7 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. 8 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, 9 and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things,
1.1 If you are reading in the ESV, NRSV, or NIV, you will see that Paul was made a minister (or servant) “of this gospel” in Ephesians 3:7, though the Greek only uses the pronoun οὗ (hou), translated “whereof” or “of which” in the KJV and NASB, respectively, to point to the antecedent εὐαγγελίου (euangeliou), that is “gospel,” in 3:6, which is the second of four uses of the word in Ephesians. In 1:13, Paul uses the phrase τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς σωτηρίας ὑμῶν (to euangelion tēs sōtērias humón), almost ubiquitously translated as “the gospel of your salvation.” In 6:15, he uses τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τῆς εἰρήνης (tou euangeliou tēs eirēnēs)—“the gospel of peace.” And in the other two places, 3:5–6 and 6:19, he connects it to μυστηρίῳ/μυστήριον (mystēriō/mustérion) or “mystery,” a notion we already went over in weeks 5, 8, 12, and 15 in the first study guide.

Looking first at 1:13, something we did not cover in week 7 is the second person plural ὑμῶν, referring to “your salvation.” Paul is not writing of the salvation of one person or the salvations of many. He makes it something collective, rather than individual. Σωτηρία (sōtēria), the word from which we derive soteriology, or the theology of salvation, is used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament that preceded the time of Christ, to translate the Hebrew words יְשָׁע (yēsha’), ישׁעָה (yeshû’āh), תֶשֶׁע (teshû’āh), and פֶלֶטָה (pelēṭâh), among others, with ranges of meaning including deliverance, salvation, rescue, safety, welfare, prosperity, victory, and escape. With the exception of פֶלֶטָה, these words are used in the Psalms far more than any other OT book. Look at Ps. 3:2,8; 18:2; 37:39; 51:14; 60:11; 69:13; 71:15; 74:12; 89:26; 108:12; 132:16; and 149:4 and make note of the words found in the range of meaning a few lines above. Is salvation spiritual? Is it physical? Is it individual? Is it corporate? As Paul was writing to both Greek-speaking Jewish and Gentile Christians in Asia Minor, how might the Jewish Christians specifically, who had the Septuagint as their Scriptures long before Christ’s incarnation, have understood “the gospel of your (plural) salvation”? 
1.2 Now consider “the gospel of peace” in Eph. 6:15. Εἰρήνη (eirēnē), “peace,” is used in the Septuagint to translate בַּטֶּ֫ב (betach), ψακ (shaqat), and every modern Gentile Christian’s favorite Hebrew tattoo, שָלוֹם (shalom), among others less frequently used. These words have a range of meaning including refuge, safety, security, welfare, prosperity, health, tranquility, peace, completeness, and wholeness (the latter three are especially connected to שָלוֹם). Continuing in the Psalms, look at 4:8 (where most translations use “peace” for שָלוֹם and “safety” for בַּטֶּ֫ב) and then look at Psalm 122:6, 1 Samuel 1:17, Isaiah 39:8, Zechariah 8:12, Malachi 2:6, which use שָלוֹם, and then also look at Is. 14:30 and Ezekiel 38:8, which both use בַּטֶּ֫ב, and then 1 Chronicles 4:40 (ψακ). As one might suspect, εἰρήνη is most often used in the Septuagint to translate שָלוֹם. What does the range of meaning used in these contexts tell you about how first century Jewish Christians would hear “gospel of peace”? To be sure, there is only one gospel (Gal. 1:7). What can we then infer about this gospel of both salvation and peace about which Paul writes?
2. Getting back to the first verse for this week, 3:7, we see that Paul notes that he is a διάκονος (diakonos), a “minister” in the KJV, ESV, and NASB or a “servant” in the NASB and NIV, which is the same word from which we get “deacon.” Either translation functions well here, but servant, which was likely a common term for traveling missionaries in his day, better connects with the humble posture of “the very least of all the saints” in v. 8. And continuing in v. 8, we see this servant-like attitude in Paul as he doesn’t only receive “the gift of God’s grace” for his own benefit but also that he might “preach to the Gentiles…” This captures the spirit of being “blessed to be a blessing,” like in the call of Abram (Gen. 12:2). As discussed in week 12 when we studied 2:8–10, grace (χάρις—charis) is a gift (δωρεά—dōrea) of God; it is not something Paul earned as a result of works, and yet he was created “for good works…that (he) should walk in them.” With his vocation being servant of the gospel, he “walks in” the good works “God prepared beforehand” (2:10) by bringing the εὐαγγέλιον, the good news, specifically to the Gentiles (3:8). How then should we similarly receive and respond to “the gift of God’s grace” given to us?
FOR A DEEPER REFLECTION:

Meditation on Ephesians 3:8
by Charles Spurgeon

The apostle Paul felt it a great privilege to be allowed to preach the gospel. He did not look upon his calling as a drudgery, but he entered upon it with intense delight. Yet while Paul was thus thankful for his office, his success in it greatly humbled him. The fuller a vessel becomes, the deeper it sinks in the water. Idlers may indulge a fond conceit of their abilities, because they are untried; but the earnest worker soon learns his own weakness. If you seek humility, try hard work; if you would know your nothingness, attempt some great thing for Jesus. If you would feel how utterly powerless you are apart from the living God, attempt especially the great work of proclaiming the unsearchable riches of Christ, and you will know, as you never knew before, what a weak unworthy thing you are.

Although the apostle thus knew and confessed his weakness, he was never perplexed as to the subject of his ministry. From his first sermon to his last, Paul preached Christ, and nothing but Christ. He lifted up the cross, and extolled the Son of God who bled thereon. Follow his example in all your personal efforts to spread the glad tidings of salvation, and let “Christ and him crucified” be your ever recurring theme. The Christian should be like those lovely spring flowers which, when the sun is shining, open their golden cups, as if saying, “Fill us with thy beams!” but when the sun is hidden behind a cloud, they close their cups and droop their heads. So should the Christian feel the sweet influence of Jesus; Jesus must be his sun, and he must be the flower which yields itself to the Sun of Righteousness. Oh! to speak of Christ alone, this is the subject which is both “seed for the sower, and bread for the eater.” This is the live coal for the lip of the speaker, and the master-key to the heart of the hearer.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. This multifaceted gospel of both salvation and peace, in every sense of each word, is included within “the breadth and length and height and depth” (Eph. 3:18) of “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (3:8). In what ways have you seen evidence of God’s deliverance, salvation, rescue, safety, welfare, prosperity, victory, and escape, as well as his refuge, security, prosperity, health, tranquility, peace, completeness, and wholeness in your community, whether within the Church or beyond it on the streets of Flagstaff, Tucson, Phoenix, Peoria, Mesa, Gilbert, Tempe, Queen Creek, or Scottsdale? No need to list items under all sixteen categories, unless you want to, but start with three. And then list where God’s deliverance, rescue, wholeness, etc. is much needed. How can your Redemption Community, your family, or a group of friends be servants of and bear witness to (“bring light to”) the fullness of the gospel, in both word and deed, in your midst?

