

God's Glorious Plan

Studies in Ephesians

David Gooding

A Myrtlefield House Transcript



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Contents

1	God's Cosmic Purpose for You and the Universe	3
2	God's Cosmic Purpose for You and the Universe: Q & A	12
3	Uncountable Wealth	16
4	Uncountable Wealth: Q & A	26
5	The End of Hostility	30
6	The Unity of the Body of Christ	40
7	Growing in Christ	50
8	Ephesians: Q & A	60
	About the Author	67

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God's Cosmic Purpose for You and the Universe

As you have heard, this is the beginning of a series of studies on the letter that the Apostle Paul wrote from prison to the Christians in Ephesus and elsewhere. Tonight we're going to consider one or two of the phrases in the first great paragraph of that book, and the title I've given to the study is 'God's Cosmic Purpose for You and the Universe'. That is, God's purpose in creating the universe and, secondly, and most important for us, when God created the universe, we ask why he did it and whether God has a purpose for us and our lives within this universe.

The problem of suffering

Before we get down to that topic, however, we have some unfinished business to deal with. Last night you may remember that you set me a question. We believe in a God who is all loving and all powerful and all wise. Because he's all powerful, he can do whatever he decides to do; because he's all wise, he will do everything in wisdom for the best. So how then can we believe in a God like that, when he appears to allow so many good people, as we count them, to suffer bad things?

We noticed last night that to answer that question, we've got to split it into two parts, for the suffering that we human beings endure from time to time comes from two basic sources. There are the evil things that happen to human beings which are inflicted on them by their fellow human beings—man's inhumanity to man. There has been, and still is, a colossal amount of evil in this world inflicted on human beings by their fellow human beings. The question that engaged us last night was why God allows evil like that to carry on and hurt people.

But then we noticed that there is another source of suffering for which human beings are not primarily responsible. That's the suffering that comes through what we call natural disasters—volcanoes, earthquakes, mudslides, epidemics, hurricanes, tsunamis and such like things. Man may be partly responsible for it, as now we begin to see the effect of man's unwise behaviour upon the universe and the environment. But man is not immediately responsible for a lot of things and therefore we ask why the creator of the universe should allow such things. That is the question that I must now address, but we shall see in a moment how that fits in with our initial study of Ephesians as we consider God's cosmic purpose for you and the universe—the purpose God had in mind when he created the universe and the purpose he had in mind for us.

A creation subject to 'futility'

As to the fact that it is this universe—this world in which we live and which God created—which from time to time inflicts suffering on individuals and sometimes on thousands of people all at once, the Bible says that creation has been subjected by God to futility. We find that in another letter Paul wrote to the Roman believers, where he says that the whole of creation is groaning (see Rom 8:20–23). We hear its groans very loudly from time to time. What does that mean and why has God subjected creation to futility?

Well the original story is given us in Genesis—how God created our world and put Adam and Eve in it and gave them the high honour, not just of being gardener in the garden of Eden, but being God's viceroy. The Bible has a gigantic, large sense of the importance of human beings. It's best expressed in, say, Psalm 8, where the psalmist is thinking and he's saying,

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, and the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? (vv. 3–4)

And you might think at that point that the poet is going to say, 'What is man compared with this vast universe, when he's a tiny little worm, not much bigger than a mosquito or something?' Instead, he says the very opposite.

Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet. (vv. 5–6)

That's God's idea for man: not to be a slave within the universe but to be God's viceroy, ruling it for God. So in the very first chapter of the Bible, God said that when he made man, he made him to have dominion.

That's God's idea, and then the book of Genesis tells us of what happened. God's viceroy, man, tempted by the devil himself, grasped at independence from God and attempted to decide for himself what was good and what was bad, in spite of God and his word. That is still the trouble with humankind to this day—independence of God in heart and spirit. When God's viceroy rebelled like that, God didn't destroy him—God forgave him indeed, forthwith—but what he did next was to turn him out of the garden of Eden. He allowed him to continue his work of tilling the ground and so earning a living, but now man found that, as he tilled the ground, as well as his crops he also got thorns and thistles.

I used to work on a farm during the war and the farmers decided that there would be more crops if they ploughed a little bit more deeply. So they ploughed a little bit more deeply and, yes, the crops came, but then the thistles came, such as they'd never known before. That futility marks us still. To get more crops the farmers spray the fields to stop the insects that harm the crops. But then the birds don't have any insects to eat, so the birds die off. And when the birds die off, then caterpillars and other such things begin to proliferate and you get a pest of them. Likewise in medicine, the doctors invent penicillin or something to kill the bugs that are causing disease. That's marvellous, but then thirty years down the line, the old bugs get

used to it and they evolve a different form, and so now the drug doesn't work anymore. It's all a part of that futility.

Restoration

But then the Bible has a wonderful thing to say. When man has learnt the error of his way in trying to live independently of God, God has a gospel that this futility, built into creation by God since man fell, is not going to last forever: 'creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God' (Rom 8:21). And, as a Christian, I have to tell you the glorious news that that process of restoring creation has already begun. It happened two thousand years ago, when our blessed Lord Jesus died on the cross, bearing the punishment due to our sin so that we might be reconciled to God and forgiven. He died on Calvary, he was buried, and then the Bible says God intervened. That holy body of Christ never saw corruption. It didn't begin to disintegrate: the very process was stopped. The third day, he rose again with a body, a literal body, a body somewhat different from what it had been before—he could now come into a room while the doors were closed and could disappear—but it was a real body. He said to his apostles, 'Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have' (Luke 24:39). When some of them doubted it was a real body, he said, 'Have you anything here to eat?' and they gave him some fish. I've often thought when he left the bones on the plate and disappeared, the apostles must have looked at those bones and said, 'Was that real? Well it was real—look at those bones!'

Christ is risen and the New Testament says that that same Christ, our Lord Jesus, is coming again and, when he comes, creation will be delivered from its bondage to corruption. What a glorious thing that is—God's purpose for the world and for the universe! Says the critic, 'Oh, yes, all pie in the sky tomorrow, but nothing today. That's how you Christians are. You promise us great things in the future, but what about today?' Well, now that's a point, so let me tell you a story at this juncture. It concerns two Christian apostles, Peter and John, and we read about it in Acts 3. This was soon after the resurrection of Christ and they were preaching in Jerusalem and one day they were going up to the temple when there was, on the steps of the temple so to speak, a man who'd been lame from his birth. Because he couldn't work, his friends had put him there. They thought that as people were coming and going to the temple they might feel in the mood to give some alms, a few pennies or so, to such a poor man who was born lame and couldn't walk.

That's a very poignant picture: here was the temple of God, where inside people were singing his praises and, on the steps of it, a man lame from birth. How do you reconcile those two things with a God of love? As Peter and John were going up to the temple, they saw this man looking at them and hoping to get a gift of money. Peter fumbled in his pockets and found he didn't have any. He said, 'Sorry, old fellow. I don't have any money. But I have something bigger than money to give you. In the name of Jesus, rise up and walk.' And God was pleased to do a miracle to vindicate the name of Jesus, and the man got up and walked and went dancing and leaping into the temple. Well of course the crowd came round, all agog. 'How did he do it? What name did he do it in?' Peter stood among the crowd and told them very bluntly, 'This man has been healed in the name of Jesus Christ, whom you killed, for you killed the author of life.' This wasn't very much more than a few months after Christ had been crucified on a cross in that very city of Jerusalem. 'You killed him, the very author of life, and you desired a murderer to be released'—for they had called out, 'Not this man, but Barabbas!'

(John 18:40). Isn't that a strange attitude of the human heart? Faced with the author of life himself, they not only refused him and crucified him, they preferred and asked for a murderer—a terrorist, we should call him nowadays.

So what about that then? Well Peter, as a Christian apostle, was prepared to do what all Christians do, to give help—money and other kinds of aid—to the poor and the sick and the ill. They still do it all round this world, but there's something more important than that. What's the good of giving the church's money to men and women who have no time for Christ? It's not a question of not giving money to someone because they're not of our religion: Christians normally give to all sorts of people, whatever their religion is. But there's a more important question. This universe is not a slot machine, where you put in your coin and get your packet of whatnots out of the machine. It is a personal universe and Jesus Christ, God's Son, who died at Calvary, has been raised again and God has set him at his own right hand in glory, he is the head of the universe. What use is the church's money if one is not prepared to submit to Christianity's Saviour?

That's a big point, for God has a programme for this universe. It is delightful and gloriously wealthy and rich beyond description. We shall be looking at it, God willing, tomorrow and the days following. Incalculably rich, but it all depends on our relationship with God's Son, Jesus Christ. He is the Son of the owner of the universe and, ultimately, those who reject him cannot live within the same universe as is run by Christ. The critic says, 'Does that mean that you Christians, now you've been converted as you call it, are free from all suffering?' No indeed not. Christians suffer just like unbelievers suffer and the Bible makes the point:

but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Rom 8:23)

God goes on to explain that he allows believers to suffer in different ways and one of its purposes is for the strengthening of our faith. Because when we get home to heaven, so far from faith being finished, faith will always be the link that links us to God. It's easy to trust God when things go well—ice cream with every meal! When things are difficult, it is then that faith gets tested, and God has promised he'll not test us beyond what we are able.

What shall we think then of suffering? Well I'll tell you what I think, and it's not the whole answer to it, but in my little way when I think of suffering, I notice that we human beings don't regard all suffering as necessarily evil. Have you noticed that? There are some people—now you can believe this or not as you please!—but they are to be found, fifteen dressed up in one colour shirts and fifteen in another colour shirts; and they meet on a rugby field and they play rugby. They know in advance they're going to get bruised, and perhaps limbs broken and heads torn off, and I don't know what happens in the scrum. You say, 'Why on earth do they do it and submit to all that pain?' They do it for the fun of it: they enjoy the game so much, they think the game is worth the pain!

Then we notice that pain has a very good effect. There's the nurse and the doctor in the hospital diligently serving the ill, often with great self-denial. It produces in them a strength of character, in a way that lolling around on the sofa indulging yourself, doesn't produce. And then of course, pain can be a very good thing. If you get a pain in the chest and it warns you

to go to the doctor and he says you've had a heart attack, well the pain was jolly good as a warning system! Then I've noticed something else. Mankind has made colossal progress through the inventors and the scientists and so forth. A lot of it has involved a lot of suffering and loss of life. Think about electricity, for instance. Should it ever have been invented? I'm not saying electricity is wrong, of course not; but discovering electricity and how to apply it to serve us, has involved the loss of hundreds if not thousands of lives. What would you say about it? Has it been worthwhile? Most people would say, 'But look at the good it does and how people are helped through their illnesses on the operating table in the hospital, and the lights and everything else.' So the result is worth the suffering involved.

A Christian perspective

Now I want to talk to Christians, because first and foremost, this Epistle to the Ephesians is addressed to Christians. Is there some great scheme of God for making this universe and putting you and me in it, a scheme so glorious that when it is achieved, you will say to yourself, 'It was worth all the pain that happened incidentally'? I'm going to suggest, as we begin to turn to Ephesians, that Ephesians does talk to us throughout its chapters of this vast, magnificent scheme of God, that he has put in progress through Jesus Christ our Lord, that will be worth all the pain that would ever come to us in the process.

What is that scheme? Well it will take all of our studies this weekend to comprehend even a little bit of it, so I'm going to select one part of it tonight and it comes from the early verses. I particularly appeal to the following verses of chapter 1:

[God] chose us in [Jesus Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will. (vv. 4-5)

So he decided this before the foundation of the world. The purpose he had in mind was that he would adopt us. The Greek word behind this word *adoption* literally means placing as sons, or placing as sons and daughters. And this, says this verse, was the scheme God had in mind even before he made the world. So what are we to make of that? He had this scheme before the foundation of the world. That's a long while ago, but it's not just a question of time. It's what the philosophers would call 'logical priority'. Let me try and explain that.

God was thinking of the future idea and of all the steps that he would have to take if that idea was ever to be realized. So let me use a little illustration of what I mean by a logical priority. Here is a good lady, we'll call her Anna, and Anna's been thinking. 'A year today, my daughter will come of age. I want to mark that great occasion, that milestone in her life. I'm going to put on a party and it will be a most wonderful party. I'll invite the local member of Parliament and the mayor and the corporation and all my friends, and I'll hire some public venue and I'll have my daughter's coming of age reported in the press and the photographs taken.' What an idea she's got. And then she begins to scratch her head and think, 'Now if I'm going to have a party like that, what shall I do for it?'

Now she's very good at making cakes and particularly at icing cakes. She has various diplomas in how to ice cakes. She's determined she's going to make a cake such as never was

and it's going to be iced and everything else. It's going to be the centre of attraction and the press will mention that the girl's mother made the cake. Then she thinks again. 'I want to make the birthday cake for it but my oven is old and it's not like these modern hi-tech ovens. I need a new oven.'

Do you see how she's thinking? She's got the end in view, but she's thinking of all the steps that she's got to take. 'I need a new oven. Well how do I get a new oven? I can't afford to buy one but I'll get my husband to do it. But how will I persuade him to buy a new oven?' So she cooks a beautiful dinner for her husband and says, 'I thought it's about time we had a beautiful dinner.'

But when the husband bites into the meat, he says, 'My dear, I don't like to disappoint you, but is this meat burnt or something?'

'Yes,' she says, 'I'm afraid it is. That's our old oven, you know. It does tend to burn things. I think we need a new one, wouldn't you agree?'

And of course husband has to agree. She's thinking of all the steps to get that purpose!

God's purpose for us

Before God founded this universe, he had a purpose in mind that you and I as his creatures should become sons and daughters of the living God. That's why he made the universe and I'll tell you why he had to make it presently, but let's first get this thing right in our heads. It says here that God predestined us. That was his purpose in all his plans—that we should become sons and daughters of God, to adopt us as such. We have now to ask what the Bible means by those terms. To take the male line, if a male is going to be a son of his father, he has first of all to be born as a child of his father; and then, having been born as a child of his father, he grows up to be a son like his father. That's the ideal process anyway. So, in order to have us as sons of God, we have first of all to become children of God.

Now it is a fact that many religious people think that everybody is a child of God. That isn't true. God loves all his creatures, for we're all *creatures* of God. But not all God's human creatures are children of God, not in the biblical sense of the term. The Gospel of John talks like this about Jesus Christ our Lord coming into our world:

He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. (1:11–12)

So says the Bible. You can't become what you already are, can you? A fish can't become a fish: it is a fish. I can't become a human being: I am a human being. If I want to be a child of God, according to this verse I have to become one. I don't start off by being a child of God.

Think about the verse with me and see whether I'm exaggerating. 'To all who did receive him,'—that is, received God's Son as their personal Saviour—'he gave the right to become children of God.' What was the process? The next verse tells us:

who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (v. 13)

This is the beginning of that marvellous scheme that those who were mere creatures of God should, by God's tremendous grace, become children of God. You say, 'What's the difference between being a creature of God and a child of God?' The famous Irishman C. S. Lewis illustrated it like this. Take a cabinetmaker, who designs a chair. It is a beautiful design, beautiful to sit on, and so on. He designed the chair and he makes the chair. Then he falls in love with a pretty young lady and marries and eventually he has a son. Not by the same process as he made the chair, but by an altogether different process! The chair is wonderful and you would know to look at it that it was made by this famous cabinetmaker. But the chair doesn't have his life. The little baby does have his life. When you see the little baby first, it's a funny looking thing, though you mustn't say that to the parents! The chair looks far superior, but it's the little baby that's far more significant than the chair, because it has the father's life.

We come into this world as God's creatures. He made us. Wonderful the design, but the purpose of making us and putting us in this universe and on this world was that eventually we might not just be creatures of God, but become children of God. That is the scheme and, becoming children of God, we are then to grow up spiritually to become full-grown sons and daughters of God, sharing the very character of God.

On the subject of sons and daughters, I have to tell you one other thing. Here's a wealthy landowner and he has a child and it happens to be a boy. Although the boy's only a baby, he's a child of his father and when his father dies, this son will inherit his father's possessions. On what ground will he inherit it? The lawyers will say on the ground that he is the father's son. Now forgive me for mentioning such a thing to this audience, but in England we have a queen. I'm in a club that supports her racehorses—they call it the Income Tax! The heir to her throne is a certain Prince Charles. Do you know how he became heir? Well he became heir when he was born. As a little boy, being the firstborn son of his mum, he was already heir.

The Bible has some wonderful things to say about that. I quote you what Paul wrote in Galatians 3. Every believer, man and woman, who has received Christ, has been born of God, given the very life of God, eternal life, and one day will grow up under God's training and discipline to be a full-grown daughter and son of God. Already, because they are a son or daughter, they are heirs of God. That is magnificent, isn't it? The Bible phrases it this way, talking of believers:

But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. (Gal 3:25–26)

That's worth a 'hallelujah' in anybody's money! Just think of it. No wonder this Epistle to the Ephesians will be full of mentions of the wealth and the riches of God's grace, for that is the scheme. Before God founded this world, or even this universe, he had in mind a purpose that one day he would have sons and daughters, grown-up children of God. To get them would mean instituting what our blessed Lord calls the new birth—being born again of God's Spirit. You may wonder why it was necessary for God to go and create a whole world rather than proceeding directly to create sons and daughters. When he created the world, he just had to speak and it happened, and so with the seas and when he created man. Well it can't be done that way: let me illustrate what I mean.

A personal choice

You can't be born married, can you? I've never heard of anybody who was. I've heard of twins being born, but when they're born they're not married. Why can't you be born married? Well because, in general reckoning, to get married it means one man and one woman and, somehow or other, they come to an agreement and, as an act of will and choice, consent to marry each other. You can't be born married. You can't be born by physical birth as a child of God either. Why not? Did you notice it as we read, 'to all who receive him'? To become a child of God you must receive Christ. Many didn't, but 'to all who receive him he gave the right to become children of God'. To become a child of God means receiving Christ personally, by free choice.

