Lecture 4, 240.

¹⁴⁹ Aquinas, *Ephesians*, Lecture 4, 241.

¹⁵⁰ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 195 (emphasis added). Text from the NAB-Revised Edition.

[faith] quenches present and [temporal] temptations with the eternal and spiritual blessings promised in Holy Scripture. Thus the Lord brought forward *authoritative texts of Holy Scripture* to oppose the devil's temptations. We ought to do the same."¹⁵¹

- i. **v. 17**—*take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.* Aquinas: “Finally, the third weapon is *for attack*. *It is not enough to simply defend oneself, it is also necessary to assault the enemy.* Physically, this is done with a material sword; it is done spiritually through the *Word of God, which is the sword of the Holy Spirit ...* For the word of God is living and active, *sharper than any two-edged sword*, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.¹⁵²
- j. **v. 18**—*pray at all times in the Spirit.* “Not just once a week, or once a day, but at whenever we can. This is essentially the same message as found in *I Thess. 5:17*, ‘*pray without ceasing.*’
- k. **v. 19**—*that utterance may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel.* Jerome: “This is to be understood as if he said, ‘*Let the treasures be opened. Let the promises hidden from ages be revealed. Let the Spirit enter to bring forth those things that have been concealed.*’ That this is indeed the meaning of this passage ... is clarified by what follows: ‘*in confidence,*’ he says, ‘*to make known the mystery of the gospel.*’”¹⁵³
- l. **v. 20**—*ambassador in chains.* Yet another reference to Paul's imprisonment. “An ambassador is a duly authorized representative of a government; Paul represents the kingdom of God and its sovereign, the Messiah Jesus. *That I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.*—“[First, Paul] depends on God inspiring him with the appropriate words on each occasion when he speaks. Second, he depends on God to strengthen him ‘with boldness’ when he evangelizes ... Evangelization is never merely a human act; it always depends on God's involvement for the right words and the spiritual courage to be effective. Prayer makes this possible ... Prayer is not simply to make us feel better but rather to bring about God's intervention in history ... God waits on the prayers of His people.”¹⁵⁴

VII. 6:21—24 *Conclusion of Epistle*

- a. In **vv. 21-22**, Paul commends “Tychicus” to the Ephesians. It was through this trusted friend / messenger that the letter, which Paul wrote to the Ephesians, was able to reach the church. Messengers of the Apostles usually would remain with the church for a short time—delivering and gathering news. When he returned to the Apostle (in this case, Paul), the Apostle learned how the letter was received (at least initially) and learned about the progress of the church.
- b. In **vv. 23-24**, Paul offers his final benediction to the Ephesian Christians. We present it here without further comment—as *their* prayer—as well as *ours*:

¹⁵¹ Aquinas, *Ephesians*, Lecture 4, p. 242.

¹⁵² Aquinas, *Ephesians*, Lecture 4, 242. *Heb. 4:12*.

¹⁵³ St. Jerome, *Epistle to the Ephesians* 3.6.20.

¹⁵⁴ Williamson, *Ephesians*, 202.

“Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ *with love undying.*”

APPENDIX:
PAUL’S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS—OUTLINE
DR. STEVEN SMITH

VIII. 1:1—23 INTRODUCTION OF EPISTLE

- a. *Greeting* (1:1-2)
- b. *Trinitarian Blessing*—The Plan of Salvation (1:3-14)
- c. *Paul’s Prayer*—Knowing God and One’s Place in the Body of Christ (1:15-23)

IX.2:1—6:20 BODY OF EPISTLE

PART A: PROCLAMATION: THE EXTRAVAGANT GRACE OF GOD IN CHRIST (2:1—3:21)

- a. *Salvation* —By Grace, Through Faith for Good Works (2:1-10)
- b. *Reconciliation* —of Jews and Gentiles into the One Body of Christ (2:11-22)
- c. *Evangelization*—Paul’s Ministry: Preaching God’s Secret Plan (3:1-13)
- d. *Divinization*—Paul’s Prayer and Petitions for the Ephesian Church (3:14-21)

PART B: EXHORTATION: BEING ‘IMITATORS OF GOD’ IN ALL CHRISTIAN LIVING (4:1—6:20)

- e. *Become What You Are* —Unity within the Church in Word and Deed, Toward Full Maturity (4:1-16)
- f. *Imitators of God*—Putting on *Ho Kainos Anthropos* [‘the New Self’] (4:17-5:2)
- g. *Children of Light*— Life in the Spirit (5:3-20)
- h. *Christian Family Life*—Marriage in Christ; Parents and Children’ Masters and Slaves (5:21-6:9)
- i. *Spiritual Warfare*—Gearing Up for Battle (6:10-20)

X. 6:21—24 CONCLUSION OF EPISTLE

- a. Commendation of Tychicus (6:21-22)
- b. Final Benediction (6:23-24)

NOTES