2. With a great deal of humility, fully aware of his wretched past as a persecutor of Christ’s Church—persecuting Christ himself, in fact (see Acts 9:4)—Paul refers to himself as “the very least of all the saints.” To be sure, he has great reason to boast (see Phil. 3:4–6), and yet he acknowledges that he should only boast “in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal. 6:14). As Redemption Church, we could rewrite Paul’s list of reasons to boast by inserting our stellar preaching, foster care and adoption ministry, children’s and students’ ministries, First Wednesdays, praise and worship, etc. (intentionally keeping the list short, though dozens of other areas should be acknowledged). We get national, and even international, recognition. It would be easy for us to see ourselves as “a big deal” in contemporary American evangelicalism. In light of that, pastors and staff certainly must strive to maintain humility, but even laypersons can get caught up in the pride of their local church or network of churches over against other bodies, forgetting that we are only one tiny part of one appendage of Christ’s global and historical body—we are not even a toenail. How might we, communally, while rejoining in what Christ has done through us, also maintain Paul’s humble posture? Get as specific as possible.
CHRIST’S
BELOVED
CHURCH
3so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. 1This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. 13So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.
1. In Ephesians 3:10, we come to a critical word Paul uses nine times in the epistle, ἐκκλησία (ekklēsia), translated as “church.” This is only his second usage—the first of which was in 1:22, though we didn’t spend much time on it in our ninth week of study. He will use it one other time in chapter 3, and then the remaining six instances are in chapter 5. Outside the Pauline corpus and beyond the gospels, ἐκκλησία is only found twice in Hebrews and once in James, but then nearly two dozen times in the Johannine literature, mostly in Revelation. Matthew is the only gospel writer to use the word, and he only does so three times. The very first instance, at least in our ordering of the New Testament canon, is in Matthew 16:18, where Jesus famously tells Peter “on this rock I will build my church...” And then the most prolific user of the term is Luke, who only slightly edges ahead of John, using twenty-four instances of ἐκκλησία in Acts. It perhaps should come as no surprise that New Testament ecclesiology, that is, the theology of the Church, is largely found as the early Church spreads throughout the Middle East, Asia, and Europe in the first century, post-Pentecost, as recorded in Acts, as well as with the eschatological notion of the Church as found throughout Revelation.

Long before ἐκκλησία became a trendy name for emergent and missional churches in the early 2000s, the noun came from the verb ἔκκλητος (ekklētōs), which combines ἐκ (ek), or “out from,” and καλέω (kaleō), or “to call,” so a literal translation of the verb is “to call out from,” and of the noun is “those who are called out from,” which can also be translated as “assembly,” “congregation,” or “gathering.” While the New Testament was written in Koine (or common) Greek, ἐκκλησία is found in Ancient/Classical Greek, such as in the writings of Herodotus, the fifth century BC Greek historian, which, in one instance, referred to a sacred assembly being called (The Histories 3, 142). The Septuagint also often uses the term to translate the Hebrew, קהל (qahal), referring to the congregation of Israel (see Dt. 31:30).

As is often the case with English translations, the word “church” falls short. Its etymology can be traced from Middle to Old English, to proto-Germanic, to the Classical Greek κυριακός (kuriakōs), meaning “belonging to the Lord.” As amazing as that concept is, the word is only used twice in the New Testament, and neither instance directly has to do with the gathering of believers itself (see “Lord’s supper” and “Lord’s day” in 1 Cor. 11:20 and Rev. 1:10, respectively).

There is not any specific question for this study point, but it seems necessary to spend some time giving background on the New Testament word for “church,” since Paul uses it repeatedly in Ephesians, which really is a treatise on the unity of the Church, and because today, it is often merely thought of as a building or institution with tax exempt status and not so much the people of God, the bride of Christ, called out for a purpose. Keep this background in mind as we study Paul’s use of the term further.
2. One of our purposes as the Church is to make “the manifold wisdom of God…known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (Eph. 3:10). Now what in the world, or heavenly places, does that mean? The “rulers,” ἀρχαῖς (archais), and “authorities,” ἐξουσίαις (exousiais), in the “heavenly places,” ἐπουρανίοις (epouraniois) are generally thought by commentators to refer to angelic beings, though those turned evil. But didn’t these angels-turned-demons fall from heaven rather than remain “in the heavenly places”? That’s the general interpretation of verses like 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6; and Revelation 12:4, 9. But remaining in Ephesians, we can flip to 6:12 and see that Paul is likely connecting the idea here to “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places,” rather than his sense of the term in 1:3, 1:20, and 2:6. How can we reconcile these seemingly contradictory ideas?

First of all, we ought to admit that our concepts of heaven and hell are often more informed by culture and tradition than they are Scripture. Whether one has read Dante’s *Inferno*, for one, most are vaguely familiar with its geography of spiritual places. The simplest way to navigate this topic is to point out that ἐπουρανίοις can also be translated as “the sphere of spiritual activities.” So when we read “heavenly places,” we need not immediately look upward and think of our white God with a white beard on a cloud surrounded by adorable Precious Moments cherubs strumming harps (who are much less frightening than Ezekiel’s depiction of cherubim in his tenth chapter). In sum, Paul is most likely referring to evil cosmic forces rather than the Church making “known the manifold wisdom of God” to angels Michael or Gabriel, which would seem a bit awkward, especially given those angels’ specific roles in Ezekiel, Daniel, Luke Jude, and Revelation.

Following Paul’s argument from the beginning of chapter 3, or really beginning with his first mention of “mystery” in 1:9, we see that what the Church is to make known is that Gentiles share in the gospel (3:6), that the Church ought to be one, not two (2:15)—we are to be unified. And what was preventing such unity? The “dividing wall of hostility” (2:14). Christ “is our peace,” but division comes from the evil forces that haven’t yet been defeated fully, though they will be (see Rev. 20:10, 14, fulfilling the promise from Gen. 3:15). So in its unity, the Church is bearing witness to Satan and his demons of their impending defeat. However, the inverse of this is that in our present disunity, the evil forces are reminding us that they are still here.
As mentioned earlier, by the time Ephesians was written, much of the conflict between Jewish and Gentile Christians had abated, but it was still recent history. See Acts 6:1–7; 11:1–18; Acts 15:1–35; and Galatians 2:1–14. How could these incidents have occurred after the great unifying event at Pentecost (Acts 2)? What “rulers and authorities” might have been at play, whether those “in the heavenly places” or on earth under their influence? How were these matters resolved? Is there evidence of “the manifold wisdom of God…(being)...made known”? 

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Due to the benefits that we enjoy in our redemption — peace with God, freedom from sin’s bondage, eternal life (Rom. 5–6) — it is easy to believe the Lord’s primary purpose in saving His people is to bless us. We readily view salvation as man-centered, and we often regard our well-being as our Creator’s chief concern. Certainly, we must not discount the Lord’s genuine love for His people, for Scripture tells us that God loves us with an everlasting love (Jer. 31:1–3). Still, as God’s Word stresses the preeminence of His glory even when He redeemed His old covenant people (Ex. 14; Isa. 42:8), we know His glory is also His chief goal when He saves us.

It is no surprise, then, that Paul holds the same God-centered view of salvation as the rest of Scripture. Ephesians 3:10 is one of the clearest verses in all of Paul’s writings telling us that our redemption is ultimately for the purpose of making the glory of the Lord known to His creation. We see that the creation of the church through the preaching of the gospel is designed to proclaim the “manifold wisdom of God … to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (Eph. 3:10). The Greek word translated “manifold” here was often used in the first century to describe the intricately embroidered patterns found on cloaks worn by the wealthy. Divine wisdom is incredibly rich, even colorful, similar to the patterns found on these cloaks. Yet God’s glory is even richer, and evidencing it to other creatures displays His magnificence more fully.