Why creation?

You say, 'You still haven't answered why God made the world anyway.'

Where would you begin? God made a world and then he made us human creatures to put on it. He didn't have to ask our consent. When you were born, did you consent to be born? Nobody ever asked me whether I wanted to be born—I just found I was here, sometime after the event! Nobody asked my permission or whether I consented, or whether I wanted to be born. For that purpose, God just ordained it. What is more, when God made us as his creatures, he didn't have to get our consent. And he put in us a moral sense—he didn't ask our consent for that either, but men and women have inside them a conscience and a sense of right and wrong that God put in them.

So God made a world and made human creatures and put them on the world. He didn't have to ask their consent to do that, but when God did it, he had in mind his future plan. He'd make a world. He'd put men and women on it. He didn't have to ask their permission. But he did have a proposition that would demand their consent or refusal; and that was, he would propose to them to become children of God. That would demand their free choice.

God will not force anybody to do anything; and the free choice is, when God sent his Son, to all who receive him, he gave the right—and still gives the right—to become children of God. That's what this universe is about: that's what this world is about. God has many experiences for us in this world that are natural and ordinary, wonderful and good, and God maintains it. But the ultimate purpose that God had in mind, even before he made the world to put us on it, was that eventually he would send us his Son and commend his love to us in giving his Son to die for our sins and our rebellions against God and our independences of God. And he would offer us not only to forgive our sins, but that we should become children of God, born of his Spirit—born again, as Christ puts it—and from being born again as his children, eventually become his grown-up sons and daughters. Forgive my exuberance, I can't talk about it to you without getting a little bit excited!

'In Christ'

One other thing, and with this I close, is the constant repetition of the phrase 'in Christ' in these chapters, particularly this first chapter but in the other chapters as well. If you want a little homework, take that passage in Ephesians and the first fourteen verses, or the whole of chapter 1 if you like, and a bit of chapter 2, and mark the many times the phrase 'in Christ' occurs. It's a very important idea in the New Testament. Being born again as a child of God

means, among other things, being *in Christ*. That's an extraordinary statement. You will have heard of the great philosophers in the Greek world—Plato and Socrates and Aristotle. They had many followers but nowhere would you read that Mr So-and-so was 'in Plato' nor 'in Socrates' either. And Marx had millions of followers, but nobody talked about being 'in Marx', still less of being 'in Adolf Hitler'. From the very start, the early Christians began using this idea of being 'in Christ'.

What on earth does it mean? Well, take a little example from the Old Testament if you like. In Noah's day, God sent a flood upon the world. If you wanted to escape the flood, you had not only to know *about* the ark, you had to get *in* the ark. And so with Christ, it's not enough just to know about Christ. I have to ask myself, even as I sit in front of you and talk, 'Am I in Christ?' How do you get in Christ? Well when you receive him, he comes into you, but at the same time, when you receive him, the Holy Spirit puts you in him. That's a very important thing. We're told in 1 Thessalonians 4 that when the Lord Jesus returns from heaven, the dead 'in Christ' will rise first. If in this life I trust the Saviour, I receive him and the Holy Spirit puts me in Christ, that's a distinction that death itself will not obliterate. Dead believers who have passed away through their physical death, are 'in Christ', and when he comes, they will rise again.

Summary

Two questions therefore arise in our minds from considering our passage. We shall have more to say about them as we get further into the epistle, but we've made a start. The great cosmic purpose of God: why did he make this universe? Why did he make this world? Why did he put us on it? His intention was eventually to have sons and daughters. That demanded their free choice. Therefore, he made a world and put them on it without asking their permission— as Creator he has the right to do what he likes—and gave them a moral sense.

But then came something that God could not do by his own power. It required the consent of each individual, 'Will you accept my Son as your Saviour?' And to all who receive him, he gives the right to become children of God, who can then grow up to be sons and daughters of the living God. Receiving Christ means that the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts, and the Holy Spirit puts us in him, and from now on we are 'in Christ'. It's a question we have to ask ourselves. Am I, in the biblical sense, a child of God? Have I received him and been born again of the Spirit of God? Am I in Christ now in life, in death and through eternity?

God's Cosmic Purpose for You and the Universe

Question & Answer Session

Are we chosen or predestined?

DWG: The question is based on that phrase I called attention to in Ephesians 1, which says,

even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will. (vv. 4–5)

So we notice two phrases—two phrases that have caused a lot of argument and discussion among Christians. I'll give you what I think they mean myself. If you seriously object, well raise it tomorrow then, if you wish.

Chosen

Some people think that God has chosen some people to be saved and others he's chosen to be lost, or he has chosen some people to be saved and just bypasses everybody else. These people think that faith is described in chapter 2 as *the gift of God*. And so the idea has come around that God gives some people faith to believe with and he doesn't give this faith to other people, and he does that of his own sovereign will. It's nothing to do with the people or their behaviour; this is just God deciding. He elects some people to be saved and then he gives them the faith to believe with. Other people, he doesn't elect. He doesn't give them the faith and, as a result, they can't believe.

Now that is not true, and we can know it isn't true because of what is said elsewhere in holy Scripture. In Romans 10, at the end of the chapter, Paul is discussing why so many Jews in his day were not saved. As a Christian preacher he had preached hundreds of times to Jews and then to Gentiles. Hundreds of Gentiles had got converted and received Christ, but so many of his own dearly beloved fellow national Jews hadn't been saved. And in Romans 10 he discusses the reasons why not, and he gives a number of reasons. That's a very important chapter, but he comes finally to this, and let that suffice for us tonight. Is it that God wouldn't save them? Had he decided not to save them? Was it that they couldn't be saved unless God gave them the faith, as the idea goes, and he had decided not to give them the faith? Well if that were true, now watch what Paul says about God, quoting from Isaiah's prophecy:

But of Israel he says, 'All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.' (Rom 10:21; cf. Isa 65:2)

Can you see the image? Like a parent calling a little child, 'Come.' The parent doesn't just stand there and say, 'Come to Mummy.' She holds out her hands, stretches them out to the little chap, and he's got to try and take the step and try to come to Mummy. She wants him to come, of course she does. If not, those hands stretched out would be a lie, wouldn't they? But she's not pretending when she holds out her hands and says, 'Come.' And God says, 'All day long, I have held out my hands.' Did he want the people to come, or didn't he? Look at that gesture, arms outstretched, pleading with them to come. Will you say that he really didn't want them to come, because he hadn't elected them? That standing there, pleading with them to come, he knew they couldn't come unless he gave them the faith to come with, and he had decided not to give them the faith? To hold that view would be a very serious charge against the character of God. When God stretched out his hands, he wanted them to come and the Bible is quite clear: God gave Christ as a ransom for *all*. He would have *all* to be saved.

What God has decided in election is this, if you will notice the passage, 'He chose us in Christ'. That is God laying down the terms of salvation. Let's use the old illustration of Noah and his ark. God wanted to save people from the flood. How will he save them? Well he'll provide an ark and anybody in the ark will be saved. If folks don't get into the ark, they won't be saved. God has chosen to save and God has the right to lay down the terms. He elects to save those who will come to Christ and enter in through Christ. He lays down the terms. It is in Christ, and he has chosen to save all who will come to Christ and are in Christ.

Predestined

But having saved them, God doesn't have to say, 'Now I've got a lot of people on my hands. I didn't expect so many to believe in Christ: now what on earth shall I do with them all?' No, of course not. He thought out the destiny he would bring them to, before he put the proposition to them. The destiny he had for those who would receive Christ and be in Christ, would be that he, God himself, would adopt them as his sons and daughters. That's the *predestined* bit. So my answer is that the terms upon which God chooses and predestines are laid down in Scripture. He decides the term. '*Everyone* who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved' (Acts 2:21). Come to Christ, receive Christ and you will be saved. You come without your works. You can't merit salvation. You must take it as a gift.

The source of 'faith'

If you try to gain it by your works, God says, 'No, thank you. You can't have it on those terms.' You must come on God's terms, for that's what election means. He elects—chooses—to save those who will come on his terms. If we won't come on God's terms then we won't get saved. But you say, 'Faith is a gift of God, isn't it?' Well, in a sense it is, of course. You're a businessman, and you have an acquaintance who comes unexpectedly on the scene. He's been given your name and he has a big business deal to propose to you. How do you decide whether to trust him or not? Well one of the things you do is to watch him as he's talking to you, and watch his body language and the tone of his voice and what kind of a man is he, and does he look a bit shifty, and is his proposal a bit dubious or something? You're making up your mind as to whether to trust him or not, partly by what he says and what you can judge of his character. If you judge him to be a sound man and he can give you examples of his

reliability and validity and all that, you may well trust him. If you do, it's he that has convinced you, he that has produced the faith in you. 'If you want to be saved,' says God, 'come to Christ. Listen to Christ and let Christ convince you.'

'Whoever hears my word . . .' says Christ (John 5:24).

'Faith comes from hearing' says the Bible, 'and hearing through the word of Christ' (Rom 10:17).

Come to Christ and let him convince you, and if you take him seriously, you'll find your faith responding to him, as he draws it out from you.

Can a person lose his or her salvation?

DWG: Well that's a very big question and some Christians hold one view and some another. I can tell you tonight what I hold and if you think that's unsatisfactory, come back and put another question to me tomorrow. But we read that Christ came as a shepherd of the sheep. He was talking to people who didn't accept him as a shepherd, the Pharisees, so he stood there and, if I may use the vulgar term, he 'advertised' himself as the shepherd, as a good shepherd indeed. Now what would you expect a good shepherd to do? He said, 'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep' (John 10:11). That's one thing. Christ did that at Calvary. He's risen again now. Then he says,

I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. (vv. 28–29)

This is the shepherd talking. He defies anybody to pluck his sheep out of his hand. I rest my case there: the shepherd won't lose any of his sheep.

Understanding Scripture

How can I find out this sort of information from a Bible passage like this? I don't seem able to understand the Bible like you experts.

DWG: Well, perhaps that's not altogether to be surprised at. I have been saved for seventy-two years and I went to a very old-fashioned school where I started Latin when I was ten—that's how they used to do it in those far-off days—and Greek when I was twelve. So by the time I got to my teenage years, I thought I would really start reading the New Testament in the Bible to see what it had to say. I've been reading it now for sixty years like that, so I have an advantage, don't I? And the Bible says that the risen Christ gives to his church various gifts. One of those gifts, not the biggest by any means, is to be a teacher and some are evangelists, so you'd expect the teachers to know a bit more than those who aren't teachers!

You may say, 'But I would never have dreamt that that passage is about what you said it was about tonight.' So how can you discover such things? Well, read it again, but when you read the Bible, do start by believing this is God's word and he will speak to you personally in it. He might show me a lot more things, because of my years and experience, but he will certainly speak to you if you will trust him and read his word, a little bit at a time. For he

made us and he speaks to us and, if you're one of his sheep, Christ says 'my sheep hear my voice, and I know them' (John 10:27). So start reading it anyway and talk to the Lord about it. I do, and if I come across a Scripture I don't understand, I say, 'Well, Lord, I see what you say, but I don't understand it. I can't make sense of this.' I tell the Lord that in all humility, and say, 'Please, Lord, show me what it means.' I recommend it to you. Don't be discouraged because you can't see all the things I see in it. Read it for yourself, but ask the Lord to speak to you in a way that's suitable to you.

Uncountable Wealth

It is a great pleasure, ladies and gentlemen, to see you here again. Your lecturer has asked me to say, and to admit to the sad truth, that he has fallen far behind the advertised programme! He asked me to say how profoundly sorry he is for this fact and it comes because he spent all of our first session on only the first five verses of this letter. So your lecturer asked me to say that tomorrow he promises to do better, and make up the leeway. If you can come to the three sessions, or get the recording, he will try to redeem his character. That's a difficult thing, but he will try to do that! So that tonight, we shall probably get round to thinking of the uncountable wealth that we mentioned for our second session. We shall not get around tonight to dealing with the next topic, 'The End of Hostility', and must reserve that for tomorrow. First, let's recap briefly.

God's cosmic purpose for the universe

When we began our study last night, we spent a lot of time considering what God has to say to us in this letter about his cosmic purposes. His purpose for creating this universe, his purpose in creating our world, and we studied what God has to say about his purpose in these things, because his word assures us that we are involved in this matter. We woke up one day to find we were in this world. We've been conscious of it ever since. We are conscious, likewise, of the fact that our world, or at least our stay in it, is not permanent and if we listen to the scientists, they will enforce this notion that this world, however long it exists, is temporary.

The scientists debate among themselves as to whether the universe is expanding or contracting. In the 1950s, the then Professor of Astronomy at Manchester, Professor Lovell, assured the public that they were on the point of proving that this world exists in a steady state. It's neither getting younger nor older—as it appears to decay, further supplies of energy and atoms are somehow added. But his promise was never fulfilled and now is dismissed by scientists. They still debate whether the universe will contract. If it does, it will mean an enormous crunch. It will be the end of this little planet, certainly. Or whether the universe is expanding. If it goes on forever expanding, the consequent heat loss will spell death for this planet anyway. Then there is another small matter to be considered, that our sun up in the sky is putting out millions upon millions of tons of energy every moment. The astronomers reckon it is a middle-aged star, which makes it possible for us to be a planet of that star. But if it's putting out energy like this, by definition one day it will run out of energy. Before that happens, they say that the sun will cave in on itself and then explode; and in that moment, little planet earth will disappear. Whichever version you accept, the conclusion is the same—

our world is temporary. Added to all that, of course, observation tells us that our personal stay on this world is temporary as well.

God's cosmic purpose for us

It leads to the question, what is it all for? And so we spent a lot of time last night considering God's purpose in creating our world. We learnt that God made our world so that he could put on it his human creatures and then give them free choice—free will to choose—and offer them the possibility of becoming more than simply a creature of God. Indeed he offers the possibility of becoming a child of God, growing up to become a son or daughter of God, and the way we become children of God is spelt out quite clearly in the Bible.

to all who did receive [Christ], who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. (John 1:12)

We found that our passage in the early verses of Ephesians underlined that purpose of God. Before the foundation of the world, he chose us in Christ. That is to say, he provided Christ as the means by whom he could adopt us to himself as sons and daughters. Now tonight we are to come down to the details in the argument and the discourse that follows. We will not be able to stop at every phrase, comma and full stop, but let me, if you will, guide you in our thinking tonight. You have, as I hear our chairman say, a copy of Ephesians in front of you. You might care, from time to time, to check where we are in our exposition.

God's ultimate purpose—the glory of his grace

We've seen then that the purpose God had in mind for creating this universe and putting us in it as his creatures, was to give us the opportunity to rise in the universe and become sons and daughters of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, God's dear Son. That is the scheme, and we're given the reason:

to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. (1:6)

That is, the praise of his glorious grace which he lavished on us through Jesus Christ, for it is he who is God's beloved one, his beloved Son. To put it in humble language, God loves his Son so much that he determined to have an eternity full of human beings who have received his Son, have become joined in spirit with his Son; people who have been placed by God in his Son, that God might have multitudes of sons and daughters for all eternity. And he's done it for the praise of his glorious grace.

I feel that, deep down in my insides. I don't know about you. It's difficult to put it into words. God's grace is wonderful. We shall later come across the verses which say,

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (2:8–9)

God's salvation is a free gift. God is not in the business of selling salvation.

There's a story told, I can't tell you whether it's true or not, of a poor woman in a city in Europe, and her daughter was desperately ill, and she thought that perhaps it would be a good thing if she could only get some grapes for her daughter. She walked down into the city and there were these big, ornate gates which were open and she could see inside a beautiful greenhouse, with a lovely vine and luscious bunches of grapes. The poor woman stood there wondering whether she could perhaps buy some of those grapes. As she thought, there came a very elegant lady and said, 'My good woman, what do you want?'

'I hoped I could buy some grapes. How much would I have to pay for a bunch of grapes?'

The elegant lady replied, 'My father is not in the business of selling grapes. He is the king. Hold your apron out.' And she began cutting off large bunches of grapes.

'Oh, stop,' said the woman, 'I can't afford it.'

'You don't have to pay anything,' said the elegant lady, and she cut and cut until the apron could scarce carry the grapes away. 'My father doesn't sell grapes,' said the princess.

And I'm glad to say, in the name of my Father in heaven, he doesn't sell salvation either. Salvation is by grace: it is the gift of God. And for all eternity, as heaven surveys the multitudinous hosts of the redeemed, it will express not only his grace, but the glory of his grace. This is real salvation. This is the magnificent gift of God.

The problem of sin

But what about our sins? What was God's reaction when man rebelled, and wanted to go his own way? We've not all murdered our mothers-in-law, or shot policemen or robbed banks, but God's charge against us is that

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way. (Isa 53:6)

Our Lord Jesus told a parable at one stage about a man who planted a vineyard, and he let it out to tenants and he himself went away to a far country (Luke 20:9–15). At the time of the grape harvest, he sent a servant to get the grapes, but the tenants beat him and sent him home with nothing. So the owner sent a few more servants, but they each got very roughly handled. Last of all, the owner said, 'I have only one son, but I'll send him. Surely they will respect my son?' But when the tenants saw him coming, they slunk behind the glasshouses and whispered to themselves, 'This is the heir. Let's kill him and throw him out, and the vineyard will be ours.'