The heavenly rulers and authorities are angelic beings, and Paul may be thinking more specifically of those angelic beings gone bad — Satan and his demons. But how does the creation of the church show forth the Lord’s glory and wisdom to these evil creatures? It is shown through the fellowship between Christian Jews and Christian Gentiles, as we conclude from Paul’s emphasis on the unity of Jew and Gentile in Christ Jesus and the end of the Mosaic law as a dividing wall between these two peoples (Eph. 2:11–22). In witnessing such fellowship, the Enemy sees that his power to incite sin and direct people to use the law sinfully to separate them from others in self-righteousness is not absolute. A unified, faithful church is one more reminder to the Devil of his defeat, and living in peace and purity with other believers glorifies God in manifesting His victory over evil.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Reflect on what we discussed above regarding the meaning of “church.” How should we think of ourselves, whether as a local congregation, Redemption Community, other small group, or the universal Church, as “those who are called out from...”? From what are we called out? To what are we called? 1 Peter 2:9–10 is a good place to look for answers. What other passages come to mind? How might we corporately think of “the Church” as our existential reality and identity, rather than simply an institution or club to which we belong?

2. Consider how lofty and unattainable the task of revealing the wisdom of the creator and sustainer of the universe to the physical world and beyond must have sounded to the early Church, who merely met in houses, had no political authority, were being persecuted and martyred, and were eventually even fed to lions as sport and used as fuel for tiki torches at Nero’s parties. Was this duty possible before Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire in AD 380? Today, is it necessary to have a “Christian nation” in order for us as the Church to carry out our mission? What type of relationship ought the Church to have with the earthly “rulers and authorities” in order to meet such an end?
CHRIST’S BELOVED CHURCH
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.
1. In Ephesians 3:14–21, we find the one of the prayers Paul breaks into in the midst of his letter—this being either the second of three (1:15–23 and 6:18–20 being the other two) or the third of four (add 1:3–14), depending on the commentator. In this section, we’ll cover the prayer report recorded in 14–19, and then we’ll get to the doxology in vv. 19–20 next week. One can connect this prayer to “the boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him” in 3:12. In v. 14 Paul picks up where he broke away from his thought in 3:1, as indicated by the em dash (—) in most English translations. There are many suggestions as to why this break occurs, but all, of course, are mere speculation and aren’t necessary to mention here. Whatever the reason, he repeats “For this reason I,” to signal that he is returning to his original thought. Backing up to the flow of his thought as chapter 2 concludes, we see that the reason he is “a prisoner for Christ” (3:1) and that he “bow(s) (his) knees before the Father” (3:14) is the unity in Christ by which Jewish and Gentile Christians “are being built together into a dwelling place” (2:22).

As Paul transitions to the second part of the body of his letter beginning in 4:1, where he approaches how the meaning of Christ and the benefits we have in him described in the first part should affect Christians’ behavior, he prays for his readers’ strength by the power of the Spirit and that they would be “grounded in love” (3:17). We have already seen this word δύναμις (dunamis), “power” or “might,” in 1:19, 1:21, and 3:7, and in those first two instances, we see the cosmic contrast between God’s power and that which is below him. Paul has also gone over this theme of ἀγάπη (agapē), or love, in 1:4, 1:15, and 2:4, whether in reference to God’s love for his people or their love for him. But what is key here is that both love, which begins with God (1 Jn. 4:19), and power are critical for this unity and oneness he encourages throughout his letter.

Look back through each of the references to power and love mentioned in 3:14–19 and write down some thoughts as to how we should specifically approach God in prayer with “confidence” and see that we have “boldness and access” “through our faith in him” (3:12) because of his great power and love.
2. Something also worth mentioning in 3:14–15 is a play on words used by Paul between πατέρα (patera), or “Father,” and πατριὰ (patria), meaning “family,” “clan,” “ancestry,” “tribe,” or “race.” Paul stressing that every πατριὰ is ὀνομάζεται (onomazetai—named) from the πατέρα is far more significant than saying Riccardo’s mom named him Riccardo, as significant and relational as that is. This same word, ὀνομάζεται, is used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:1, where the ESV and NIV use “tolerate,” and the NRSV uses “found,” and NASB uses “exist.” He also uses it in Romans 15:20, where the NIV uses “known.” In the Septuagint, ὀνομάζω (onomazo), the lexical form of ὀνομάζεται, is used in Isaiah 62:2, as one example, to translate the Hebrew, רִכְזַנ (nazkîr), meaning to “remember,” “mention,” or “call”—in this instance where Yahweh will give Zion a new name by which to be called.

With this, we can see by writing that every family is named, Paul is pointing to both God’s sovereignty over and relationship with all humanity, with no mention of individuals who do not call upon the name of the Lord, so we should not understand this in a salvific sense. Only by the Father does one exist, is one found, and is one tolerated. Paul “bow(ing) his knees” to the πατέρα as he begins his prayer on behalf of his readers is showing the utmost reverence to the one from whom all are named and also receive the strength for which he prays. We can see this as echoing his doxology beginning in 1:3, where Paul gives a lengthy list of the blessings we have by him in Christ, the ὄνομα (onoma—name) above every ὄνομα (Phil. 2:9).

In light of all this, what should our posture be toward the Father by whom everyone exists? That is a notion we probably often take for granted, but we see no reason to assume Paul is not entirely sincere in the way he addresses our heavenly Father. Does this realization bring humility? Comfort? Fear? Read through each of the prayers recorded in 3:14–19; 1:3–14; and 1:15–23 as you reflect on your sentiment here. And then consider how we ought to think of members of “every family in heaven and on earth,” whether or not they are Christians, as all are named by the Father and are created imago Dei, in his image (Gn. 1:26–27).
3. In vv. 16–19, we see that Paul’s prayer includes two separate petitions, one in vv. 16–17 and then another in vv. 18–19a. The first was largely covered above in Study the Text 1, as we referred to “power through (the) Spirit” and being “grounded in love.” Here, we can also see instances of what has been noted in the first study guide, where Paul adapts certain phrases from his early letter to the Colossians. Juxtapose Eph. 3:16–17 with Col. 1:27; 2:2, 7, observing “the riches of the glory,” “hearts…knit together in love,” and “rooted and built up in him.” The instances in Col. 1:27 and 2:2 are both connected to the “mystery” we have highlighted in weeks 16 and 17 of this guide, which, to recap, is that Gentiles also partake in the gospel, something Paul also noted in these verses in Colossians (Laodicea, along with Ephesus, was one of the seven churches in Rev. 2, 3, and also refers to Gentiles, given its location in Asia Minor).

In the second petition, Paul prays that his readers would have the ἐξισχύσητε (exischysēte), the “ability,” “strength,” or “power,” (a modern translation might be “grit”) to καταλαβέσθαι (katalabesthai), to “comprehend,” or “perceive,” or “understand” “with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth”…you may ask. The NIV makes an interesting translation choice by placing ἀγάπην τοῦ Χριστοῦ (agapēn tou Christou—the love of Christ) at the end of v. 18, rather than in v. 19 as in the ESV, NRSV, NASB, KJV—virtually every other English translation. Not that the dimensions Paul mentions fail to apply to Christ’s love—of course it’s that vast—but the NIV’s decision doesn’t seem to make grammatical sense from the Greek, for reasons we will not get into here. In any event, Paul states in v. 19 that Christ’s love surpasses knowledge, so it is something beyond comprehension anyway. Instead, it is probably more appropriate to connect these dimensions to “the riches of his glory” in v. 16. Δόξης (doxēs), meaning “glory,” from which we get “doxology,” and which can also be translated as “magnificence,” “excellence,” or preeminence—all of which can be used to describe the infiniteness of God. So it makes sense that “breadth and length and height and depth” would connect here, with the understanding that such dimensions are endless. And then, in 3:19b, Paul writes that the reason for all of this is “to be filled with the fullness of God,” which we can also connect to the infinite dimensions of his glory.

Why might Paul place such importance on comprehending such vastness? And why might we need strength, power, or ability, as well as being grounded in love, in order to do so? For what reason(s) could we suggest that the primary emphasis on his prayer here is not so much for the strength to go out and do necessary unifying work—as much weight as he gives that elsewhere—but rather to simply comprehend and know? It should also be mentioned that γνῶναι (gnōnai), “to know” in 3:19, is used by the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew, יָדָּא (yāda’) in Gn 4:1, where “Adam knew Eve” (hardly the only sense of either word, but this example is simply to highlight the broad range of meaning, which also includes “to understand,” etc., but often in a rather intimate way).
FOR A DEEPER REFLECTION:

Knowing the Surpassing-Knowledge-Love of Christ
by Mark D. Roberts

In Ephesians 3:18, Paul prays that we might “grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.” In verse 19 he adds, “and to know this love that surpasses knowledge.” The Greek of this phrase reads very literally, “[that you might have the power] to know the surpassing-knowledge-love of Christ.”

How can we know that which surpasses knowledge? At first, this might seem self-contradictory. It doesn’t seem possible to know the unknowable. But Paul is not saying that Christ’s love cannot be known, only that it will always exceed our knowing. No matter how much we understand the love of Christ, we will never completely understand it. Yet, we are able to fathom Christ’s love truly, however imperfectly.

If you think about it for a while, you’ll come up with all kinds of analogies for our incomplete knowledge. For example, I know something about how car engines operate. Years ago, when they were more simple, I could actually work on them a bit. But the days of flathead, straight-six Rambler engines are long gone. I can barely understand how car engines work today, and I don’t even try to monkey around with them. It wouldn’t be too far off to say that I know car engines, even though they surpass my knowledge.

Yet I must qualify what I’ve just said in two ways. First, there are some people who really do understand how today’s automobile engines work. These engineers and mechanics know everything (or just about everything) there is to know about motors. In the case of the love of Christ, however, no human being in the world will ever be able to fully understand the love of Christ. It exceeds, not just my knowing, but all human knowing.

Second, remember that when Scripture speaks of knowing, it almost always envisions a relational, experiential kind of knowing, a knowing that includes but goes beyond intellectual understanding. You and I are privileged to know the love of Christ, not just as a wonderful idea, but also as something to be felt and treasured. Yet, even in the realm of personal knowing, there is always more of Christ’s love to be experienced. To put it plainly, Christ loves you more than you can understand, and he has still more love for you to experience.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In this section, we have covered just how relational “naming” and “knowing” are, as merely two examples in reference to the Father’s relationship with all humankind and how we ought to understand the breadth of his glory as well as the love of Christ. We find these concepts in the midst of Paul’s prayer, hanging between his sections on understanding the meaning of Christ and how we, as the Church, are to live in light of that, with unity being a critical component. As a community centered on and united in Christ, how should we, together, approach God in prayer, both for the purpose of better understanding our relationship with him and our relationship with one another as a result?

2. Similar to how we approached the second discussion question last week, in light of the martyrdom and persecution faced by the early Church, much of which had already occurred by the time Ephesians was written, think further about the necessity of supernatural strength to comprehend “the breadth, and length, and height, and depth” of “the riches of (the Father’s) glory” and “to know the love of Christ.” Would it have been easy to conjure up the strength necessary to remain faithful while being so powerless, only visibly seeing the glory and might flaunted by the Roman Empire while God’s people seemed comparatively weak? In the last century, we can think of faithful Christians like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King, Jr., both of whom suffered imprisonment and death for being faithful and taking a stand amid evil state and private entities and personalities overpowering the faithful. Though most of us are in contexts today where we are largely privileged, which people or groups can we think of today who are faithful and yet powerless in the earthly sense? What hope can we see in how they display this strength for which Paul prays?
CHRIST’S BELOVED CHURCH
WEEK 19

FAR MORE ABUNDANTLY BEYOND

EPHESIANS 3:20–21

20 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, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.
1.1 Paul’s prayer that began in Ephesians 3:14 concludes with this doxology in vv. 20–21, which also concludes his major section that began in 1:3 after his greeting. He writes a similar conclusion to a major section in Romans 11:36. Consistent features in New Testament doxologies or benedictions include acknowledgement of the person being praised, a praise formula generally containing the word “glory,” an eternity formula (e.g., “throughout all generations,” “forever and ever”), and “Amen” (see Rm. 16: 25–27; 2 Tim. 4:18; Heb. 13:20–21; and 1 Pet. 5:11). A rather intriguing item worth noting about this doxology in Ephesians is that unlike any other NT doxology, this one makes both the Church and Christ the reason for praise, which aligns rather well with the overarching theology of the letter. This locus of praise also connects well to “all the saints” and “Christ” in vv. 18–19. And then “power” is another connection to the preceding prayer report. Looking at some of the major themes from 1:3–3:13, what other connections to 3:20–21 can we see?
1.2 In looking at both Paul’s prayer report in 3:14–19 as well as the doxology, and after having reminded ourselves of some of the dominant themes throughout the letter thus far, we should see that much of what is contained in Paul’s intercession has already occurred. Simply look at all the past tense verbs in 1:3–14 (e.g., “has blessed,” “chose,” “predestined”). So, it should be rather evident that Paul is not asking for something he feels has not been received. What he describes throughout much of this first part of his letter pertains to the Father’s work of salvation in Christ. What we can conclude about his intercession, then, is that he longs for such work to be brought to perfection. It has an eschatological hope, or, to borrow from philosophical terminology, telos (from the Greek τέλος, referring to “fulfillment,” “end,” “purpose,” or “goal”). Think about this fact in light of how you pray, and write down what you ask for that may have already been begun but what has yet to be done according to God’s desired end.
FOR A DEEPER REFLECTION:

Commentary on Ephesians 3:20

by John Gill

This is the conclusion of the apostle’s prayer, in which the power of God is celebrated, a perfection which is essential unto God, and is very large and extensive; it reaches to all things, to every thing that he wills, which is his actual or ordinative power; and to more things than he has willed, which is his absolute power; and to all things that have been, are, or shall be, and to things impossible with men; though there are some things which God cannot do, such as are contrary to his nature, inconsistent with his will, his decrees and purposes, which imply a contradiction, and are foreign to truth, which to do would be to deny himself: but then he can do above all that we ask or think; he can do more than men ask for, as he did for Solomon: God knows what we want before we ask, and he has made provisions for his people before they ask for them; some of which things we never could, and others we never should have asked for, if he had not provided them; and without the Spirit of God we know not what to ask for, nor how to ask aright; this affords great encouragement to go to God, and ask such things of him as we want, and he has provided; and who also can do more than we can think, imagine, or conceive in our minds.