It was a parable of course, and it's not difficult to see its application. Israel was God's nation. The world is God's world. He's let it out to us, his creatures, but we're only tenants. We don't own the place. But so many of us are like those tenants. We're not content to be tenants: we want to be owners, to go our own way. We want to set the final purpose of our living, caring nothing for whether it coincides with God's purpose for creating the world and us on it. Our Lord finished that parable by asking them what they thought the owner would do to the men who murdered his son, and they suggested to the onlookers, 'He'll come and destroy them.' But the parable was obvious. God has sent his Son, his only Son, and the world took him and hung him on a cross, slung him out, and what will God do about that?

Now here is the amazing story of it. Though the world meant it as an act of defiance, God turned it and used the occasion, through the death of his beloved Son, so that his death should

be for our benefit. That he would bear our sins and the penalty of them upon him so that, as it says in the later verses of this chapter, we might be redeemed, and find forgiveness of our trespasses and our sins. I know you've heard it many times, but if you were hearing it for the first time, that would be almost incredible. That the God of this universe should come in human form, send his dear Son in human form into our world and let the world crucify him, and turn that very death into the means by which we might be forgiven and justified and reconciled to God.

That, says the Bible, is God's grace, God's glorious grace. I don't know about you, but if a mosquito, of a pleasant summer evening, latches on my noble forehead and stings, I don't stand still and debate what I should do: I'd swipe it forthwith. I expect you'd do the same. What do you suppose our God would do with this planet that murdered his Son? Do consider and marvel at the incalculable wealth of God's grace, that the Bible puts this way:

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. (Rom 5:10)

There's a story told of King Solomon. He was meant to be a very wise king, and he was in some respects. One of the stories that is told about his proverbial wisdom is that one day in the royal courts, two women were brought in. They were both prostitutes and they slept in the same room. They each had a little babe and, in the middle of the night, one of the women rolled over on top of her baby and smothered it and killed it. She woke up and realized what she'd done and quietly she crept out of bed, went across the room, took the other woman's live child, put her dead child by that woman, and went back to bed. When they woke up in the morning and the woman saw that her child was dead, she was heartbroken of course. But then as she looked at it she said, 'But that isn't my child. That's her child.' She woke the other woman and there began one of these contests of pulling of hair and scratching of faces, and they argued the case. One woman said it was her child. The other woman said no it wasn't, and so on. So they brought the case before the king, and the women told their story. And the king said, 'Well I will be fair,' and calling one of his officers he said, 'Officer, take this living baby and with your sword, cut it in two. I'll give half to this woman and half to that woman.' And one of the women said, 'Yes, you do that,' and the other woman said, 'No, no, let her have the child.'

'That's the mother,' said Solomon. 'She'd do anything rather than her child perish.'

Do you want to know who the true God is? The true God does not want that anyone should perish, to the extent of giving his Son for us as our substitute and Saviour, so we can have forgiveness through him. Even before the foundation of the world, the Bible tells us that God foresaw what man would do with his free will and strive to get independence of God and break God's law, and virtually tell God, 'Go hang.' And God made provision for it—the Lamb of God was foreordained, says the Bible, before the foundation of the world (see 1 Pet 1:19–20).

God's plan for the future

So we get forgiveness then, through Christ and in him. But then the passage goes on to say,

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (1:7–10)

We'd better stop over that, because that contains some majestic ideas. We're forgiven then. Well you are if you've trusted Christ, for forgiveness is only in him and through him. But God doesn't just give us forgiveness: he makes known to us what his plan is for the future.

We considered last night why there is so much pain in the world and found the biblical answer to be that, as a result of man's rebellion against God, God has subjected nature to futility so that all creation groans in travail until now. And we too, who are believers, also groan within ourselves, waiting for our complete adoption, the redemption of our bodies. But while we notice that that is the source of the trouble and the disorder in our planet, we also notice that God has already started the process of restoration, what the Bible terms as the restoring of all things (see Acts 3:21). And he did it when, on the third day after the burial of Christ, he raised our Lord Jesus from the dead—a human being with a literal body, raised from the dead.

The headship of Christ

That was the beginning of the restoration of all things and God tells us what his plan is for the future—the development of the new heavens and the new earth. So that, being forgiven, we may more and more conform ourselves and fit ourselves into the purpose that God has for our lives as his sons and daughters. It says here that his plan for the administration of the new heavens and new earth is to 'unite' all things in Christ ('gather together in one' 1:10 KJV). Now the word Paul uses here is an unusual word. It only occurs in one other place in the whole of the New Testament, which is Romans 13:9, where it is translated to 'sum up'. It's God's intention that when Christ comes again, he'll come to reign and everything will be 'summed up' under the headship of Christ, and anything of which he is not head will be removed. Christ once hung upon a cross in our world. Not now. He's the heir of the Father, by whom the worlds were made, who made at Calvary purification and purgation of the guilt of our sin, was buried, risen again, sits at the right hand of God, and is coming again. And when he comes, he will restore all things. And God says that he is going to be the head—everything and everyone under his headship—and those who have refused his headship will be banished to the everlasting darkness.

The word means more than simply under his headship, though we'd better start to apply it to ourselves at that level, should we not? Have you received Christ as your Saviour?

You say, 'Yes, I rejoice and I have forgiveness of sins.'

Marvellous, so what is the purpose of that then?

You say, 'It makes me feel good.'

I'm delighted to hear that. Any further purpose in it? Says God, 'Now I've forgiven your sins, I'd like to tell you what my purpose is that you shall come under the headship of Christ, that he may be your Lord.'

You say, 'Yes, when I get to heaven, he will be.'

You can't be serious? You're proposing that in heaven, Christ will be your Lord, but what about now, in everything in life? That's a purpose of salvation.

But the word means more than that. You will have noticed how the word is used in Romans 13:9 where Paul is commenting on the Ten Commandments: 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal,' and so forth. And he says all these separate commandments can be 'summed up' in one phrase: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' It doesn't mean that the others are eliminated. But if you want to explain the law as a whole, every bit of it now comes under this general statement of its purpose:

you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength; . . . You shall love your neighbour as yourself. (Mark 12:30–31)

It's summed up in that phrase, and the significance of every redeemed human soul is summed up in Christ. Ultimately, it's the only meaning that life has. If I were to ask you, 'What does your life mean?' I wonder what you would say. The thing that ultimately gives us meaning is first that we're creatures of God; and then, having been redeemed by Christ and having received him as Saviour, we're in him and part of his purpose for the universe. That's what gives us meaning.

The word can mean a little bit more. It's a word that you'll find if you read the Greek orators. I don't especially recommend you read the Greek orators! But they did like and enjoy oratory. In those days the crowds didn't go to football matches but they held competitions for orators. People would sit all day on hard stone seats, listening to orators perform to see who could get the victory over the other one. It was a strange pursuit, and they developed the art of oratory in a very big way and wrote great books about it. Among the books was this advice. You had to have a beginning phase of your speech that set the central purpose of it. And then you dealt with the purpose in this way, and then that way, and then the other way. And when you'd done that, you had to have a final thing that summed up the whole and showed the meaning of every particular argument and how it fitted into the whole. They called it by a particular Greek word¹, and in English we would use the term *to recap* or 'recapitulate' the meaning.

That's an interesting idea, because in the Bible our blessed Lord Jesus, the second member of the Holy Trinity, is called *the Word*. He is the expression of God. We are told that this universe was made through him who is the Word. This universe, originally made, is the expression of God. The universe is something that God was saying and we're told that as each stage of creation came, it was introduced by a word of God: 'And God said', 'And God said'. We understand that the worlds were made by the Word of God, the great statement of God's intention. With my childish mind I've often wondered what the angels thought when they saw kangaroos for the first time. What on earth was God doing creating kangaroos? What's the meaning of kangaroos? I haven't got an answer yet! But I could ask the question, what was God saying when he made you? What was God saying when he made the whole human race and what was he saying when he made you as the distinct individual you are? There's

¹ *Anakephalaion*—to sum up under one head; to gather together into one.

not been another exactly the same as you, nor will there ever be. You are unique. What was God saying when he made you? Now, when we consider that we all went astray and we have all sinned, then the wonder becomes ten thousand times greater. What was God saying about you when he gave his Son for you?

The periods of history have gone by, with man's free will expressing itself and often resulting in misery and slaughter; some of it resulting in brilliant progress and scientific discovery. What has God been saying in those ages? One day, God is going to 'sum up' the whole thing and show its meaning and its purpose, as nature herself is delivered from her bondage to corruption, into the glorious freedom of the children of God. And among that glorious orchestra of praise that will break out constantly and incessantly before almighty God, there will be the presence of redeemed sinners like you and me who, through faith in Christ, have been forgiven and joined to Christ and made heirs of God, as his sons and daughters, and joint heirs with Christ, redeemed at the immeasurable cost of the blood of Christ, to fit into God's eternal plans for the development of the universe and any other universes that he pleases to create.

The ultimate purpose

So let's hastily move on. The aim of it all, says verse 12, is that we should be 'to the praise of his glory'. When Paul speaks of those who were 'the first to hope in Christ,' he is talking of the original Galileans and others who first trusted the Saviour—like Martha and Mary and Peter and Nathanael. They were all Jews and they trusted Christ. Now the gospel has gone to Gentiles. 'You also, when you heard the word of truth' (v. 13) have trusted the Saviour as well. And God's aim is that together we should be to the praise of God's glorious grace. It will be marvellous, won't it? Don't get embarrassed, my dear friend, because there are going to be infinite possibilities for God to take you—if you are a believer, have accepted Christ and become a child of God—and say to the angels, 'See this good lady? See her story!' And the angels will admire, not you particularly, but the glory of God's grace shown in your creation and in salvation and his mercy to you and his eternal purpose for you.

A seal

And then Paul says,

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (1:13–14)

That's a rather tightly-packed sentence so we need to stop a moment to elucidate the various phrases. When you heard the gospel, the word of truth, and you believed in Christ, what happened next? Says Paul, every believer in Christ, the moment they believe, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. What does it mean by 'sealed'? Well it's a metaphor taken from the ancient world. If they had a document that was an important legal document, it would be tied up and sealed with sealing wax and stamped with the name of whoever the owner was; and if the owner was the emperor, it was sealed with his seal. That defied anybody to break that seal. This made that scroll the emperor's possession. His seal on it was the mark of his

possession. And when someone trusts the Saviour, God gives them forthwith his Spirit, and that Holy Spirit is God's seal upon their life. It says to all and sundry, 'This is my property.' It defies all hell and earth combined to steal that property from God.

A guarantee

And next, the Holy Spirit is the spirit he promised to make real to us and get us to think about the great promises of God that lie ahead for us. Then it is said that the Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance. It's a guarantee in the sense of a down payment. Now with credit cards and so forth shops don't have to ask for a down payment these days. But it used to be that if you hadn't the full money for what you wanted to buy, you could secure it by paying a deposit or down payment. That was a guarantee that one day you would come back to pay the rest, and God uses the term here. When we trust the Saviour he gives us the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is God's seal saying, 'This person is mine, now and for eternity,' and then the Holy Spirit is God's down payment to us and a guarantee of what he will give us when he pays us the full payment. Marvellous, isn't it? So that the Holy Spirit, already within us, is able to give us a confident guarantee—and to some extent the immediate enjoyment—of the great inheritance that one day will be ours.

The worldly man says it's all pie in the sky, of course. Well what else would he say; he doesn't know the facts! The believer says, 'Well there's a lot of pie in the sky, and I'm going to enjoy it one day—but I've got some pie already!' We're told elsewhere that 'the [Holy] Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God' (Rom 8:16). And that same Holy Spirit in the believer, as he reads Scripture, makes it real to him and her that they are 'a child of God and if a child, an heir of God, and a joint heir along with Christ.' Even now you're an heir. Did I talk to you about Prince Charles the other night? You'll have to forgive me if I did, but I'm an Englishman and hard up for illustrations! Right from the moment he was born, Prince Charles has been an heir to Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II. Whether he will ever inherit the throne is another story. But God has given us the Holy Spirit and he witnesses with our spirits that we are the children of God; and if children then heirs, heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ.

Then the Holy Spirit argues with us. I don't know if you've found him arguing with you, but if you're a believer you should do! In Romans 5, Paul says the hope that we Christians have will not let us down. Why won't it let us down?

hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Rom 5:5)

It's the Holy Spirit's delightful task to take the love of God and pour it out in the hearts of God's believing people—not their love for God but God's love for them. And the way the Holy Spirit does it is not by fancy feelings but by a logical argument concerning the character of God. He reasons like this. What is the biggest thing that God will ever do for you? If you're a believer in Christ and you have received Christ, you're a child of God. Well now, what is the biggest thing that God will ever do for you? Would you care to ponder that realistically a moment? Think big.

You say, 'I hope when I get home to glory, God will think I'm worthy enough and give me a whole galaxy of stars to govern.' That'd be something big, wouldn't it? Are you sure you're up to it? Who knows what he'll give you. But that isn't big enough. The biggest thing God will ever do for his people, he has already done. He has given us his Son to die for us. The creator of all the galaxies that are, or ever will be, God gave him for us. That's how the Holy Spirit argues. Do you get the point? But now the question arises, when did he do it? Was it that God came to you one day and said, 'Now look here, you're moderately okay but you could do with a lot of improvement. Now if you were to manage to improve yourself somewhat, I might consider giving my Son for you, but only if you improve considerably.' Nonsense, that amounts almost to blasphemy. No, our Bible says,

God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom 5:8)

It's open to us, of course, whether we will believe it, or throw God's love back in his face and say, 'I don't need it.'

The Holy Spirit pours out the love of God in our hearts. He's the Spirit of promise. Paul the apostle, when writing his second letter to the Corinthians, though he was only in his late 50s maybe, was battered and beaten. As a missionary, he'd been stoned, he'd been left for dead, he'd nearly drowned twice in the Mediterranean, he'd been beaten with rods and I don't know what, and he says, to be frank, 'I'd prefer to go home to be with Christ. That is far better' (see 2 Cor 5:5-8). For we can be absolutely sure that while we're in this body, we're absent from the Lord, but when we are absent from the body, at death, at physical death, we will be immediately present with the Lord. 'I'd like that,' said Paul, 'but it's not me running away from life, being rather melancholy. No, what's brought this about is God has given me his Holy Spirit as the guarantee in my heart. A touch of heaven already there and if this is the down payment, well I'd love to get home and get the whole lot'. Understandable, isn't it?

An inheritance

And then the verse adds another exceedingly wonderful thing. We have been sealed with the promised Holy Spirit 'who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise on his glory' (1:14). What does that mean? Well God has paid his down payment for you, giving you his Holy Spirit as a guarantee of what shall be. As a believer, God has bought you—body, soul and spirit. There's not a hair on your head that he hasn't bought. 'You're not your own,' says Paul, writing to the Christians at Corinth, 'you've been bought with a price' (see 1 Cor 6:19-20). For the moment, we're still left here, but one day God is going to come and redeem his possession and take us to himself. He owns us, if we are Christ's; and until he comes, the Holy Spirit is our guarantee that he's going to take us for himself, to the praise of his glorious grace.

A prayer

You say, 'That's okay for you, Mr Lecturer. They are fine sounding words, but it's difficult to grasp and difficult to feel it's real. How do you know it isn't just words?' Do you ever get that feeling? Well that's a feeling that a lot of Christians get, and I do sometimes. For that reason Paul now breaks off what he's going to say and tells them that he constantly prays for them,

and he prays three things for these people in Ephesus. They were pagans. They've now heard the gospel. They have received Christ. They've been born as children of God. They're on their way to growing up as sons and daughters of God. They have the Holy Spirit. They're sure of eternal security and eternal glory. But now Paul prays for them that God would give them a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of God, that they might perceive and understand certain things: (1) the hope to which God called them; (2) the riches of God's inheritance in the saints; (3) the almighty power of God, available to them for daily living, even now (see 1:16–19).

I mustn't yield to temptation. I frequently do, in certain circles. When I should stop preaching, I yield to the temptation to go on preaching and that's a naughty thing to do, so I won't do it tonight! I mention this as we close because it is practical after a study like this. We have thought of magnificently glorious things, true of God and his dear Son and the magnificent salvation God offers us. You could not exaggerate its wonder and its glory, but it is so glorious you may feel it's difficult to grasp it, to sense it is real. What is to be done then? Well Paul prays, and we can pray after him, not that God will give us his Holy Spirit, for God has already done that if we have trusted Christ, but we need the ongoing working of the Spirit in our hearts, in our minds, in our perceptions. It is the Holy Spirit's task to take these glorious things and make them real to us.

A spirit of understanding

That is a very necessary thing. There is a part of the Bible which says,

who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. (1 Cor 2:11)

That's perfectly true, isn't it? I use the illustration of people's dogs. If you have a dog, he knows a lot about you. And if he sees you eating a beefsteak, he knows exactly all the lovely feelings that are filling you as the beefsteak descends into your stomach; and he comes round, if you let him, and he wants some of it. He understands it. Good old Fido. But then you take him into your drawing room or your study and you show him this painting. You say, 'Fido, have a look at that: that's my Rembrandt. What do you think of that now?' Fido has a go at thinking of it but he doesn't get very far. He uses what faculties he has. He goes and sniffs it and tries to lick it, but that doesn't yield a lot. None of the tests applied do anything for the dog and it's no good you trying to explain to him what you see in that picture, for he hasn't got your human spirit. The things of God are like that. Who can comprehend the things of God except the Holy Spirit of God? The marvellous thing is that, to the humblest believer, God gives his Holy Spirit so that they might begin to understand the lovely things that God has given to them.

Uncountable Wealth

Question & Answer Session

We have some very searching questions now.

At what age are children responsible before God?