According to the power that worketh in us: either in believers in common, meaning the Spirit of God, who is the finger and power of God, who begins, and carries on, and will finish the work of grace in them, and which is an evidence of the exceeding greatness of the power of God; or in the apostles in particular, in fitting and furnishing them for their work, and succeeding them in it; which is another proof and demonstration of the abundant power of God, and shows what he can do if he pleases.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1.1 Looking back to our discussion on ἐκκλησία (ekklésia) in week 17, think about how “church” might function in connection to “glory” in the praise formula in Ephesians 3:21—something that is unique, as pointed out in this week’s Study the Text 1.1. How might believers in the early Church have thought of “glory in the church,” in their context of meeting in house churches? How about those who have worshiped in magnificent cathedrals, both over the centuries and today? As we acknowledged, the Church is far more than an institution or building, but since we are not gnostic dualists, and we do believe physical space matters, how might we think about “glory in the church,” which is unto the Father, in our corporate worship? These verses are commonly used as our own benedictions concluding our services. So how should we meditate on such glory as we wrap up our time together and head out into the rest of our lives? What elements of our liturgies and our spaces echo that glory and make it unto him? What should we add? What should we tweak? What should we remove?

1.2 Now let’s turn to life as the ἐκκλησία between Sunday night and Saturday night and ask similar questions. What elements of our lives and the places in which we live, work, and play echo that glory and make it unto him? What should we add? What should we tweak? What should we remove? Yes, think about your personal morality, which is often the direction in which the answers to questions such as these go. But in what other ways can we address this? It may help to again revisit some of the major themes of Ephesians explored thus far.
CHRIST’S BELOVED CHURCH
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.
1. We now begin the second major section of the body of Paul’s letter, which discusses how its original audience, and all Christians since, ought to live in light of the realities described in the first part. Without section one, which is gospel truth, section two would simply be empty morality. But without section two, section one would be an appendageless gospel—one that is all affirmations but no action, or a dead faith (Jm. 2:17). Ephesians 4:1 is a perfect summary verse or thesis statement for this section; we are to “walk in a manner worthy” of the grace the Father has given us in Christ. This is similar to Paul’s instruction to brothers and sisters “to present their bodies as a living sacrifice” in Romans 12:1–2, which also makes it clear that Christianity is hardly restricted to theological affirmations. Given the ecclesiological emphasis of the letter, this manner largely has to do with how Christians are to treat one another, rather than those who do not profess our faith (though the New Testament is hardly void of instruction on how to treat nonbelievers—see Mt. 5:43–44; Rm. 12:14; Rm. 13:10; Jm. 2:8–9; and 1 Pt. 2:23 as just a few examples). Flowing from Paul’s prayer in 3:14–21, believers ought to exhibit to one another what they already are in Christ—what Christ has already accomplished needs to be brought to its fulfillment, which, of course, can only be done by the power of the Spirit, hence, our need to be perpetually in prayer (1 Th. 5:17). And what we are to exhibit ought to reflect the unity that has already been purchased by Christ’s flesh, by which he demolished “the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph. 2:14).

Before we proceed to 4:2 and get into what Paul spends the rest of his letter describing—what this manner of walking ought to look like—review what “the calling to which you have been called” involves. To get you started, look at 1:4, where we see we are to be “holy and blameless.” Also look at the fact that in 1:10, God is “unit(ing) all things”—what is our calling in that? And in 1:12, how are we to “be to the praise of his glory”? And so forth. Keep making your way through the first three chapters, asking and answering similar questions.
2. This section also shares a common trait found in the other Pauline epistles, which is known here as paraenesis, a type of hortatory discourse or exhortation providing moral advice or admonition. Paraeneses were often used among Hellenistic philosophers, including Epicurus, Seneca, and Clement of Alexandria, who tended to remind their readers of what they already knew with the hope that they would act accordingly. They did not necessarily feel the need to respond to any particular vice, and such is the case in Ephesians. Paul's paraeneses often begin with “I beg,” “I appeal,” “I entreat,” or “I urge” (see Rm. 12:1; 2 Cor. 10:1; and 1 Th. 4:1), followed by a list of particular virtues aligning to the broader theme of the letter. So in Eph. 4:1–6, we see Paul, right after he reminds us of why he’s a prisoner—something he first mentions in 3:1—“urge(s)” his readers to follow the virtues he begins to list, which in this section relate to unity in the body of Christ. We can see a close parallel in Paul's earlier writing to the Colossians in 3:12–15.

Look back to Eph. 1:15 and also to week 8 in the first study guide, specifically Study the Text 1.1 and 1.2. Though Paul may or may not have originally written this letter specifically to believers in Ephesus, word of the “faith in the Lord Jesus” and “love toward the saints” from multiple churches and individuals, including in Colossae, had spread and reached Paul (see Col. 1:3–4 and Philemon 4–5). So, it should be evident here that Paul was not urging them to do something they were not already doing, as if they completely lacked humility, gentleness, patience, etc. This is then consistent with the Hellenistic paraenesis formula as well as with what we noted last week about Paul’s prayer at the end of chapter 3—that we should long for the work God has already begun to be brought to his telos, to perfection. What can we learn from Paul about how to exhort or admonish fellow believers today?
3.1 Eph. 4:4–6 forms a liturgical expression, with features that Paul seemingly adapts from his first letter to the Corinthians, with 1 Cor. 12:12–13 being the foundation for Eph. 4:4–5, and 1 Cor. 8:6 being the basis for Eph. 4:6. Paul also uses a rather clear Trinitarian formula here, referring to the “one Spirit” (v. 4), “one Lord” (v. 5, with “Lord” referring to the Son, Jesus Christ—see Eph. 1:2, 3, 15, 17; 3:11, etc.), and “one God and Father of all” (v. 6), of course referring to the first person of the Trinity. Belief in the Trinity has been a rather critical element of this “one faith” (v. 5) and “one hope” (v. 4) affirmed by “one body” (v. 4), as evidenced in the works of some of the Ante-Nicene Fathers (Church Fathers following the Apostles and preceding the Council of Nicaea in AD 325), including Ignatius of Antioch and Justin Martyr, as well as in the conclusions of the (first) Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople, from which we have our current Nicene Creed, with Trinitarian contributions largely coming from the Cappadocian Fathers, and which clearly describes the functions of and relationships between each of the Trinitarian persons.

Read through the Nicene, or rather Niceno–Constantinopolitan, Creed located in Appendix I toward the end of this study guide. How can we consider these words to be at the center of our “one faith” and “one hope”? What echoes of Eph. 4:4–6 do you find in the creed? How can the Church be unified in light of these words? We should note that unlike the Apostles’ Creed, which is only accepted in the western Church, the Nicene Creed is the most ecumenical statement of the global Church, as it is used in the liturgies of Roman Catholic, Protestant, Anglican, Eastern Orthodox, and Oriental Orthodox churches (with only slight, but historically significant, variation in the eastern version). Does the fact that they have been recited globally and across denominational and traditional boundaries by the communion of the saints for nearly 16.5 centuries help point to the “one faith” and “one hope” with “one Spirit,” “one Lord,” and “one God and Father of all” at the center and help us understand the necessity of unity in the Church and the basis of it?
3.2 There is one remaining unifying feature that we have not addressed yet: one baptism, which might be a little trickier to unpack. Βάπτισμα (baptisma), coming from the root βάπτω (baptó), literally meaning “to dip,” and can refer to a ceremonial washing or cleansing or purification rite by immersion. Most of us are familiar the practice of baptism as performed by John, AKA “John the Baptist,” Jesus’ cousin (see Mt. 3:1–17; Mk. 1:1–11; and Lk. 3:1–22).

Have you ever wondered whether this practice was foreign to those in “Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region” (Mt. 3:5–6) who came to the river Jordan to be baptized by John? It shouldn’t have been. Second Temple Jews, who lived between the construction of the Second Temple (see Ezra 6:13–18) in 515 BC and its destruction by the Romans in AD 70, which we touched on in week 13—so the same Jews coming to see John—were well familiar with הָליִבְט (tevilah), also meaning “to dip,” and which was a ritual washing by immersion in either a river or a מיקְבֶה (mikveh), which was a bath used exclusively for this purpose. Such baths are still used in synagogues today and look nearly identical to many baptisms presently used in Christian churches. This practice has occurred for a number of reasons, including cleanliness following contact with certain things listed in the Torah (or the first five books of the Old Testament), before festivals, upon conversion to Judaism, or prior to burial.

One can assume that as these Jews heard John’s message of repentance and forgiveness of sins, they indeed must have seen his baptism as a rite of purification, similar to their own, but they likely did not see it as conversion to a new religion. John was a Jew, just like them, and Christianity would not become a separate sect for quite a while. Further, they had not yet received the Holy Spirit. John told them he was only baptizing them “with water,” but Jesus would baptize them “with Holy Spirit and fire” (Mt. 3:11; Mk. 1:8; Lk. 3:16). In Acts 19:1–7, when Paul was in Ephesus, in fact, he asked some disciples whether they had received the Holy Spirit and into which baptism were they baptized, to which they answered “No” and “Into John’s baptism,” respectively. And then they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. After Paul laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them. Dozens of questions are probably already forming in your minds as you ponder these things. And unfortunately, we cannot even begin to answer them here. But it is our hope that you are seeing that baptism is not always used in the same sense in the New Testament. Beyond referring to immersion or a purification rite, βαπτιζω can also, in a more metaphorical sense, mean “to overwhelm,” “to undergo,” or “to subject to,” which is probably more of the sense of Jesus’ baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire. Fire, here, should be understood as if it relates to alchemy. It is purifying, but it also has to do with judgement (see Lk. 3:16–17). What we can conclude here, which is consistent with our view of baptism at Redemption Church, is that baptism in water, though incredibly important, just like the sacrament of communion, is not salvific. It is a sign of our initiation into God’s covenant community, but only the work of Christ and the regeneration by the Holy Spirit saves sinners.

So, all of this builds to the question of what Paul means by “one baptism”—is he referring to John’s baptism or Jesus’? Does it refer to water or Holy
Spirit and fire? Is it a ceremonial washing? Probably not. Is it a Christian sacramental initiation rite? Perhaps. Is it the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit? Most definitely. Some clarification here is in Paul’s earlier parallel verse in 1 Cor. 12:13: “For in one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” This “one baptism,” consistent with the theme of Ephesians, is unifying.

For nearly two thousand years, the Church has failed to agree on the mode of baptism and whom the recipients ought to be. Can only those professing faith be baptized, which is the view of Redemption as well as Baptist and most non-denominational evangelical churches? Can the children and infants of believing parents be baptized, which is the view of Presbyterians, Dutch Reformed, Lutherans, Methodists, Anglicans, Roman Catholics, and others? Should new adult converts be immersed (our view)? Should they be sprinkled (their view)? Should infants be immersed (the Eastern Orthodox view)? I don’t think Paul’s getting into any of that, though one can of course argue historically that in his day, one view or the other was dominant or exclusive (all sides have compelling arguments, for the record). The point is that the Church is not united by these things. If by “one baptism,” Paul means we must all perform baptisms the same way, his exhortation will never come to fruition. But if he means being unified by the redemptive work of Christ and the regeneration by the Holy Spirit, we can all say “Amen!” to that. And we’d better hope we can be unified despite differing sacramentologies; otherwise, we will need to find people to quote besides C.S. Lewis (Anglican), Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Lutheran), or Tim Keller (Presbyterian)—all of whom either do or have affirmed infant sprinkling—and we love and trust them dearly.

To be sure, there are certain issues on which we certainly cannot flex—the Trinity being one of them, as we have discussed. Our unity must be based on something unifying and solid and not on baseless sinking sand. But what we must flee from is putting up denominational (or lack thereof) walls as we read these verses. Christ broke down “the dividing wall of hostility,” erected over issues such as circumcision. Let us not rebuild those walls over the very similar issue of water baptism.

Jot down any thoughts you might have on this rather lengthy subpoint, but otherwise, we can proceed to the discussion questions following the article below.

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6 To see Redemption Church’s doctrine, as well as what we consider “open-handed issues,” visit http://www.redemptionaz.com/doctrine. For further depth, explore our membership packet at https://redemptionwebcontent.s3.amazonaws.com/Central%20Operations/Membership/Membership-Packet.pdf.

FOR A **DEEPER REFLECTION:**

**Maintain the Unity of the Spirit (excerpt)**

by John Piper

**What Is the Unity of the Spirit?**

Part of the answer is found in verses 11–13. Here Paul says that Christ has given to the church “some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the **unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.”**

**A Reality to Be Maintained and a Goal to Be Attained**

One difference between verse 3 and verse 13 is that in verse 3 we are told to *maintain* unity but in verse 13 we are told to *attain* unity. In verse 3 it is a reality to be maintained. In verse 13 it is a goal to be attained. The reason for this is not that there are two kinds of Christian unity but that Christian unity has in one sense already been accomplished and in another sense hasn’t. Look at Ephesians 2:13–16...

This text shows that, in a decisive act of atonement and reconciliation, Christ has already made us one. What he has accomplished at Calvary we should *maintain* by the Spirit. But in another sense the unity Christ purchased and guaranteed with his blood must now be lived out and brought to full expression in the life of the church. In this sense it is a goal to be attained.

**Three Components of Christian Unity**

So if the same basic unity is spoken of in 2:13–16 and 4:3 and 4:13, then we can now define it. Christian unity involves three things that we should have in common. Ephesians 4:13 speaks of a “unity of . . . the knowledge of the Son of God.” That is our *common convictions* about Christ. That verse also speaks of a “unity of faith.” That is our *common confidence* in Christ. And Ephesians 2:14 speaks of the end of hostility. When hostility is replaced with love, we have a *common care* for each other. So I would sum up Christian unity from Ephesians 2–4 as having *common convictions* about Christ, *common confidence* in Christ, and *common care* for each other.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Consider your Redemption Community, your family (including extended family who are also Christians), and any other Christian community in which you find yourself. What is placed at the center of your relationship—what makes you one? And be honest, without giving the automatic answer expected by Christians. For families, it may be memories and traditions, which are great things. Jesus most likely is there as well, but he might not be in the dead center of the relationship. The same might be true in a marriage. A Redemption Community might be more about good food, conversation, and game nights—all good things. But when we consider how to “walk,” how to live, and thrive in community together, how might we reorient ourselves to do so around our calling? We read about our calling in the first three chapters of Ephesians. Go back to that list you made for Study the Text 1.1 for this week. What do those things look like, tangibly, in community? This should put some substance on the fruit of the Spirit listed in 4:2–3.