DWG: As far as I know, the Bible does not discuss the matter. The Jews, whose book the Old Testament is, to this day regard twelve as the age at which at least a boy assumes responsibility for his own sins, and then they'll have a ceremony called the Bar Mitzvah at that stage. I think we're not called upon to decide. This is for God to decide, surely, for he knows the hearts.

Do children go to hell?

DWG: Well again, I prefer to keep to what the Bible says. God gave his Son to die on the cross that people might be saved, and his desire is that all should be saved and come to repentance (see 2 Pet 3:9). When he was here on earth, our blessed Lord said, 'Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God' (Luke 18:16). God will save everybody he can, by definition. 'It is not the will of [your] Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish' (Matt 18:14). I am in no position to say at what age a child comes to responsibility such that they might decide, just as they might rebel against their parents, to rebel against God. I must say that the Bible is clear about the issue, 'Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him' (John 3:36). It's up to God to decide the individual cases. But we are asked to believe what God says and, if we are Christians, to do our utmost to lead other people to Christ, and parents will want to do that particularly for their children.

I think I am a Christian but I'm not really sure. How do I make certain?

DWG: The answer to that varies according to who you are, so to speak, and what your makeup is. How can we be sure? Well there are various Scriptures that tell us how to be sure. I'll quote you this one, because in this question it is important to see exactly what Scripture says. I'm quoting to you now from 1 John 5. This is an argument: not my argument but the argument of Scripture.

If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not

believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1 John 5:9–12)

‘If we receive the testimony of men’; well we do often, don’t we? We ring up the airport and we say, ‘When is the next plane to Toronto?’ and some charming female voice tells us a time. We’ve never seen the dear lady in our all lives and we know that even such people can make mistakes and be careless, but for practical purposes we believe this voice anyway. We know people can sometimes be untruthful, but we do often receive the testimony of men.

Then, says Scripture, the testimony of God is greater. We should believe him the moment he speaks. Moreover, the testimony of God is not only greater, but he has borne testimony concerning his Son, and who should know about God, if God doesn’t? Are you prepared to accept God’s testimony about his Son and believe what God says about his Son? And the Scripture says that those who believe have the testimony in themselves, meaning that God, by his Spirit, will confirm it in the heart of those that believe on the Son of God.

But notice the alternative. ‘Whoever does not believe God, has made him a liar.’ You say, ‘That sounds very severe: if I don’t believe God, I make him a liar?’ But wait a minute, if I came to you after this meeting and said, ‘Madam, I’ve noticed you here several nights and I’m delighted to see you. May I be so forward as to ask what your name is?’ and you say, ‘I’m Mrs Elizabeth O’Rourke.’ Just at that moment, a friend comes up to me and you’re still there, listening. He says, ‘What is that good lady’s name?’ and I say, ‘Well she says it’s Mrs Elizabeth O’Rourke, but I find it a bit difficult to believe.’ What a dreadful thing for me to say. You’ve just told me your name is Elizabeth O’Rourke and I don’t believe you, and in front of your face, I tell my friend here that I find it difficult to believe you!

If God says something and I don’t believe him, I’m making out that he is not to be trusted. He’s a liar. You’ll not live in heaven with a God whom you regard as a liar. That’s why faith is essential. I must believe God. How could I ever live in his heaven if I don’t? The verse says that I would have made God a liar because I have not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. What is that testimony? What does God say and what does he demand that I believe? It is this: ‘that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son’. Now notice how carefully Scripture is speaking. It doesn’t say that ‘God *will give us*’. It says ‘he *gave us*’. As far as God is concerned, he has given this eternal life, and that’s that. Where is it to be found? It’s in his Son and therefore it follows that he that has the Son, has the life.

Let’s suppose that I’ve changed this piece of paper into a €10,000 note, and I’ve placed it inside this book. So the euros are in the book, and if you believe me and you want it, you’ll come and grab the book. If you don’t come and grab it, I will say, ‘Well he didn’t really believe me, or else he doesn’t need €10,000!’ Suppose you come and take the book and, before you’ve time to open it to find out where this €10,000 note is, your friend comes up and asks ‘Have you got the €10,000?’ and you say, ‘I don’t know.’ So you didn’t believe me after all, for I said that if you have the book, you have the €10,000. And if you don’t believe it, or you’re not sure of it, then you’ve made me a liar.

So one answer to whoever it is who wrote this question—I’m only giving one answer tonight, but there are other answers, for in my experience there are all sorts of reasons why

people feel uncertain—but let's deal tonight with this one thing and get that clear. Do you want eternal life?

You say, 'Yes, of course I do.'

God says, 'I've given it, and the life is in my Son. If you have my Son, you have the life.' The question therefore becomes, have you got God's Son, have you received him?

You say, 'I don't know whether I have or not.'

Okay, suppose there came a knock on the door and when you went to the door and opened it, it was Jesus Christ standing there, what would you say? You'd say, 'Come in.' And of course he would, because he's given it as his promise: 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me' (Rev 3:20).

So you have his guarantee that if you say, 'Come in, Lord Jesus, I need you. I've no other Saviour but you, come in, please,' he will come in. 'And if you have my Son,' says God, 'you have the life.'

If you say to God, 'But how will I know?' God will say, 'Because I said so, and if you don't believe, you've made me a liar.' You wouldn't want to do that, I presume. The question comes round, therefore, have you, as best you know how, received God's Son into your heart?

I did as a child. I think I told you the other night. I said the words of a little chorus they used to teach children. 'Come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Come in today. Come in to stay. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus'. He did that and I've lived for over seventy years since then, to prove the reality of it. In spite of all sorts of doubts and fears and psychological issues and the ups and downs of life, I've found him true. God's word is true and if the Lord doesn't come before I die and I go home to glory, I go home on this word. Not on my merit. Not on my works. Not on my attainment. Not on my preaching. I go home to glory on the word of God: 'He who has the Son, has life.' I've no other option. I've no other Saviour. I have God's word. I have eternal life. So may all who will come in true repentance and faith.

Do our natural passions/desires cease immediately at conversion?

DWG: Early in the text, it mentions that we lived in the passions of our flesh and carried out the desires of the body and the mind, as it was our nature as children of wrath (see 2:3). So the question is asked whether such passions, actions and desires simply cease at the point of conversion.

Well let me explain what the verse means by the *children of wrath*. That's a Hebrew way of talking. It means people who deserve God's anger against them for their sins. We lived simply according to our own desires, whether they were our own mental desires or psychological desires or physical desires. What Paul is saying is that we lived according to our own desires, apart from Christ. Our desires might have been quite religious, like Saul of Tarsus. He was very religious before he got converted and became a Christian. He thought he was earning salvation by his good religious attainments. So zealous was he for the law that he persecuted the Christians and tried to eliminate the name of Jesus from the earth. He kept the law as best he knew how, but regardless of Christ, and in fact against God: he would have murdered God's Son. Then he got converted. Did he lose forthwith all those wrong desires, passions and whatnot? The biblical answer is, no of course not.

What Paul will tell us, we shall have to consider tomorrow at the end of Ephesians. Of course Christ does make an immediate difference, but then Christ begins to take us in hand and he will ask us to deal with those passions and to put off the old man with his style of living, and to put on the new man. We have strength to do it, of course, because the living Christ comes to live within us. We should not be constantly defeated by sin, for as we continue with Christ and we know the truth and get to know the truth more, Scripture says that the truth will make us free from the constant practice of sin (see John 8:32). On the other hand, John tells us that if as believers we sin, we have an advocate with the Father, and 'if we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (1 John 1:9).

The Bible never claims that believers in Christ are sinlessly perfect this side of heaven, but of course Christ does make an enormous difference. If you'll allow a crude illustration, the Bible says that in one sense, as far as God is concerned, in our unconverted days we were dead in trespasses and in sins. So suppose you came across an open grave in a churchyard and you could see that the corpse was rather filthy. Do you think you would set about trying to clean it up? That would be a bizarre thing to do. No, but what you could do is plant an acorn in the middle of the corpse. In a year or two, there would come out a green shoot and, if you left it long enough, there'd come out an oak tree. What you've done is not to clean up the corpse, so to speak, but you've planted a new life in the corpse. We shall learn tomorrow as we continue to study Ephesians that that is what God has done and is doing for a believer. We were dead in trespasses and in sins and God gives us a new life. It is the development of that new life that pushes out the old.

The End of Hostility

It is delightful, ladies and gentlemen, to see you here so fresh on this bright Saturday morning. You will recall that in our previous sessions, we have been considering the purpose of God in creation—his purpose in creating our universe and his purpose in creating us individually. What is life about? What purpose is there in life, and when death eventually comes, is that the end of everything, or has God got a future for us? The general answer we found as we studied the opening section of Paul's letter, is that God's purpose in creating our world and us in it, was so that God eventually might give us the opportunity of becoming his children. We enter this world as God's creatures, simply because he made us, but while we are in this world, God gives us the opportunity through Jesus Christ, his Son, to become something more than a creature of God.

So we spent quite a bit of time in our last two sessions thinking of that process by which we become children of God and know God as our Father. The Bible sums it up in these words, 'To all who did receive [Christ], who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God' (John 1:12). That is God's purpose then, in having this world, and the Bible goes on to tell us what God's purpose will be when this world is done and God brings in new heavens and a new earth.

The role of Christ in history

But now as we begin our study this morning we will aim to set Paul's letter in its wider context by considering the role of Christ in the history of this world. We must start by giving our attention to the Jews, and the difference between what the Bible refers to as Jews and Gentiles. Now I've a number of friends who'll take and read the New Testament, even some of them who don't believe it, but the question they always have is, 'Why is the Bible so full of talking about Jews? Why on earth do we want to know about Jews and what's that got to do with anything?'

It is a fact of course that the Bible, you will have noticed, is in two parts. There is the Old Testament and there is the New Testament. The Old Testament was written by Jews, and it is their sacred book still. The New Testament is the Christian part of the Bible. So it's the Old Testament that tells us why God chose out the Jewish nation and for what purpose he did it. Let me just remind you of that and fill in a bit of history.

Why did God choose the Jews?

The Bible tells us that when God first made people, men and women, on this earth, they knew that there was one true God. Indeed the Bible says still that if you consider the earth and its

marvels and the heavens and the stars, something will be awakened in your mind and there will arise in your heart this thought, 'There must be a God who started it all off.' The Bible says that, through creation, God shows us his exceeding power and Godhood. This is a supernatural power. That's a very important lesson of course and God says we all know it, even if we deny it. We know there's a God, for God has revealed that much to us; not only to us, but in us.

The great European philosopher Kant said, 'Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing wonder . . . the starry heavens above me and the moral sense within me.'² These things tell us there is a God, but then the Bible goes on to say that a lot of people didn't like the idea that there's a God. Indeed, they not only let it go, they sometimes suppressed it. And when people don't believe in God the creator, they get into all kinds of intellectual difficulties. People didn't like to retain the knowledge of the one true God, but then they had the sense to see that they didn't create themselves and they didn't create the universe. Well if you're not going to believe in God, then who are you going to believe in? The ancient world began to invent all kinds of gods and goddesses. They deified the sun and started to worship the sun as though that were a god, and they deified the moon as a god. They deified the storms, they were so powerful. And then they deified the god of chance: the Greeks called her *Tyche*. That's a very strange god to worship, but a lot of people still do. I've seen them queuing up for a prayer ticket to ask the help of the gods to fill in the football coupons, or so that they can win a big prize in the lottery; and they say it's the god of chance that rules everything. And some people worshipped the god of fate: they said everything is already determined and we human beings have no choice—what is going to happen will happen. When I was about thirty years younger, there was a song people sang all round the streets and it went '*Que sera, sera, whatever will be will be*'. Of course you're all too young to know about that! But this was people trying to hide behind the thought, 'Well I'm not really responsible for what I do. What is to be will be and that's that, and nobody can stop it.' So people got worshipping their man-made gods. Some worshipped the god of sex: the Greeks called her Aphrodite. And nowadays, you'll find a lot of people who don't believe in the one true God of heaven, but they worship a lot of other gods. Some worship the god of money. The ancients called him Mammon.

So what did God do about it? Sometimes I go to places like Russia, where for years it was almost a criminal offence to believe in the one true God of heaven, and I get the chance to talk to these atheists about the true God. So I tell them these stories of the ancient world, how people came to worship the sun god and the moon god, and worship the god of love and the storm god and all that kind of thing, and the nonsense it was. And of course the atheists think that was absolute nonsense too and now they've got beyond that superstitious stage. Or have they? If you ask an atheist, 'What began this universe, what started it all, what controls it, and what one day will bring it to its end?', the atheist will say the same thing as those ancient old idolaters actually.

If you go into an atheist's home, you won't find a god shelf in the corner. Some people do have a god shelf in the corner, but an atheist will tell you he doesn't believe in God. If you ask

² Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), *Critique of Practical Reason*.

him or her, 'So what set the whole thing going, and what controls it?', they will say, 'Well the thing was brought about by the big bang, and then by a weak atomic power and a strong atomic power, and electromagnetism and sundry other such things.' And what are they? They are just the powers of nature, and the atheist is doing exactly the same as the old idolater. He doesn't like to believe in the one true God but he knows he didn't make the universe and doesn't control it, so what does control it? He comes up with the same idea as the old idolaters, that it's the forces of nature that control everything. They are just impersonal forces with no purpose in their heads, and they don't care anything for you.

So the modern atheist, for all his pride in his modern science, is no better than the old idolater who deified the moon god and the sun god and all those other kinds of gods—mankind bowing down to the forces of nature. Talking about that, let's think about ourselves for a moment and the sun up in the sky. I want to tell you that I am, my little self, infinitely more significant than the sun up in the sky. I know we depend on the sun for warmth and light and therefore for life. How do I know myself to be more important than the sun up in the sky? Well I know the sun is there, but the sun doesn't know I'm here. The sun is only so much stuff—enormous quantities of it of course, but mere stuff. And you know and I know that, as human beings, we're much more important than mere stuff. You are a person and instinctively we know ourselves as persons, superior to mere stuff. And we are indeed, for we were made by a God who is personal. We are more important than all the impersonal forces of nature. We are persons made in the image of God.

The unique role of the Jewish nation

You say, 'Why are you telling us all this?' Well I'm telling you all this to explain why God chose the Jews. When mankind in all the nations of the world was hopelessly lost to idolatry—deifying the forces of nature, worshiping the sun god and the moon god and goodness knows what else gods—God had to start again. First God had to establish, or to re-establish, that there is one true God and all other gods are not true. To do that, God chose out a man. His name was Abraham and God revealed himself to Abraham as the one true God, and God announced he was going to make a nation from that man, a nation who would stand in the world for belief in the one true God, as distinct from all the idolatry. So Abraham became the father of what we now call the Jewish race, only they weren't called Jews until much later on. They were called Hebrews.

You say, 'But what's all this got to do with Christianity? I thought this was a study session for studying the Christian Bible.' Well for this reason, because in the New Testament, in Christianity, God offers us his Son as a Saviour, and it is a very important thing to come to see and believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. But suppose you went to an ancient Greek and you said to him, 'We want to talk to you about the Lord Jesus. He is the Son of God.' An ancient Greek would have said to you, 'Oh, is he? We've heard of this kind of thing before. For example, there's Zeus, the chief god, who has many wives and many sons. So when you say your Jesus is the son of god—which god in particular are you thinking about?' If you don't know who God is, you'll have difficulty discovering that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and what that term means. So before God sent his dear Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, into the world, God spent centuries establishing the witness here on earth through the Jewish nation, that

there is one God. That's exceedingly important, so that when at last God sent his Son and he was proclaimed as the Son of God, it would be clear that this is nothing to do with idolatry, not one god among many gods.

Jesus Christ is the Son of the true and the living God, the only God. Jesus Christ is his Son and God chose the Hebrew nation to be his witnesses in the earth, when all the rest had gone over to idolatry—a protest against idolatry and a witness to the one true God. That's why the Christian gospel tells us that Jesus Christ came. He's witnessed to by the Old Testament prophets and by the Old Testament Scriptures. Then God began to teach the Jews some elementary lessons, like a parent would teach a child. If there's one God and we have sinned against him, how can we find forgiveness? So with the Hebrews, God arranged a system. They had a sacred building, a temple, and they had a big altar and they offered sacrifices on the altar—a lamb or a bullock or something. The animal was killed and its blood shed and sprinkled on various things in the temple; and God said that when they did that, he would forgive their sins.

But it was evident, even to the Jews, that just sacrificing a bullock and shedding its blood couldn't really bring you forgiveness of sins. Bulls and lambs don't know anything about sin: they don't go to bed with a bad conscience. It's we human beings that get troubled in our conscience about sin. How can it be forgiven? Well not really through shedding the blood of a bullock and offering a bullock to God. The Bible explains that these were pictures only, kinds of parables, when the nation was young. When I was a little boy—and I was the last of six—my parents gave us a toy shop and this shop sold sweets, but they were only toy sweets. The girls were put in charge of the shop and we boys were dished out with money, only it wasn't real money. You had to come to the girls and ask for a penny-worth of sweets or something, and the girls would dish them out in a bag and you had to pay the money. Well even as kids we knew it was only a game. The money didn't buy anything really. So why did our parents give us that game? Well it kept us quiet on a rainy afternoon, but it also began to teach us something. It wasn't real money and they weren't real sweets, but it got across the idea that sweets cost money and sweets had to be paid for, getting across in our childish minds the idea of value and cost.

And in the early days of the Hebrews, God was teaching them that sin costs. There's a penalty to sin and sin demands its penalty under the law of God, which is death. It was a lesson for people in their childhood of development, but it was also a picture pointing forward, says the Old Testament itself, to the time when God would send his Son, Jesus Christ, into our world to pay the real cost of sin, to bear the penalty of sin, so that through his death and the shedding of his blood, we might obtain forgiveness with God. It was a picture in advance.

But there was another thing about those Jews. They had a temple, and if you could have got in, at first you'd find a room and then there would be a big curtain, and behind that curtain was the most sacred place in which there was a model, so to speak, of the throne of God. Into that second division nobody was allowed to come, except their high priest once in a year. Otherwise, no one could come in. Indeed, the ordinary people weren't even allowed into the first bit: they stayed outside the temple. What was God saying? Well God is not only against sin, he's against moral uncleanness, for sin not only is against the law, but sin makes us

unclean and God cannot have uncleanness in his presence. It is said of the great heavenly Jerusalem that nothing unclean will ever enter it (Rev 21:27). So in that temple there was always this big barrier and the people couldn't come into the presence of God. They had to learn how clean you have to be to enter God's presence.

Then the time came when God scrapped those childhood lessons. It came when he sent his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to bring in the reality—to pay the real money by giving his own life's blood, not the blood of animals, so that mankind might be redeemed, forgiven and cleansed and made fit to enter God's presence. That's what God was doing down the centuries, until the Lord Jesus came, and we can see now the difference Christ has made, even from those early things that God himself instituted in the Old Testament.

God's purpose in a new creation—two become one

We're going to pick up on some of those things in our studies today. So first of all Paul says to his Gentile readers in Ephesus,

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called 'the uncircumcision' by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. (2:11–18)

Let's think about that for a moment. He's talking to us Gentiles. Now the Jews had a certain sign that marked them out as Jews. All the males, eight days after birth, had to be circumcised. Gentiles didn't have that custom and therefore the Jews looked down upon them as 'uncircumcised Gentiles' and they felt themselves superior. So there was that difference. You couldn't come into their temple if you were an uncircumcised Gentile; you could come to the outer court but no further.

'Then,' says Paul, 'you Gentiles in Ephesus were "separated from Christ"'. What does that mean? Well those Old Testament Scriptures were full of promises that one day God was going to send into our world the one whom the Old Testament calls the Messiah, the anointed one, the Christ. One of those wonderful prophecies in the Old Testament is to be found in Isaiah 53, where God promised that one day he would send his divine servant. The prophet writes:

But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. (v. 5)

A promise that one day God would send a Saviour, who would deal with our problem of sin and suffer its penalty on our behalf so that we might be completely forgiven. But that prophecy was written to Jews, and Gentiles didn't know about it. They had no hope that one day God would send a Saviour into the world. They didn't know about Christ, and didn't know what he was meant to do. They were strangers from the Old Testament.

Of course there are many folks in the world today just like that. Some of them have never heard of Christ. They don't know what he stands for, and what he has come into the world to do, and who he is. The answer is he's God's special, chosen servant, his anointed Son. He is the Son of God, one with God. He is God in human form. So now Paul is telling these Gentiles who before didn't know about him, but now they have heard the marvellous news. And the wonderful fact is that God has sent this Saviour into the world not just for Jews but for us Gentiles as well.

For God so loved the [whole] world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

For there's only one God and one mediator between God and men. That's the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all, without distinction (see 1 Tim 2:5-6).

A means of access

The first major lesson therefore is that this Jesus Christ, though sent in the first place to Israel, is the Son of God and he's sent as the Saviour of the world. What does he do for us? Well the passage tells us:

And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. (2:17-18)

Let's get hold of that word *access*. In the Jewish temple, if you'd gone inside—even the Jews weren't allowed inside, only the priests went inside—there was a big curtain. You couldn't come into the presence of God. You weren't fit enough. Now in Christ that has all been done away and we have access to the Father, says Scripture. We have freedom to come to God and freedom to enter his presence. We have access to the Father and we may know him as our Father. Through the cross, Christ has made it possible.

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (2:13)

How has the blood of Christ brought us near to God? Well the answer is plainly this. We have all sinned and God's wrath is against our sin. According to God's law, sin must be punished. God can't look upon sin and just say it doesn't matter. When God sees our sin, it stirs his holy indignation, his wrath. How could we come anywhere near God if that is so? The answer is Christ. For the amazing gospel is that while we were still sinners, while we were still enemies, God sent Christ to bear the penalty of our sin. He endured the wrath of God that should have been against us, so that God might freely forgive us and we have access in peace

to God. God cannot say that sin doesn't matter. Suppose you stay the night in a hotel and when the receptionist says in the morning that it will cost you such and such, you say, 'Sorry, I have no money.'

'But you have to pay,' says the receptionist.

'Well I don't think it matters,' you say.

What do you suppose the hotel would say? 'Oh, it doesn't matter if you can't pay. A lot of people can't pay, so it doesn't matter if you don't pay'?

Many people think about sin like that. 'Oh, it doesn't really matter. Let's forget it.' God doesn't. God says sin must be paid for. Sin is the breaking of God's law and it must be followed by the penalty of God's law. The marvellous gospel message is this, that when we couldn't pay—for the penalty of sin would be eternal death—God sent his Son to bear the penalty, to pay the penalty for us, so that God can forgive us without saying it didn't matter. Christ paid the penalty so that God is perfectly just now to say, 'Well the penalty's been paid. Now you can be forgiven and accepted.' That's the glorious message of the gospel, through Jesus Christ.

Peace

You notice it also says here, 'he came and preached peace to [us]' (2:17). First of all, peace with God. How does anybody get peace with God? Well the Bible puts it this way:

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom 5:1)

It's a marvellously real thing to come and think about God, realize we have been sinners and yet, through Christ, we can be forgiven and we can be at peace with God and have access to the Father. So yes, through Christ, we have peace with God; and through Christ we have access into the divine presence already here on earth. We can come in heart into the very presence of God, and stand before God and know ourselves welcome. And finally, we can be utterly sure that when we die, because we have trusted Christ, we are welcomed in God's heaven. To be absent from the body is to be present with God in his heaven, and we can be absolutely sure of it.

No difference

But the other thing we should notice about this passage is as follows. When the Jews had lived years in their religion and they looked out on the Gentiles who were all worshipping a myriad different gods, the Jews felt very superior to Gentiles; and when the Gentiles were behaving in ways that were morally unclean, the Jews despised Gentiles, and then they got it into their heads that they were so much better than Gentiles. The actual fact was that, though God had chosen them to be his witnesses in the earth to the one true God, they too had broken God's law. They too had come short. Only they didn't always realize that and they felt superior to Gentiles and they became very hostile to them, enemies indeed. How was God going to deal with that?

Breaking down the barrier of hostility

Well that passage we read earlier is telling us how God is breaking down that hostility between Jew and Gentile. When Jews come to realize that, in spite of all their favoured position and their attempts to keep God's law, they have sinned, but through Christ they can be forgiven and restored and have peace with God; and then they find that God offers the same to us Gentiles, that we too can be forgiven through Christ and welcomed by God, so that we have the same Saviour and that same Saviour has made peace with God for the Jew and peace with God for the Gentile. That does away with enmity between Jew and Gentile. You say, 'But aren't the Jews fighting the Palestinians and so forth in Israel at this present time? What are you talking about, about Jews being at peace?' But, wait a minute. I'm not talking about politics.

Some years ago I was in Nazareth where there was a little church formed largely of Arabs who had found Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour, so I joined them one Sunday and I got to know them. They had been saved through Christ, through his death on Calvary, through his resurrection; they had found peace and pardon with God, through the Jewish Messiah, Jesus. If you've been to Nazareth, the city is overlooked by a very big hill called Nazareth Illit which is where most of the Jews lived, while the Arabs lived down in the valley. So when I got a quiet moment, I asked the leading Arab, a Christian man, 'How do the Israelis treat you?'; for I knew that these Arabs had lost a lot of their property – the Israelis had just taken it away, so they'd suffered loss under the Israelis. His reply startled me, 'They treat us well, because we Arab Christians teach Arabs to love Jews.'

I saw it with my own two eyes in that church in Nazareth. There were Arab believers who had found Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour, sitting down at the little ceremony to remember the Lord Jesus; and with them there were converted Israelis, who had found Jesus as their Saviour, and the hostility was gone. Peace not only with God, but peace with one another. If you owe your salvation to Jesus Christ and you say to me, 'Well now, my whole hope for forgiveness, my peace with God, my surety that when I die I shall go to God's heaven, my whole salvation depends on Jesus Christ, who loved me and gave himself for me,' I shall say, 'That's marvellous. I'm an Englishman you know, and you're Irish. But my peace is altogether through Christ. He loved me and gave himself for me. He loved you as well and gave himself for you. Well how can I be hostile to you then?' And the peace that Christ gives, not only gives us peace with God but peace with one another.

Let an old man tell you another story. I went to Greece some years ago and I felt a little bit nervous, because the Greeks at that stage did not like the English. There were all kinds of protests around and I wondered what would become of this poor Englishman among these Greeks. Well eventually, I found a dear Greek in Crete. He'd been saved by Christ and he used to go round preaching. He'd been in prison four times for preaching the gospel of Christ in Greece. One Sunday he asked if I would like to come up to his birthplace where some Christians had a small church. He offered to take me on his machine, which I accepted, suspecting nothing. His machine turned out to be a moped, and here was me in my Sunday best, blue suit and tie, on the back of a moped. The first bit of the road was on tarmac, but that soon gave out. Then it was a matter of avoiding the potholes, but simultaneously, if you could, avoiding the rocks in the path.

We went up the mountain to a little village and we arrived at a little church building made of concrete, so it was a very plain affair. Some older men were sitting outside it before the service began, and they were Cretans. They wore funny trousers with a sort of big tail coming out of the seat of the trousers. (I don't know why they had that, I never did like to ask!) And they had a band round their middle with a *machairi* in it. That was a dagger of course. Well normal Cretans did: these chaps hadn't. So they looked at this strange apparition that had come in what was once a navy suit and was now more the colour of the dust of the ground! They looked at me and I decided to greet them with that lovely verse, John 3:16, in the modern Greek translation. They flung their arms round my neck, English though I was, and invited me to their homes. Marvellous example of our oneness in Christ.

I repeat; if you have been saved, have come to see that Jesus Christ is God's son and that he loved you and gave himself for you, so that you might be forgiven, and that through him you have access to God and can call God your Father and be certain of a place in his home, and daily have access to him in prayer, and you owe everything to Christ, well, I do too. I don't care what your politics are, but how can we be hostile when Christ loved us both and has united us to himself?

Let me tell you one more story about that Greek place. There I was introduced into one of their rooms and they made a special meal for us in this house. So the Greek preacher and myself were sat at a table while all the others stood around and watched these two folks eat the meal. As we ate, they told me the story of one of the men present on that occasion. They said his wife became a believer in Christ. He was so angry that he was going to kill her. Cretan men in those days wore the *machairi*, and they didn't wear it for nothing. They found it easy to knife people they didn't like, and he was going to kill his wife. But he took ill and was taken down to Heraklion, to the big city, and put in hospital; and the Christians in Heraklion visited him and took him gifts and helped him with their kindness, for Christ's sake. And the kindness of those believers brought that dear man to repentance and faith in Christ. There he sat in the room with the woman that he was intending to murder, one with the believers, because he too had found Christ as Saviour. It is God's purpose to unify the coming age in Christ, but more of that on another occasion.

Summary

What has God been doing in history? To sum it up, what I've been arguing is that, originally, all of mankind knew and worshipped the one true God. Religion has not evolved: all men started there. Alas, many people didn't like to retain the knowledge of the one true God in their minds, so they banished him from their thinking. But then of course they saw that they themselves didn't control the universe, they didn't make it, and so they began to invent other gods, thousands of gods—deifying the forces of nature and the stars, sun, moon; and deifying sex or money, putting all their trust in the goddess of chance. All round this world thousands of folks do it still, worshipping many different gods.

So God raised up a protest against it in the person of Abraham and made himself known to Abraham and raised a nation to witness to the one true God, as against all the idolatry in the surrounding nations. And they themselves were far from perfect, for they kept slipping back into idolatry and had to be pulled back to the worship of the one true God. It is the fact

that God, having spent centuries doing it, when Jesus Christ came on earth to the temple at Jerusalem, there were no idols in that temple. No idols at all. They worshipped the one true God.

And there came the time when God, as soon as he could, sent his Son so that we might understand what this true and living God is like. Jesus is his Son, God manifest in flesh, and God sent him to die for us that we might be forgiven, that we might be at peace with God through Jesus Christ, our Lord. So Christ died for us at Calvary and rose again, and has made a way for us into the very presence of God, so that we can be forgiven and at peace with God and utterly certain that we shall be in God's heaven later on. But the other result of it has been that when people of whatever nationality find God through Jesus Christ, and peace with God, it unites them together and puts an end to their enmity and hostility.

The Unity of the Body of Christ

So we turn this afternoon to the next section of Paul's letter to the believers at Ephesus. We found that the previous verses were predominately about the ability of Christ to unite people who previously were enemies, whether on national and political grounds or on religious grounds. In the particular example that Paul quotes, there is hostility between Jews and Gentiles. The Jews, because they would not join in a lot of the things that were culturally acceptable to the Romans, got themselves very much disliked by the Romans, and by Greeks as well. It is true also that many Jews by that time didn't like Christians either. And as we noticed this morning, what Paul is explaining is the ability of Christ to destroy those kind of hostilities and bring people together in peace.

The way Christ does it is by the great salvation he offers. His death on the cross, the shedding of his blood that our sins might be put away, has brought us first peace with God and then, having peace with God, we can have peace with all those who have found Christ as their personal Saviour, whatever their nationality or background. If you owe your salvation, your eternal life, your hope of heaven, to Jesus Christ and you can say, 'The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me, and he is all my hope,' well I say that too. That is true of me as well. How then could I possibly be hostile to you, or you to me? And Paul of course, the great preacher, going round the Roman Empire preaching the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, had evidence galore how the age-old bitterness between Jew and Gentile was overcome by those who found in Christ their personal Saviour, to bring them first of all peace with God and then peace with all fellow Christians. We shall find this afternoon, when we come to the fourth chapter of Paul's letter, that it likewise is about the topic of unity.

The unity of the Body of Christ is a very big subject and we shall have to pay some attention to it in a moment—unity achieved through the formation of the Body of Christ. Unity therefore that is founded on the cross of Christ, on the redemption that he brings us. Forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God and peace with God, through his death at Calvary. Unity between Jew and Gentile who have found the Saviour because, finding the Saviour, they find they have access in one Spirit to the Father. And if you're coming to the Father through Jesus Christ and here am I coming alongside you to the Father through Jesus Christ, we might collide, mightn't we? We might even join up. We might put our arms round one another! So then we're going to think later this afternoon about unity in the Body of Christ, that great new, spectacular thing that was brought about on the day of Pentecost by the coming of the Holy Spirit.

A gift from God

Before we do that, however, I would like to take you to prison. We're going to a Roman prison, and we're going to visit the Apostle Paul. He reminds us of this fact in chapter 3, 'For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles' (v. 1). He was at that moment in prison for the sake of the gospel. He was a prisoner on behalf of us Gentiles because, as a Jew, he had taken the gospel to Gentiles. He was the great apostle to the Gentiles, just as Peter was the apostle to the Jews. He got a lot of persecution from unconverted Jews, and very often from pagan Gentiles. Now he had been arrested by the Roman authorities and was imprisoned in Rome. He'd gone there to defend the gospel before the highest authority in the world in those days, the Emperor Nero Caesar.

So we're going to visit him in prison this afternoon. How shall we find him, do you think? You say, 'Down in the dumps, I should think, being in prison.' No, you don't. If it weren't for his chain, he'd be skipping around the prison. He's in a great state of happiness and excitement, and he tells us why he is so excited.

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. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. (3:2-6)

That is the message which has got hold of him, that not just Jews but the whole world of Gentiles can be saved through Jesus Christ and united with Jewish believers in the one great body of Christ. But then the thing that's got him really excited is that he has a free gift. Now don't look at your Bible just yet. Paul is going to tell us he has a free gift. I'm asking you to think what it is. Have you got a free gift, a free gift from God? You say, 'Yes, of course I have. I read about it in Romans 6:23, "the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" — the free, unconditional gift of God.'

It's marvellous to have a gift like that, isn't it? So now, what is this free gift that's got Paul dancing around his prison cell? You say it must be eternal life, for as believers we've all got this gift of eternal life through faith in Christ. 'Yes, I have it too,' says Paul, 'but I've got another free gift. Absolutely free. It's got me really excited.' And Paul tells us what it is: just have a look at it now if you care to.

Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. (3:7-8)

Do you see why the man is so tremendously excited? He's been given a gift, and it's about unsearchable riches. But the thing that's got Paul really excited is that it's not merely available to his Jewish compatriots. It's to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. And when he says he's the least of all the saints, he's not exaggerating. That's how he really felt, because he had persecuted believers in his early days, sending them to prison and to

death some of them, and he stood by while they were tortured to try to get them to blaspheme the Saviour. He never forgot it. He felt himself to be the least of all the saints and the chief of all the sinners. To think that he had been given the gift that he never did deserve, and it was a free gift given to him to preach to the Gentiles the gospel of these unsearchable riches. He couldn't get over it and he never did until the day he died.

Does that sound to you a bit strange? Suppose some great inventor came to you and said, 'I don't know why I'm offering this to you, but I am. We have discovered an infallible cure for cancer. Anybody who takes this tablet is immediately cured of cancer and it has been proved in our laboratories. We're offering you to be the one to go and tell everybody round the world.' Would you say that you couldn't be bothered to go and tell other people? I think some of you would say, 'What, me have the honour and the joy and the privilege of going to these starving people in Africa or somewhere else, and saving their lives and saving hundreds of thousands of people, and I'm the one to go and tell them?' Yes, I think you might grasp it. I would.