2. Now look back to 3.2—I know it’s long. Beyond baptism or maybe modes of or beliefs behind communion as well (another discussion for another study), what other doctrinal issues, besides the essentials like the Trinity, incarnation, dual nature of Christ (also known as the hypostatic union), etc., do we use to build up dividing walls of hostility? Maybe predestination? Are we only really comfortable in Reformed circles and largely unwilling to read from a Methodist author like Stanley Hauerwas (side note: you should read Stanley Hauerwas), attend an interdenominational conference, or donate to a parachurch ministry with affiliation beyond our tribe? Do differing views on spiritual gifts keep us from going to multi-church worship events where too many hands might be raised, or not enough hands will be raised, or whether or not someone might speak in tongues or prophecy? Do we think less of those who do not share our eschatology (i.e., views on the end times)? Do we question the salvation of anyone affiliated with a certain denomination or tradition, as if everyone seated in our own sanctuaries is indeed saved? Can we really recite the Nicene Creed (see Appendix I) and claim that “We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church” (lowercase c “catholic,” from the Latin catholicus and the Greek καθολικός (katholikos), meaning “general,” “universal,” or “whole”)? If not, what steps do we need to take to
get there? How can we realize “one Lord, one faith, one baptism”? Or, if you do not believe we should get there, why not? Who should be excluded?
CHRIST’S
BELOVED
CHURCH
7But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. 8Therefore it says,

“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”

9(In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? 10He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) 11And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13until 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, 14so 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.
1. In this section, after Paul exhorts his readers to walk in a manner that exhibits the fruit of the Spirit (his list in Eph. 4:2–3 includes four of the nine items included in Gal. 5:22–23, with humility being an additional one, though in Gal. 5:26, he says to not be conceited, the opposite of humility), he gets into the diversity of spiritual gifts. While all Christians are called to walk in the manner that includes the entire fruit of the Spirit (the Greek for “fruit,” καρπός (karpos) is singular, so we are not to think of “fruits” from which we can pick and choose), we are not all given the same gifts. See what Paul wrote earlier about gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:4–11, and notice that none of the items contained within the fruit are listed. In the list in Eph. 4:11, he is referring to specific roles or offices in the Church.

Introducing this section in 4:7, Paul rephrases what he wrote in 3:2 about “the stewardship of God’s grace” in light of the specific functions of the members of his body, the Church, of which Christ is the head, which he wrote about in 1:22–23, and a concept that is repeated in our section for next week, 4:15–16. These functions, which we will get to in 4:11 shortly, serve the ultimate purpose of us attaining, together, “the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God” (4:13). As we covered in week 17, the Church is to bear witness “to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (3:10) that in our unity, we are pointing to the impending defeat of Satan and his demons—that the battle will be won, in and by Christ. “The glory in the church and in Christ Jesus” (3:21) is now and will be further revealed.

Do you think of your role in your local church, whatever it may be, as working toward such a goal? Do you feel that both your fruit and your gifts are helping to display the glory in the Church, promote unity, and declare to evil cosmic forces that their influence will soon be no more? Do you see how Christ, as the head, is using you and those with whom you serve as at least some small part of his telos, his desired and promised end, being achieved?
2.1 In 4:8, Paul refers to Psalm 68:18, largely citing the first two-thirds of the Greek text from the Septuagint, though he does not do so entirely. It is rather common for NT authors to adapt OT texts for their own theological or pedagogical purposes, which by no means subtracts from the truth, inspiration, authority, or reliability of either verse(s). The major difference, beyond the omission of a few words and referring to God in the third rather than second person, is that the verb ἔλαβες (elabes), “you received,” properly translating the Hebrew, לָתְחַקָל (lāqaḥtā), which is essentially reflected in your English translation of the Hebrew, is changed by Paul to ἔδωκεν (edōken), meaning “he gave.” So in Psalms, Elohim (God), “received gifts among men,” while in Ephesians, “he gave gifts to men.” The psalmist likely has in mind the reception of the spoils of war following a conquest, given the imagery of chariots (Ps. 68:17), leading a host of captives (v. 18), and God’s enemies being scattered, as the psalm begins. The captives can be understood as “the rulers and authorities” who are now in subjection under Christ’s feet.

What Paul does in Ephesians is focus on those spoils, those gifts, being distributed to God’s people. The idea here is that God, as a good and generous king, does not hoard the spoils of war like a greedy king might as he further ascends to power. We will get into the importance of “ascended” in a moment, but for now, what we can see Paul doing here is pointing forward, to when not only does Yahweh (the LORD) “dwell there” (on the “mountain of God” in Ps. 68:15, referring to Mount Zion, where the glory of God dwelled in the temple), but also where his people will dwell on earth with God forever and ever (Rev. 21:1–8). Though even now, he gives us gifts, which shows the eschatological reality we currently experience—he has already “blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Eph. 1:3). Another thing about these gifts is that they are not to be hoarded by us either. Rather, they are to be used to “equip the saints” (4:12). Again, we are blessed to be a blessing. There is no new question here, but if anything in this section helps bring to mind something to add to the question in the previous section, please elaborate here.
2.2 Returning to “he ascended,” we should also point out that as critical as the language from Psalm 68 was in its immediate context, referring to God conquering Israel’s enemies as a temporary kingdom had been established and secured, the psalm remained among the ψαλμός (psalmos), “songs,” of Israel and Judah throughout their exiles and through the Second Temple period, reminding them of God’s protection and promised victory. And it has remained in the praise book of the people of God since. As such, the language has taken on more significant meaning as redemptive history has unfolded. As Paul is writing Ephesians, then, “ascended” refers to more than “the sanctuary,” that is, the Ark of the Covenant where God would meet with humankind (Ex. 25:22), eventually placed in the temple (1 Kgs. 8:1–11) on Mt. Moriah (1 Chr. 3:1). While ἀναβαίνω (anabainó) often means “to move to a higher place” or “to climb,” in a physical sense, as in Matthew 5:1, where it is translated in the ESV as “he went up,” Jesus also uses it to refer to his ascension into heaven (see Jn. 20:17).

In week 9, when we covered Eph. 1:20–23, we touched on this concept, though Paul did not use the word “ascension” there. He referred to Christ’s resurrection directly (God “raised him from the dead”) but then spent more time on what is involved in Christ’s ascension, being “seated…at his right hand in the heavenly places” where he reigns above all both “in this age” and “also in the age to come.” By his ascension, Christ is presently ruling over all other powers and also as the head of the Church. This reign is infinitely more broad than ruling over a single nation in David’s day. He has now put “all things under his feet.” He is king over all nations, and his kingdom spans the entire globe, rather than being restricted to a small, constantly disputed (though religiously significant) sliver of land in the Middle East. Christ rules over the entire world, no matter what human rulers decide or fight about amongst themselves.

As we think about the gifts Christ has given the Church, the “spoils of war,” if you will, how are they made more significant in light of the glory and power and majesty of the one who reigns and won them for us? And what are we to make that these spoils are not gold or silver used to build our own micro-kingdoms or weapons to fight earthly wars, but rather offices and functions used to serve? How can we develop an ethos, a distinguishing character or morale, around this idea?
2.3 We cannot discuss “He ascended” without at least touching on “he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth” (4:9). This certainly refers to his incarnation, “the Word (becoming) flesh and (dwelling) among us” (Jn. 1:14). Contrasted with his exaltation in his resurrection, ascension, and present reign, his descension refers to his humiliation. The creator of the universe was made “for a little while...lower than the angels” (Heb. 2:9), and “made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant...(humbling) himself by becoming obedient to the point of death” (Phil. 2:7–8). As to how low he descended, that has been disputed. In the ESV, you should have a footnote following v. 9 saying, “Or the lower parts of the earth” as translating Τὰ κατώτερα [μέρη] τῆς γῆς (ta katōtera [mere] tēs gēs). Does this mean the earth in general is the lower part, cosmically speaking, relative to the heavens? Or does it refer to something lower?