Spreading the good news

If you are a believer, you've been given a gift far greater than that. None of us have as great a gift as the Apostle Paul had, but we too are allowed to go and tell the world of the unsearchable riches of Christ. Gentiles of whatever nationality or kind or sort or background or education can have the free gift of forgiveness, peace with God, access to the Father and a certain place in heaven. You have the right to go and tell them, so how do you assess it? We're surely not content to be saved ourselves and not bothered about others? The grace of Christ is of such kind that when you really get it, you'll want to go and tell others.

There's a story told in the Old Testament, in the book of Kings (see 2 Kgs 7). There was a city called Samaria. It belonged to Israel but it was being besieged by the Syrians. The siege was terrible: no one could come in or go out, and they were so short of food in the capital that some of them were resorting to cannibalism. Now there were four lepers outside the city—because being lepers in those days meant they weren't allowed inside the city. There they sat until one of them suddenly said to the others, 'If we stay here, we're going to die anyway, so why do we not go over to the Syrian army. The worst they can do is to kill us, but why don't we go and see if they'll have mercy on us and give us some food?' So they hiked off to the Syrian lines, expecting that the Syrians would see them coming. Well they didn't actually, because when they got to the Syrian camp, there was nobody there. God had caused the Syrian army to panic. They heard what they thought was the sound of chariots, a thousand coming at them, and they panicked and fled, and the tents were all empty.

And these beggars came to these tents and there was all the stuff and the silver and the pay of the soldiers and the food. They crammed their pockets full of everything they could take and stuffed their mouths until their stomachs were fit to burst. Until one of them said, 'We mustn't carry on like this. Back in Samaria, our friends are dying. If we just content ourselves staying here and filling our pockets and eating all the food, surely some evil will fall upon us. We must go and tell the news to the town that the siege is broken and there is a food supply.'

My Christian fellow believers, we have come into unsearchable riches. We mustn't hold our peace. We have a duty and a responsibility—according to each one's gift, and our gifts all

vary—to help towards the spreading of the wonderful news of the gospel to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

Paul's prayer

But then Paul realizes that this is very difficult sometimes for even Christians to take in. Loving those that once were our enemies, united Jew and Arab, both converted, sitting down at the Lord's Supper on a Sunday; is it possible? So Paul stops what he was going to say and tells them what he prays for his fellow believers. Just let's look at his prayer.

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (3:14–19)

He says he bows his knees 'before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named'. The whole idea of fatherhood and family derives from God. It is not the other way around. It isn't merely that we have had fathers and mothers and know what it is to live in a family, and then we think that that might be a good title and metaphor to use of God. Perhaps God is also a bit like a father. No, it's the other way round. God invented fatherhood. He is the Father and when it comes to human fatherhood and motherhood, it was God who invented them: they are a pale shadow of God's fatherhood.

And Paul prays, 'that according to the riches of his glory [not merely his grace] he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being'. Now I ask you to notice exactly what Paul is praying for. He's not praying that the Holy Spirit may be given to these believers. He has told us in chapter 1 that all believers were sealed with the Holy Spirit upon their believing in Christ and receiving him and being given forgiveness in Christ. Upon believing, God seals us with his Holy Spirit and marks us out as his property and thereby grants us security. We have the Holy Spirit. So what Paul is praying for here is the work of the Holy Spirit within us, for the Holy Spirit is given to us for all sorts of reasons and one of the reasons is to work in us certain states that we need to develop.

We need therefore to be strengthened by the Holy Spirit, strengthened with power in our inner being. What for? 'That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.' Christ is in every believer, but then he seeks access to our heart, to the deep levels of our personalities. That is an ongoing work which is fostered in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. He strengthens our hearts so that Christ may dwell in them, take up his residence in every part thereof. We need the power of the Holy Spirit for that to be realized. It's an ongoing, developing thing in life.

When we come to the Saviour, we're forgiven, but people bring all sorts of psychological memories. Take fatherhood, for instance. I had a friend in Scotland, in Glasgow, who was a prison visitor in Barlinnie jail. He also used to go to the places for unwanted and battered children and have a Sunday school with them. He told me that as he went into the place once,

there was a nurse with a child of about nine years old, and when the child saw him, he shrieked and the nurse said, 'Oh, please, sir. Would you mind going out while I pacify the child?' So he went out and when he came back, the child was now calm and the nurse asked the child to tell my friend his story and the little boy said to him, 'My father always burns me.' The father used to heat an iron poker in the fire red hot and beat the child with it. That's what the child would understand by the term 'father'. Now we might not have those hideous wounds necessarily in our memory box, but we have all sorts of conditions and complexes within our hearts. It's the gracious work of the Holy Spirit to spread the love of God in our hearts, so that we might be absolutely certain, whatever we feel, that God is for us, for he gave his Son for us while we were still his enemies, while we were still sinners. He will certainly not throw us out now, whatever we feel.

Rooted and grounded in love

Then the Holy Spirit's work here is to strengthen our work, our hearts, so that we might know the conscious indwelling of the Lord Jesus so that we are 'rooted and grounded in love'. That again is a lifetime's process, but that is God's ideal, to have us rooted and grounded in love so that we may have strength. Strength to do what? 'To comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ'. Do you notice the emphasis? To come to the position where we think not merely of ourselves and our personal salvation, but the love that binds us together with all the saints in every nation. Well that love needs to be quite strong, doesn't it? And to know what is the height and length and breadth and depth of God's love to us and, as we enjoy it, that we might have the same love towards our fellow believers, 'and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God'.

That is not a one-off experience. This is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. It will take a lifetime. We shall never be able to say, 'I have arrived and don't need any more.' We need to keep praying this prayer and also the first one in chapter 1 of Ephesians—the prayer that God would cause us to know the hope to which we have been called, and to understand more of the riches of God's glorious inheritance in the saints (1:18).

Our value to God

I don't know what kind of a concept you have of yourself as a believer. Perhaps you'll say with Paul, 'I'm the worst of all sinners.' Well I'll grant you that for the moment. But I can tell you how God looks at you. He thinks of his riches, his wealth in having you as a believer in his dear Son. Why is that riches to him? Well it cost him a lot to get you. It cost him the death of Christ to get your heart's affection and loyalty to the Lord Jesus and peace with God. God thinks you are of infinite value to him. We shall need our eyes open to see what are the riches of God's inheritance in the saints, and to know the immeasurable greatness of his power and energy and dynamite towards us, that power which raised Christ from the dead (1:19–20).

That power which raised Christ from the dead is rippling to us too still. We're told by the scientists that our universe began with a big bang. That is the current theory and the very clever scientists of about thirty years ago did a host of experiments and discovered that the ripples of radiation from that big bang can still be identified and measured now, after all those years and centuries. But there was a bigger bang, not one that was heard, but a bigger event

when God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. The power involved in that great action was beyond computation. That power is still rippling towards us who believe and is available, as we learn to make use of it, so that we may live to fulfil the purposes God has for us in our individual lives.

And Paul closes his prayer with these words:

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen. (3:20–21)

These are big things, and if you say to me that they seem too good to be true and more glorious than we can grasp, there are some days I find it difficult to grasp the wonder of it too. We do seriously need the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts to make these things real to us. It is as those become real to us that we shall find ourselves valuing our fellow believers more and more because that same love comes to them as well and is the secret of enjoying union with them.

The Body of Christ

But now in chapter 4, we are once more brought to this matter of the unity of the Body of Christ. Paul says,

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (vv. 1–6)

We are encouraged to be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is after all only one Spirit: don't go and invent others. Let me repeat that. There's only one Holy Spirit: don't meddle with other spirits. There is only one Body of Christ; don't behave as if there were two or three or four, or a multitude. There is one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

You'll have to excuse me sometimes being critical, but I do think it's a pity when we Christians advertise to the world our differences. I sometimes look at church noticeboards (it's a private occupation with me!) and I say to myself, 'If a man came from Mars' (I don't know if there are any men on Mars and if they came here, whether they could read English!), and looked at our noticeboards, he'd see all sorts of terms that emphasize our differences, whether on points of doctrine or organization or church methods. Alas, sometimes the last name he would see on it is the name of Christ. Don't you think that's a pity? Why should we Christians advertise to the world these kinds of differences? Notice that we're not asked to *produce* the

unity, but to *maintain* it. There is only one Body, and whatever we do, there's still only one Body. But, says Paul, we should be eager to maintain it, and behave like it.

One Body, different gifts

In that Body, he now explains, there are members in the Body and they all have different gifts (v. 11). There are teachers, apostles, prophets, evangelists and shepherds, and a good many more besides—many different gifts in the Body of Christ, but only one Body. How do we get into the Body of Christ? Paul doesn't actually tell us here, but I'm going to ask his permission to quote what he says in another part of Scripture, and that is in a letter to the Corinthians. If you want to check up on me, as you surely ought to, you can take the reference now: it's 1 Corinthians 12. First of all, it starts off with the human body by way of analogy and illustration. It says that just as the human body has many members, it's still only one body. So what keeps the thing together? What keeps the members of the body—fingers and toes and ears and things—on the body and in the body?

The man over there says 'the blood'. That's a jolly good answer. If the blood stopped flowing, the thing would go gangrene and members fall off. Anything else? 'Air', yes. Did you hear that? For my body to hang together, two things must be true and true both at the same time. You can't have one without the other. For my body to hang together, I must be in the air and the air must be in me. Let's have an experiment. I'm in the air at the present moment, and you come along and put a little leather strap round my neck and tie it tight so I can't breathe. I'm still in the air, but the air isn't in me, and we all know what would happen then—I'd die and start to disintegrate. It's no good being in the air if the air isn't in you. But then the other condition is true. I may have the air inside me, but if I'm no longer in the air, then I die as well.

Early this year they took me to NASA's place in America, where they launch the rockets out into space. Suppose they said to me, 'Gooding, we know you would like a ride in space, but we have no room inside so we're going to strap you on the outside. Just take a deep breath because you're going out into space and there's no air out there. Well I would have the breath, the air, in me, but out there I wouldn't be in the air. What would happen now? You say, 'You'd go "pop".' Yes, for this body and the members to hang together, I must have, and must have simultaneously, the air in me and I must be in the air.

How is the Body formed?

What puts us as members in the Body of Christ and keeps us there? In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul explains how this one Body with its many members is formed.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and were all made to drink of one Spirit. (vv. 12–13)

Did you notice the two operations, not just one? We were baptized in the Spirit, and we were made to drink of the Spirit. Two operations; so why has there to be two?

Well, let's remember what it means to be baptized in the Spirit. Christ helped us to understand it by making a contrast between himself and John the Baptist. John the Baptist baptized people in water, so if you came to John the Baptist to be baptized, he got hold of you

and put you in the water. But John the Baptist himself said 'I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me . . . will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire' (Matt 3:11). And after his resurrection our Lord reminded the apostles of what John said, 'for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit' (Acts 1:5).

It is the risen Lord who—when we come to him and accept him and are forgiven and reconciled to God—takes us and baptizes us, not in water like John did, but in the Holy Spirit. When John baptized people in water, he put them in the water. When Christ baptizes somebody in the Spirit, Christ puts them in the Holy Spirit. And secondly, you were made to drink of one Spirit. Take my finger: that will do for the rest of me. If you baptize my finger in this water, it goes into the water. If I'm made to drink the water, where does the water go now? It goes into me.

The Body of Christ is formed by those two processes. Christ puts us in the Holy Spirit and he causes us to drink of the Holy Spirit—the two things are necessary, like the air in me and me in the air. And both must happen simultaneously. You can't have one and then wait for the other. Both have got to be at once, otherwise we're not alive spiritually, and we're not in the Body of Christ. But this is not something we do to ourselves. It's not something we work up. It is the gift (not the gifts!) of the Holy Spirit that Christ gives us. So when we trust the Saviour, as Ephesians expresses it, we are sealed with that promised Holy Spirit, God's mark that we now belong to him. And the Holy Spirit is given to us as the guarantee, the part-payment, of our eventual inheritance. And he is our way into the Body of Christ, as Christ puts us in the Spirit and puts the Spirit into us, and thereby the Body of Christ is formed.

Features of the Body of Christ

When the Body of Christ is formed, however, Ephesians reminds us that it is only one body, but it has different gifts, like a human body has different gifts—hands, feet, ears and everything else—so the Body of Christ has different gifts.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (4:11–16)

These are tremendous words and worth a year or two to ponder their significance, but let us just take a few moments to grasp their essential points. God is forming the Body of Christ. Now this is a colossal notion. We like to think that Christians nowadays are the Body of Christ and so they are, but it's not just a temporary thing for this life. Paul reminds us that Christ is preeminent above all thrones, dominions, rulers or authorities in this whole universe (1:20–21) and, to use the terms of Ephesians, once we are saved we are united with Christ and, in

God's idea, we are seated with Christ in heavenly places (2:6). We're joined to him. That is our position.

Now for the purposes of running the great ages to come, I can't tell you what schemes God has on in the future. When this earth is done and the heavens are done, there is going to be a new earth and new heavens. I'm waiting expectantly to see the fun and games of all that God will yet do in his good pleasure: God is not hard up for ideas! But as for running it, it's not going to be subject to angels—this present world is, to some extent, subject to angels, so Hebrews 2 tells us. So how will Christ run that new world? He will run it through his Body. The genius of the idea is this. Angels, even Michael the archangel, are but creatures of God: God is not going to be content with that forever. God has a much more brilliant idea: it is going to be run by his Son. But his Son joined—as though a body to its head—with all true believers in Christ, redeemed, forgiven, given eternal life, having the Spirit of God, in touch and under the control, eventually completely, of the head of the Body. It's through that Body that God is going to organize and run all the great developments in the eternal ages yet to come.

The importance of growth

That's why it is exceedingly important that we learn, as believers, that we are already the Body of Christ, and how we become the Body of Christ, and then seek God's grace to find out what gift we have in that Body, so that we might learn to use that gift. There is one thing almost above all others that we need to do as believers in Christ, and this chapter tells us. The great thing is for us to grow; grow up to the stature of Christ. A big head with a tiny body would be a sad sight to see. The Body of Christ is asked to grow so that it will form for its head a suitable executive for him to use to govern the unending ages and all the purposes of God.

So the story is told here of Christ, who came from glory. He descended from heaven, he fought for us the fight against the principalities and powers, against Satan himself. He won the victory at Calvary. When he ascended to glory 'he led a host of captives' (4:8) and since then he's been winning over many former enemies, like Saul of Tarsus.

'You were against him once weren't you, Saul? You persecuted those Christians. You stood over them and saw them tortured, tried to make them blaspheme Christ. You were intent on obliterating the name of Jesus from the world.'

'I was,' he says, 'I'm the worst of all sinners, but Christ defeated me, brought me to my knees on the Damascus road and then, in his amazing grace, he put me in his service.'

I wouldn't have done that to Saul of Tarsus, would you? If I had been Christ, I would have said, 'Now, Paul, I've forgiven you, but get every idea of greatness out of your head. I'm going to keep you by the door of heaven in one of the draughty seats.' (I don't think there are any draughts in heaven, but you know what I mean!) 'You be content with that.' Christ didn't. He took this persecutor, whom by his grace and mercy he had defeated, pardoned him, forgave him and installed him as a leading apostle. How he worked thereafter and suffered for Christ.

Equipped to serve

In a sense, we owe our salvation as Gentiles to Paul. We've been reading his book this afternoon. He loved us Gentiles and he wrote for us Gentiles and he points out that, in the Body of Christ, we all have a gift. There are some great prominent gifts, like apostles and

pastors, and shepherds and teachers and evangelists, but the point of them, says Paul, is for developing every member in the Christian church for their service. That is a very important point to get across. It's not the public minister, teacher, evangelist in the church that counts. Their job is to get other folks converted, growing, so as all the members of the church develop their particular service. John Stott in one of his books says it won't do to have a parson perched on a pulpit. (Those aren't my words: they're his!) He's an Anglican minister and a very dear brother in the Lord. He says that when you read on a church noticeboard 'Minister Joe Bloggs', or whatever, that can't be right. It ought to read 'Ministers: all the members of the church'. That's what John Stott says and it's perfectly true. In the Body of Christ, there are prominent gifts, but we all have some gift, and the task of the prominent gifts is to encourage the rest of us, like me and you, to develop the gift that God has given us for the building up of the Body of Christ, so that the Body grows up to a full-grown body and we don't remain spiritual infants.

Growing in Christ

This is our third session today and I shall not prolong it. I will aim to do what I have been doing so far, simply to pick out some prominent ideas from the epistle as we go through, and I shall do that even more drastically on this occasion so that we might give ourselves time for the questions and then be able to get away in reasonable time, lest our relatives and friends think we've got lost and have abandoned them completely!

Structure of Ephesians

So now we come to what is the third and final section of this epistle. You will be aware that there are many different ways of dividing up the epistle. The most common way is to take the first three chapters and say that these deal with Christian doctrine, the principle and the theology of it, and then from chapter four to the end is the practical side of Christianity. That's a very good distinction and probably the correct one. For my own convenience, I have divided it into three sections so that I might appeal to its three major topics. We thought first about the purpose of God in creation in our first and second studies. That culminated in chapter 2 with God's free gift of salvation.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (2:8–9)

So salvation itself is not of works, but then Paul adds:

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (v. 10)

And we have considered that new creation in Christ, which breaks down old barriers and unites people who once were enemies and puts them together in something entirely new: the Body of Christ.

Now in the third section we are looking at how we are to grow and progress in the things of Christ.

God's workmanship

We don't earn salvation by our works. We don't earn it by our behaviour, neither before nor after we receive the Saviour. We don't earn God's salvation. It's a free gift. Eternal life is a free gift, but when God gives us the gift of salvation, of eternal life, union with Christ, God has in

mind that we should do good works, not to earn salvation, but because he has saved us. Indeed, it doesn't merely use the word 'saved' in 2:10. It says 'we are [God's] workmanship'. God produced us. I like the term 'salvation is not of works, but we ourselves are God's workmanship' and God is a mighty good workman: he's good at his job. We are God's workmanship, and then it goes further. It says 'created in Christ Jesus'. Now that is creation in a special sense. We learnt earlier that we're all creatures of God. That's how we come to be on this planet, but when a man or woman comes to Christ and receives Christ, God puts that person in Christ and they are forgiven, they have eternal life, they become a child of God. But it's also true, as is put in 2 Corinthians 5:17: 'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.'

That's a marvellous thing about being a believer. It's not just some idea we get in our heads. When we trust Christ as Saviour, God creates something in us that wasn't there before. We are born from above, to use another metaphor. Our Lord explained it to the learned biblical scholar who went by the name of Nicodemus. When he said to Nicodemus, 'You need to be born again,' Nicodemus didn't understand what it meant. 'Born again? How can a man be born? Can he enter his mother's womb and be born again?' (see John 3). Well he knew that was a stupid suggestion, but he was trying to suggest that the whole idea was stupid. So Christ illustrated it for him. He said, 'What is born of the flesh is flesh. What is born of the Spirit is spirit.' And the old Christians who tried to educate me, used a very humble illustration to explain that principle. They said, 'You could have a cabbage in your garden and you might decide to make it the best cabbage in the world (like the Welsh grow leeks and have a competition to decide who can grow the biggest leek!) and so you till the soil and feed the soil, and you disinfect it from flies and caterpillars and things, and it grows into a marvellous big dog.' You will immediately say, 'don't be daft; whatever you do to a cabbage, it remains a cabbage and it would never turn into a dog!' And says Christ, 'What is born of the flesh is flesh.' You can educate it, train it, make it religious—but it remains what it always was.

In the biblical sense, let Christ explain it: 'What is born of the Spirit is spirit.' That's the miracle that God does. There's born in a believer a spiritual life that wasn't there before. It's not a matter of feeling or emotion, but it is a real thing. We don't create it in ourselves. God does the creating: we are his workmanship. But in creating us in this spiritual sense and putting his Spirit within us, God has a programme. Ephesians 2:10 says we are 'created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.'

Notice the verb *walk*. Christian life is a progress. We come to the Saviour. To use his own illustration, he is the door to salvation: 'If anyone enters by me, he will be saved' (John 10:9). That's a very important thing and it's a matter of a moment. Never mind how long it takes you to get to the door, and some people are years getting there, but the process of being saved is like entering a door. One minute outside, the next minute inside. As a child, I was taught a simple chorus: 'One door and only one, but its sides are two. Inside and outside. On which side are you?' Thank God, I can say like the chorus, 'I'm on the inside.' It's a long time since I took that step 'from out to in'. It's a matter of a moment actually, and our Lord says, 'If anyone enters by me, he will be saved.'

As we receive Christ, God creates in us a new life. It's a spiritual life, it wasn't there before. And then God has already planned—but this time it's not a matter of a moment—he's planned

a whole series of good works. It's a pathway stretching out into eternity, and on beyond that as well, that we should walk. And walking is a process of course, so that when we trust the Saviour, God himself has a programme stretching out in front of us to walk in. By his Holy Spirit, he will take us by the hand to guide us along those works, as we are able to do it, from the time of our spiritual infancy to the time of our spiritual adulthood, leading us on for the good works that God has prepared for us, according to our strength at any one time that he has foreseen.

The Christian's walk

And here in this last section of the book, from 4:17 to the end, we have detailed the many good works that God has prepared that we should walk in them. Paul begins by drawing a contrast with the immoral way the world behaves.

But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus. (4:20–21)

Notice he doesn't say the truth 'as it is in Jesus' as though there were varieties of truth, and there's some truth in Jesus and some truth in Socrates or something. No, 'the truth is in Jesus'. He is the truth. You want to know the truth about the little daisy that's growing by the roadside? Well you can ask the botanist and he'll tell you what plant group it belongs to. You can ask the chemist and he'll tell you what is its chemistry. You can ask the physicist and he'll tell you all about the atoms that buzz around inside it. But then there's another big question. Where does it come from? Christ is the truth about that little daisy. He's the truth about this universe. He is the truth, and the nearer we come to him, the more we will be taught what the truth is in Jesus. For life to be real, to be valid, to be true, we have to come to Christ who is the truth, the author of our life, both physical and spiritual, and be taught by him.

put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (vv. 22–24)

You notice that word 'created' again—this new self, created in God, created by God, according to God, in righteousness and holiness and truth. This is what God has created in a believer. But now of course, we're not robots; we're still living people and we still have around us all the old habits we once had. Some of those old desires are very difficult to break. There's a question now of their being brought under new management. We sometimes see shops or pubs with a notice in the window saying 'under new management'. Well you could write that across me, 'under new management', because Christ comes to live in the believer.

We have a new life, but we're not robots and we have to do what is here called 'putting on the new self.' Like a dear wife who sees her husband going out to some public event and he's wearing his old trousers that he wore last year and the year before, and ten years ago. He likes his old trousers and the wife says, 'You can't go in those old trousers! You've got a new suit hanging up in the wardrobe. Put that on.' Sometimes as Christians, we walk around in

the old trousers—old habits, old ways, and we're told here that Christ wants us to put off the old self, our old lifestyle, and put on the new lifestyle, the new life, the new man, created by God. The potential is within us, but we have to be active in putting it on. That will mean cooperating with God and, of course, listening to his word. Some of you have asked questions about understanding the Scriptures. But we can be sure of this: Christ speaks to all his people and does what he promised to do. He manifests himself to his people. He said, 'I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you' (John 14:18).

A Bible study for two

The Gospel records tell us how our Lord appeared to his people after his resurrection, and we get examples of the kind of thing that Christ does. He came up to two people—a man and wife perhaps, but nobody knows—on the road back to Emmaus (see Luke 24:13–35) and they were pretty disillusioned, because they'd expected Christ was going to be a political liberator and he wasn't, and he had allowed himself to be crucified. They were walking back home, disillusioned, when this stranger drew near and he said, 'Why are you looking so sad?'

They said, 'Haven't you heard the news? How that this Jesus was mighty in deed and in word before God and we thought he was going to be a deliverer, but now he has been crucified and buried. And some of our women were at the tomb and they came back saying they'd seen visions of angels or something, but couldn't find the body. And anyway, what good is a deliverer if he couldn't stop himself being put to death?'

Do you know what Christ said to them? He said, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!' (v. 25).

And as they journeyed down the road, he called their attention to a whole succession of Bible Scriptures in the Old Testament that were prophecies of Christ, how the Old Testament proved that the Christ, when he came, would first have to suffer and only after suffering, would he enter into his glory. In other words, he took them through a rigorous Bible study and called them fools for not having believed what the prophets had written. It is true that sometimes we make the daily newspaper more important than our Bibles. We'd be stupid to do it.

A personal encounter with Mary

But then he appeared to Mary Magdalene in the garden (see John 20:11–18). The apostles had gone home: they'd seen the tomb was empty and only the grave clothes were there, and they had gone home to breakfast—nothing more to be seen, they thought. But Mary stayed. She couldn't bear the thought of losing her Saviour: he had saved her and cast out demons from her. As she stayed there, presently she saw a couple of angels who said, 'Why are you weeping?'

And then she heard a voice and she thought it was the gardener, and he said, 'Why are you crying, my dear lady? Whom are you seeking?'

She said, 'They've taken away my Lord and I don't know where they've put him. If you're the gardener and you know where they've put him, tell me and I'll take him away.'

He said, 'Mary,' and in the moment he pronounced her name, she knew it was him.

He didn't call her a fool. He didn't actually read her a big lesson from the Bible, but he did talk to her. He said, 'Mary, go and tell my brothers that I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' He spoke to her heart, made himself real to her as the risen Christ, satisfying the relational need. He was now the other side of the grave, but he was related to her, because his God was her God, his Father was her Father, and he made real in her life her personal relationship with Christ.

My point in telling these stories is to remind you that Christ has different ways of talking to his people and will talk to you according to your personality and your background. His word is very varied, and some people like the Epistles and some people like the Gospels and some like the Psalms. Do read it, because it is all inspired of God, and is God's word to us. It's more than something written on a page. It is inspired by God's Spirit and, as believers, we can come to the Lord and say, 'Lord, I'm about to read your word. You know I can't read much and I don't understand much but, Lord, speak to me.' For he calls his own sheep by name and will make himself real to his sheep. He speaks to us and leads us along this road of the good works.

Imitating Christ

So then, the passage will tell us about one of the things we can do—I hesitate to use the word 'technique' but you see what I mean—one of the things we're called upon to do, and we find it expressed like this, as a basic principle of Christian conduct:

Therefore 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. (5:1-2)

Now I don't know how the word *imitation* appeals to you. It can have a bad sense. You've got a ring that you thought was a diamond, but the jeweller cheated you and it isn't a diamond at all. It's only an imitation diamond and you're tempted to throw it away in disgust. You go into some houses and they've got a bookshelf full of books. You must think they're very learned, until you find out they're only imitation—they're just the spines of books pasted on a bit of wood! So imitation can be a bad thing.

But imitation can be a good thing and it's the good kind of imitation that God is talking about here. But to be a successful imitator, you have to be in on the secret. Have you watched a kitten? It's playing around the back garden and it's come across a piece of paper and it's chasing this bit of paper, hitting it with a paw here, hitting it with a paw there, and the wind blows it on and he's running after it. It's doing exactly what mamma does, you see, it's seen what mamma does. She goes after mice of course, but the kitten is imitating mum. It'll grow up and go after mice eventually, perhaps even rats, but it's all right for a kitten to imitate mum, because it's got kitten life in it. You see the boys on the football field, and they're doing it just like Beckham. Well to be honest, it's no use my trying to be like Beckham. I'd never make a footballer! Sometimes, I sit down at the piano and give myself all the graces of the concert performers, but that's nonsense because I haven't got their gift. If you're going to imitate a footballer, and if you've got the gift to do it, well imitate the best ones and you'll get like them. But if you haven't got the basic gift it's no use.

Scripture says we are to imitate Christ, but is that a realistic possibility? Yes, it is indeed, for if we have received Christ as Saviour and we've been born of God's Spirit, we have the Spirit of Christ. So then this is not a nonsense, a hopeless thing: we have the basics with which to imitate Christ. And first of all, Christ has given us a very big object lesson for us to follow. How do you imitate Christ? The illustration of how to do it is given in the verse we read:

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

He loved us. What did it amount to? Just words? No, not just words. He gave himself up for us, to bear our sin in his body on the tree. And this verse tells us that as our blessed Lord gave himself up for us and died, hung upon a cross, there came up from that scene a delightful perfume to God—a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Such a delightful attitude on the part of Christ, God's own dear Son, that he was prepared to give himself for sinners, the likes of us, that we might be saved and brought home to God. 'Imitate him,' says God's word. We can't suffer in order to obtain forgiveness for other people, but we can begin to learn to love and then live for them and give ourselves for them. In the way a mother does within the family. Not only does she give herself for the children that they might grow up and be successful in business or what-have-you, but she tries to love them as she has been loved by Christ, that they may themselves come eventually, attracted to the Saviour and be born of his Spirit. Imitate Christ, therefore: it is a serious practical possibility.

There follow a lot of individual exhortations. I may be allowed to pick out one more, though I am inexperienced in the realm I'm about to mention, seriously deficient and inexperienced. That comes in 5:25, where Christian husbands are told:

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, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. (vv. 25-27)

This is Christ's devotion to the church, because in the New Testament it is not a building of stone but a collection of people. And Christ loves the church. He gave himself for her at Calvary, to purchase her. She lives by his Spirit and, as a devoted husband of the church, he seeks constantly to free the church from spots and wrinkles, so that when at last he presents the great mass of the redeemed, in their countless thousands, before the presence of his Father with exceeding joy, he might present the church—that is the sum of the redeemed people—to himself, without spot or blemish. That's Christ's example. 'You husbands,' says Paul, 'imitate Christ in your love for your wives.'

Imitation, therefore, is not fanciful but a practical possibility. Yes, we have to learn it by stages, like the kitten learning from mamma how to hunt. If we have the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, it is a practical and reasonable possibility to seek God's help now to begin to imitate him.

The Christian's warfare

Then I ought to say something about the warfare that we shall discover as believers that comes in the last chapter.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. (6:10–13)

Notice what appears to be a rather negative objective. It doesn't say here, 'having done all to attack very successfully'. It says, 'that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.' We have a very wily enemy and the one thing he will try to do with you is to make you fall and, if he can, undermine your faith. If he can break your faith, he's done what he intends to do. He doesn't mind how successful you are in other areas if he can undermine your faith and cause you to fall. Don't think this is a limited objective, for as Paul says, we are not wrestling against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces and ultimately against Satan himself. He's very deceitful and wily.

You need therefore to take the whole armour of God to yourself that you might be able to stand and not fall. It does happen sometimes to people who profess faith in Christ. They fall because they weren't expecting such a tricky enemy.

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (1 Pet 5:8)

We need to be warned about his attack and not dismiss it. On the other hand, we are not to get too worried about it. The first thing we need to know about how to be able to stand is to

Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth. (6:14)

God's truth. Satan will go for that to start with. He is the father of lies and will try to get you to doubt God's truth. You can be utterly sure of your salvation: that's God's truth. It's important to get hold of it and fasten it around us. God says,

I give [my sheep] eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. (John 10:28)

Do get hold of God's truth.

I was once up in Peterhead, and after I'd preached during the week they asked if I'd like to go down to the harbour at twelve o'clock midnight on the Sunday and go out with them fishing. When I came back on the boat, they were all queued up on the harbour to see this Englishman who wasn't used to seafaring. They thought they'd find him yellow in the face and sea-sick because of sailing on a boat. I'm glad to report that they were disappointed! But I heard all sorts of stories from these fishermen in these boats and they said, 'What you need to do before

the storm comes and the sea gets choppy, is to know where you are on the boat, and know what to catch hold of, instinctively. If you don't and the boat takes a lurch, you'll be in the sea before you have a chance. You need to be able to get hold of it instinctively.' Oh, my dear friend, get some verses of God's word into your heart so you know in a day of temptation to get hold of them. That's very important to have a shield of faith and be girded about with God's truth. We can rely upon it in the fight.

Peter's experience

We shouldn't underestimate Satan's power. We have the story of Peter in the New Testament, both to warn us and encourage us (see Luke 22:31–34). At the Lord's Supper, our Lord said to Peter and to the apostles in general, 'Satan has asked permission'. The meaning of the Greek word is thus: 'He's asked and obtained permission to sift you, to try you and sift you, all twelve of you, as wheat, to find out who are genuine and who aren't.' Satan can't just attack anybody. He has to seek permission, like he had to seek permission to attack Job. And then our Lord turned to Peter and said to him, 'Peter, I have to tell you that the cock will not crow three times this night, until you have three times denied me.' Peter got upset, 'No, Lord, you've got that bit wrong.' Peter had that habit of telling the Lord he'd got things wrong and this he felt very strongly. 'No, Lord, maybe these others but not me, I would never deny you.'

Christ's prayer

And the Lord said, 'Oh, yes you will,' for our Lord had foreseen it; then he added, 'but I have prayed for you.' (And that's singular in Greek, referring specifically to Peter.) What did the Lord pray for? He prayed for Peter that his faith shouldn't fail. Do notice that. He didn't pray that his testimony wouldn't be destroyed. That was blown sky-high that night. He didn't pray that his courage wouldn't fail. That failed miserably. He prayed that, through it all, Peter's *faith* shouldn't fail. And let us remember that the one who prayed for Peter is alive in heaven and he prays for all his people. He intercedes for us that our faith should not fail.

So what happened? What Christ said to Peter was, 'Peter, I've prayed for you that your faith should not fail and when you have turned again,' (notice he did not say if ever you turn again, but *when* you turn again) 'strengthen your brothers' (see Luke 22:32). Well Peter went in feeling a big man, he went into the high priests' court and then a girl asked him, 'Oh, you're one of those Christians, aren't you?' And suddenly he fell into a panic of fear and denied the Lord. Then getting himself in a very big muddle, he denied the Lord three times. When he denied the third time, an old cockerel crew and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, and the Lord turned and looked at Peter (vv. 61–62).

Can you see what was happening? When our Lord said to Peter, 'You're going to deny me,' he wouldn't believe Christ and told Christ he'd got that wrong. When it all happened and he denied the Lord three times, then also the sign that Christ had given him—the cock crowing—happened, so Christ was right after all. Well now Peter believed him more than he'd done before, for he couldn't help believing him because now it had come true. Doubtless in the miserable days that followed, Peter remembered the next word our Lord said, 'I've prayed for you, Peter, that your faith shouldn't fail.' It didn't fail. He came through it believing

Christ more than he'd done before. 'Strengthen your brothers, Peter.' And Peter lived on and became the mighty man to comfort his brothers and encourage them by his preaching and in his Epistles.

Restoration

Christ has no favourites. Do remember it. When the attack comes, remember Christ and say to him, 'Lord, I can't stand this. I'm going under. Save me, Lord. You know all my doubts and fears. I can't cope with them, Lord. I don't know the answers to the problems in your word: please give me the evidence, Lord, save me.' That's what he does. He prays for us that our faith shouldn't fail. When we are turned around, we are to strengthen our brothers.

I could tell you stories in my little lifetime of men I've known who, being bright Christians in their early days, got away from the Lord, some of them for forty years, and then how Christ brought them back. I have seen God's providences that are almost miraculous in bringing back to himself those who have fallen. But Christ said, 'Satan has desired to have you that he might sift you as wheat.' Sifting wheat discerns between the genuine wheat and the tares. It's the seriousness of trial. 'Take to you the armour of God,' says Paul, 'that you may stand in the evil day and, having done all, to stand firm.' Yes, so get the shield of faith that you may be able to withstand the fiery darts of the evil one. Faith in God's word and his truth. Look to practical righteousness, be concerned with truthfulness.

Salvation's helmet

Take the helmet of salvation: you need to protect your thinking. The helmet of salvation—be sure you understand the business of salvation, not only your past salvation but your daily salvation and the salvation that is yet to come when the Lord comes and saves you and takes you to heaven. Put the helmet on your head.

Gospel shoes

And how about the feet? In ancient times in the Roman army, soldiers were issued with shoes because one of the dangers of the battlefield, by the time the battle had lasted an hour or so, what with all the blood shedding and the trampling of feet, the ground would get so colossally slippery. It's a dangerous thing to fall over. You wanted shoes that could grip and keep you standing. We need some shoes.

as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. (6:15)

In this world, we will find many attacks of the devil and his hosts and many attacks on our Christian gospel, as being an attempt to brainwash people, or as being a gospel that causes strife and religious contention and so forth. 'Make sure,' says Paul, 'that your feet are shod with the gospel of peace.' That is our Christian message. Peace with God. Peace with others, in so far as it is in our power. Peace, but telling the truth. We're not prepared to stand by and consort to a lie. Tell the truth about Christ: he is the only way to God. Says he, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me' (John 14:6). Stand for the truth, but be sure that your gospel is a gospel of peace.

Ephesians

Question & Answer Session

Thank you for this lovely sheaf of questions that you have put in, which shows me very clearly that you weren't actually asleep, not even if sometimes you shut your eyes! So thank you for that.

Why or how was blood seen as cleansing sin?

DWG: In other words, what does the Bible mean when it talks about the blood of Jesus Christ cleansing us from all sin, and when in the Old Testament was blood seen as cleansing? It is important for us to notice that neither in the Old Testament nor in the New, were people bathed in blood. They were sprinkled with blood. How does blood cleanse? What is the idea behind it? Well let me read a verse that talks about this particular thing.

For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. (Heb 9:13-14)

Let's pick up on that. What does the blood of Christ do? What does it cleanse? It cleanses your conscience. It's obviously not the literal blood of Christ somehow getting inside your head to your conscience. Rather it's this way round: when we have sinned and done some grievous sin, our conscience registers guilt before God. It does so if it's working properly. And when I have a guilty conscience, a question arises, 'How can I get rid of this guilty conscience?' No good just sweeping it under the carpet and saying it doesn't matter. Sin matters and if I've sinned, I have a guilty conscience. My conscience will not really be clear until my conscience has been cleansed from this guilt.

How does the blood of Christ cleanse my conscience? Well it's a metaphor for saying that when Christ died on the cross, the Bible says he bore our sins in his body on the tree, paid the penalty of our sins, so that when we repent and trust the Saviour, God can forgive us our sins and, to use a Bible term, justify us completely. God is righteous to do it because, in Christ, he has paid the penalty of the sin that we have committed and our conscience can be freed from guilt. That is how the blood of Christ cleanses our conscience.

Why does it have to be the blood of Christ? Because the blood of Christ is the symbol of his death. 'The wages of sin is death' (Rom 6:23). The law of God prescribed death for our breaking of his law. Christ paid the penalty by dying for us. The gospel is not just that Christ

lived, but that he died for our sins, according to the Scriptures; was buried and rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures. Blood cleanses our conscience therefore.

How does one know that God was in the inner temple?

DWG: How does one know God was in the inner temple if people were not allowed in? Was it just a presence of God? Well in one sense, yes, it was just a presence of God. If you had gone into the holiest of all, you wouldn't have seen God anyway. The presence of God in the tabernacle that Moses built, which the Jews used while they were travelling through the wilderness and for some centuries afterwards, or in the temple at Jerusalem, was symbolized by the cloud of glory that filled the temple. But no one ever saw God in it. No one can see God. So they knew about God's presence in the temple because of the glory of his presence in the Holy Place. And then they knew it, of course, because the Scripture says so.

Similarly in the New Testament, Christ says, 'For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them' (Matt 18:20). You say, 'How do you know he is?' Well we don't see him, but (1) we know he's there, because he's promised to be there and (2) when he speaks his word through Scripture, we know his voice. We sense he's speaking to us.

Do we need all this great knowledge to know God?

DWG: It depends on what you mean by 'great knowledge'. If you've done me a compliment of thinking that I've expounded to you great knowledge in this weekend, well thank you for the compliment. Some people would say it's very small but opinions differ. Does everybody need that great knowledge to be saved and get into heaven? No, of course not.

You'll remember the story of the dying thief, who was crucified next to Jesus (see Luke 23:39-43). In the final hours of his life on earth, as he hung on that cross, he came to repentance, realized that Jesus was innocent, realized that Jesus was the Son of God, realized that Jesus, though he died, would come again in his kingdom, repented and said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' And our Lord replied instantaneously, 'Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.' It didn't take a lot of knowledge, did it? Notice what Christ said to him. He didn't say, 'Try and do some better works.' He was hanging on a cross. He hadn't got a few hours more to do any works; he was nailed hand and foot anyway. It was repentance and faith in Christ. And Christ assured him, 'Today, you will be with me in Paradise.' You don't need a lot of knowledge to receive that assurance from God and from Christ.

This is what I feel very strongly: if at this moment you don't have the assurance that you are saved, that your name is written in heaven, and that if you died this moment you would be with Christ in heaven; well, you could have that assurance. You don't need a vast amount of knowledge. Christ says it. You could have it. The tragedy is so many people think they can't have it, but they're trying their very best by their good works to please God. But it doesn't come that way. Listen to Christ and that dying thief. In spite of all his crimes in the past, now he repents and puts his faith in the Saviour and the Lord says, 'Today you will be with me in Paradise.'

I meet folks who tell me that you can't know you're saved and going to heaven. That is so contrary to God's word that it makes me feel a bit angry — to keep people back from knowing for sure that God's word tells them they *can* know, if they put their faith in Christ. It seems to me a very serious injury to do to people. We *can* know. In one of his letters, the Apostle John writes 'I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life' (1 John 5:13). God wants us to know. Not vast knowledge and being able to cite the whole Bible off by heart, but he wants us to know this, to know the gift of God.

Do you remember the story how our Lord met the Samaritan woman at a well (John 4:7–42)? What a brilliant story. Our Lord went up to Samaria and sat on a well and there came out a woman to draw water. She was a Samaritan and he was a Jew; and such was the religious divide between Jews and Samaritans, they pretty well hated each other. The Jews had gone along and knocked down the temple of the Samaritans on Mount Gerizim. That didn't please the Samaritans, and the Samaritans went along and took a sack full of old dead men's bones and scattered them in the temple at Jerusalem. That didn't please the Jews. And the rabbis in Judaism taught that a Samaritan woman spreads uncleanness wherever she went. Fearful lie, of course.

So our Lord went and sat on a well in Samaria and there came this Samaritan woman to draw water, and our Lord said to her, 'Give me a drink.' She was so startled that a Jew should even talk to a Samaritan woman, she nearly fell down the well herself! 'How is it that you, a Jew, should ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan?' (Jews didn't have any dealings with Samaritans and wouldn't use the same cups as Samaritans.) Our Lord said to her, 'My dear, if you knew the gift of God and who it is that's speaking to you, you would ask of him and he would give you living water.' Christ says the same to us today. Do you know the gift of God, what it is that God is trying to give you, what Christ is trying to give you? He's trying to give you what here he described as living water — the gift of forgiveness, the gift of eternal life, the gift of the Spirit of God. Christ wants to give it to you. If only you knew the gift that he wanted to give you, you'd ask for it and ask for it today.

Do you thereafter need all the knowledge? Well no, in a sense you don't need all this great knowledge to get to heaven. There are in the Body of Christ some gifts that are teachers and teachers have to know a lot. If you're not a teacher, you don't have to know so much but do read the Bible as you can, in your way. And ask the Lord Jesus as you read it, to talk to you.

The new heavens and the new earth

We have several questions about the new heavens and the new earth. You may wonder what that's all about, but they're good questions to ask, because this old earth is temporary. We said that this morning. It's a fact that doesn't impinge very much on people, but this earth is temporary. In the days when you had a coal fire, it all blazed up; but if you left it, it burnt through and then it collapsed. The sun is a big fire, like an atomic furnace. It's putting out millions of tons of energy every second but, by definition, it will burn up and collapse and then it will explode as it collapses. In that moment, if not before, our tiny planet will be melted into nothing.

The world is temporary, but there's going to be new heavens and a new earth. That's what God says. It will not be the same as these heavens and this earth, but it will be a material earth and heavens. God doesn't tell us much about it, because we're not wired up just at the moment to understand it all—the physics and the chemistry of it. But God assures us there's going to be new heavens and a new earth; and we who know the Lord Jesus are going to reign with him and be used by him in the administration of the new heavens and new earth.

We will have bodies like the body of the Lord Jesus. When he was raised from the dead, he could have suddenly appeared in a room and then disappeared. He didn't have to open the door or make a hole in the roof to come through. He appeared and then he disappeared. He had a real body but it is what the Bible calls a spiritual body. Just like you can have, in our world, one engine which is a petrol engine and another engine which is a diesel engine and another which is an electric motor. The differences are the power that impels the motor and keeps it going. Christ's resurrection body is a spiritual body and he could and did ascend from Mount Olivet into heaven. So we have to prepare our minds for a different kind of world and, therefore, some of our thinking about it doesn't come up with very good answers, because we're not yet equipped ourselves to understand all the chemistry and physics of that new world.

What about procreation in the new earth?

DWG: 'In the eternal world, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels,' says our Lord (see Matt 22:30). It will no longer be necessary to perpetuate the race by physical procreation, because they who attain to that world have eternal life and will never die.

Is the new earth the same thing as heaven?

DWG: Well no, there are going to be two: new heavens and a new earth.

Developing our personal relationship with God

We can do the simple Christian basics, but how do we seriously develop our personal relationship with God?

DWG: A very good and practical question. 'We can do the simple Christian basics.' What, like loving one another perhaps? And that is absolutely basic, as Paul has reminded us. How do we develop our relationship with God? Well we use the means of grace to start with—that's very, very important. Our Lord Jesus knew what he was doing when, on the last night, he took bread and wine, gave it to his disciples and said, 'Take this and eat it and drink it.' You will notice he didn't say, 'Offer it.' He didn't say, 'Take this bread and wine and offer it to God.' He said, 'Take this bread and wine and eat it and drink it.'

'What for?'

'In memory of me.'

Why did he ask us to remember him in that form? He could have asked us to remember him by getting up, when we meet as Christians, and rehearsing all his miracles, and we should have remembered him as a miracle worker. Well he did miracles and they were important,

but he didn't ask us to do that. He could have asked us to read his Sermon on the Mount. That would remind us of his moral teaching, and he was an important moral teacher, of course. He didn't ask us to do that in remembrance of him.

What he asked us to do was to take bread, eat it, and to drink wine in remembrance that, at Calvary, he gave his body and his blood for us. We want to make progress in the spiritual life. 'Do what I say,' says Christ. 'Meet with your fellow Christians and remember me in the way I have told you to.' Why? Because that takes us back to Calvary, the mainspring of a Christian's devotion to Christ. Listen to Paul saying, 'the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal 2:20). So Christ brings us back constantly. We call it the means of grace, don't we, to remember him? I must remember him personally. He gave himself for me. He loved me and gave himself for me. Now if Christ gave himself for me and died for me, the Bible says then I belong to him. He's bought me. I'm not my own anyway. He bought me. 'If one died for all, then all died that they which live should no longer live to themselves, but to him who died and rose again for them'. Hence the mainspring of our devotion to Christ, constantly to be renewed, to remember him that he gave his body and blood for us and now lives, and we're his and we are his to serve him. And then, as we can, let his word be our guide.

You say, 'Do we need all that knowledge?' Well half a minute. These letters in the New Testament I've been reading from, they were written by apostles, for instance, and they were sent to churches. As you will see from the letters, a lot of the people in those churches were slaves, many of whom wouldn't have had much education. Some of them would have had, but many had little education. Those letters were written to them amongst the others. People in the church who could read got up and read the letters, and the teachers explained it to them, even to the slaves, so it's not all that difficult. For us in our day who are much better educated than the slaves in that day, it shouldn't be difficult to get a Bible or to meet as Christians, and to start to read it and study it, and let the teachers in the church teach us and help us to understand it. For every believer has the Spirit of God and God is able to communicate himself to each one, according to their particular abilities. So that is how we seriously develop our personal relationship with the Saviour, by using a means of grace, by attending a reading and preaching of his word, by personal prayer of course, and talking to the Saviour regularly and every day.

but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint. (Isa 40:31)

Will we know one another in heaven?

I know there is no marriage in heaven, but will I recognize my wife and you and various friends?

DWG: Now this is a vexed question. You would think it was a simple question but I have found in my experience in several countries that it's not as simple as it sounds, because some people hope when they get to heaven they won't remember their husband, and would be embarrassed to meet him if he's up there, for all sorts of reasons! So the question is posed to me very often in the terms, 'Will we know each other in heaven?'

Since I've lived here in Ireland for nearly fifty years, I've learnt the skill of answering one question by another! You say to me, 'Shall we know each other in heaven?' Well my reply is a question, 'Shall we know ourselves?' Shall we realize that we were Joe Smith or whatever, or Jean Patrick or something, when we were on earth, or shall we be absolutely new, completely not us at all? Well it seems obvious to me what the answer is there. Of course you will know yourself.

Some people take the verse where God says, 'I will remember their sin no more' (Jer 31:34) to mean that God so blots out our sins that he doesn't remember that we ever did them. That is not true, ladies and gentlemen. When the Bible says 'I will remember their sins no more' it's talking in the language of a law court. For a believer, God will never open the books and bring up the question of their sins and decide what punishment they must get. That will never happen. God has forgiven them: he's wiped out the debt. But God hasn't forgotten the fact we were sinners, nor shall we forget the fact that we were sinners either. We won't forget that for all eternity. As we hear the choirs of heaven saying, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, who redeemed us to God by his blood' (see Rev 5:9), we won't find ourselves saying, 'I wonder what on earth they're talking about.' Nor will God ever think, 'I wonder why my Son died on Calvary.' Of course not, we will remember that we did sin. It will enrich heaven. By his grace, God gave Christ, the Lamb of God, to die for us and bring us home to heaven.

In that same sense, we will recognize other believers. We will recognize the Lord. And says Paul, talking to some of his converts, 'you are my joy and crown' (see Phil 4:1). When Paul stands there in heaven and sees so-and-so from Ephesus, and a couple there from Colossi, he will say, 'I remember I preached to them and they got converted.' They will be his crown of rejoicing. How could that be if Paul didn't know who they were and couldn't remember preaching to them?

Can you explain what it means for us in reality to be in the Spirit?

DWG: In reality, to be in the Spirit, first of all we have to believe what Christ says. The thing that distinguished Christ from John the Baptist, well, let John the Baptist tell you.

I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I . . .
He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (Matt 3:11)

That is the unique function of Jesus Christ our Lord. No other prophet, not Moses himself, nor the Apostle John or anybody like that, could baptize you in the Holy Spirit. Only Christ could do that, for the Holy Spirit is not so much stuff like electricity, that you flick a switch and it comes on. The Holy Spirit is a divine person, and when the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, Peter pointed out to them that this is what this is. This is the explanation:

This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing . . . Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. (Acts 2:32-33, 36)

It's Christ who does it: he puts us in the Spirit. We are in the Spirit in Christ. And the famous verse to be read in this connection is found in Romans 8.

You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. (Rom 8:9)

You can't be a true believer without having the Holy Spirit and if the Spirit of God dwells in you, says Paul, you are in the Spirit. That satisfies me as the plain statement of holy Scripture. We have different spiritual gifts, but that's another matter. If the Holy Spirit is in us, we are in the Spirit. We have to learn to believe what God says. By faith we believe it and, if we do, we shall find it works. And if the Holy Spirit is within us we must be open to his leadings and not grieve him by our misbehaviour; and to submit our plans to the direction of the Holy Spirit in our daily life and in our evangelism.

But we start by believing what God has said, not trusting our emotions nor trying to work up our emotions, but by trusting what God has said. He has given us his Spirit and you heard it in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, that upon believing (that is what the Greek means) 'you . . . were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit' (1:13). God marked you by giving you the Spirit that you belonged to God, and then the Spirit acts as the down payment and the guarantee of our full and final salvation.

Concluding remarks

As I have been careful to sort these pages, I think that is all the questions you have asked and I thank you for them. I trust my attempt to answer them has been of some help. But of course you won't take it simply because I said so—you're wiser than that! I know that you will search the Scriptures daily to see whether these things are so.

God bless you, every one, and thank you for your company and the encouragement your presence has been to me.

About the Author

DAVID W. GOODING (1925-2019) was Professor of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. He taught the Bible internationally and lectured on both its authenticity and its relevance to philosophy, world religions and daily life. He published scholarly articles on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John, Acts, Hebrews, the New Testament's use of the Old Testament, and several books addressing arguments against the Bible and the Christian faith. His analysis of the Bible and our world continues to shape the thinking of scholars, teachers and students alike.