The Apostles’ Creed, developed between the mid-second to late fourth centuries, uses the line generally translated into English as something like “He descended to the dead,” which is considered to be adapted from Eph. 4:9. The Greek version uses κατελθόντα εἰς τὰ κατώτατα (katelthonta eis ta katotata), which can be translated the same way we translate Eph. 4:9. The Latin version, however, uses descendit ad infernos, suggesting that “lower regions” can be “hell,” an English translation still used in many church liturgies today. Without getting into what exactly “hell” is, which is a great topic for another study, what we know for sure is that Paul did not use the Greek words Ἅιδης (hadēs) or γέεννα (geenna), which can be translated as “hell” in the New Testament,” though Ἅιδης can also mean “death” (see 1 Cor. 15:55 ESV). While γέεννα is always thought of as either “a place underneath the earth” or “a place (or state) of everlasting punishment,” in New Testament usage, based on a place called Gehenna or the valley of Hinnom south of Jerusalem where dead animals would be burned, it is not used to translate a similar idea in the Septuagint from the Hebrew Scriptures (however, it is referenced in the Talmud, a collection of rabbinical texts during the Second Temple period). It is Ἅιδης that was used to translate יָסְרל (sheol) in the Old Testament, which can mean “the underworld,” “grave,” or “pit.”

That said, saying with certainty that Christ descended to hell is probably being too presumptuous, so terms such as “death” or “grave” seem more appropriate in creedal translations. Even looking to the rather confusing text of 1 Pet. 3:18–20, we can suggest that this is similar to the Church’s role of making “the manifold wisdom of God...known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (to the evil cosmic forces). Christ’s name is declared both above and below, and we can say that without assuming any salvific efficacy, which is frankly unknown to us. We walk through all this to illustrate that we cannot simply fly through a text and assume it means what we think it means. There is more than often a lot of exegetical, or interpretative, work to be done in community, and in prayer and meditation. And even then, we will often only “see in a mirror dimly” (1 Cor. 13:12).
In sum, in Christ’s descent, as noted in Eph. 4:9, what we can conclude is that indeed, he did descend from heaven, humbly becoming a man on earth, suffering a horrible death, ultimately defeating death, so that death will soon be no more. And that is Paul’s emphasis here in Eph. 3:10—Christ descended to accomplish what was needed to be accomplished, so that he might ascend victoriously. And through that great cosmic victory, he bestows great gifts to the Church.

Even if Christ did not spend Holy Saturday in hell, and again, we need not assume he did, he was humiliated, suffered, and was forsaken by the Father as the weight of the world’s sin was upon his shoulders. This is how we can understand his descent, which must have been quite hellish in a way we will mercifully never have to understand. Rather than answering a question here, just write out a brief prayer of gratitude below, expressing your thankfulness for this glorious plan of redemption and everything it took for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to accomplish it.

3. At last, after having scoured through some of the incredibly weighty and complex ideas Paul has covered, we can get to the gifts themselves listed in 4:11. As we already addressed, these gifts, which can be understood as functions or offices in the Church, are used “to equip the saints for the work of ministry.” Christ gave “the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds (or pastors), and teachers,” which, as we already covered, unlike the fruit of the Spirit are not gifts given to every believer. We can look at what Paul had already written to the Romans in 12:6–8 to see that such gifts “differ according to the grace given to us.” Though, whatever gifts we are given, we are to use.

Unlike the list in Romans, however, we should not assume that each of the items here in Ephesians necessarily exists today in every local church. In Eph. 2:20 and 3:5, it seems that the roles of prophets and apostles may have already served their purpose. While a few (very few) churches today actually give those titles, it should come as no surprise that many do not, which is probably for good reason. And then, even εὐαγγελιστὴς (euangelistēs) only occurs two other times in the New Testament: Acts 21:8, referring to one evangelist, Philip, and 2 Tim. 4:5, where Paul is writing to
Timothy specifically. This is not to say that doing evangelistic work is not a widespread task today—it indeed is. None of us are exempt from the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18–20), for starters. But in these instances with Philip and Timothy, there were unique commissionings from the apostles. As for shepherd/pastor, although ποιμήν (poimēn) is only a designation (indirectly) given to Peter by Jesus in John 21:15–17, in 1 Peter 5:1–5, this role is given to the elders or overseers, the πρεσβύτερος (presbuteros) of local churches—from which we get “presbyterian”—and an office clearly given in 1 Timothy (5:17, 19) and Titus (1:5), which is also referred to as ἐπίσκοπή (episkopē)—where we get “episcopal—in Acts 20:28; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1–2; Titus 1:7, 3:15; and 1 Pet. 2:25 (these terms referred to church polity or governance long before they were names of denominations utilizing a respective polity). As for teachers, διδάσκαλος (didaskalos), they appear in the list in Roman 12:7 and can refer to both basic instruction and ongoing exhortation (Gal. 6:6).

A few things we can conclude here with respect to the early Church is that prophets and apostles did the groundwork, evangelists have a unique calling related to spreading the reach of the Church, and pastors and teachers do the day in, day out work of the local church for the purpose of “equipping the saints for the work of ministry,” meaning all of us who are called to some degree of ministry are not necessarily serving in these functions. Many of us might be the saints who are being equipped by our brothers and sisters in these functions. Whether or not you currently or will ever serve in one of these roles, in light of Eph. 4: 12–14, what should we expect from such persons? What are we to gain as a result? And how are we all to make use of these functions unto the “glory in the church” (Eph. 3:21)?
Unity of the faith is a reference to the fact that what unites us (especially in those cases where we have different cultural, social and ethnic backgrounds) is our common faith (trust) in the saving work of Jesus Christ. Knowledge of the Son of God refers to the fact that Jesus Christ is the object of our faith. We look to him to save us from our sins. We believe him to be very Son of God, that one who accomplishes salvation for us when we were dead in sin, that one who was raised from the dead, so that through faith in him, we are seen as raised with Christ and seated in heavenly places. It is important to notice that Paul bases this unity on our confession of a common faith, not on a common experience.

The goal of all of this is that we who are spiritual children, will continue to grow into spiritual adulthood—we are to mature in the faith, just as we do in life. This is not an instantaneous thing, but the goal of our entire life “in Christ.” The standard for which we aim is the fullness of Christ, something for which we strive, but which will not be reached until Jesus comes again at the end of the age. Here again, we see Paul’s doctrine of the already/not yet. We presently possess all the benefits of Christ, but Jesus remains the standard of our conduct. What does God expect of me? Look to Jesus! This is why we presently strive for both unity and maturity, even though these things are not realized in their fullness until the end of the age. This means there is no perfect church, and no end to our striving for both unity and maturity until we die or Christ comes again!

But the immediate pay-off in this struggle for maturity is an important one. As he tells us in verse 14, Paul exhorts us to do this 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.” Perfection does not come until the end, but in the meantime we must be prepared for every kind of assault which may come our way, from false doctrine, to all sorts of human scheming and deceitfulness. Paul implies that it is not a matter of if this will happen but when. Spiritual children cannot deal with these attacks, but mature Christians can. If unity comes from a common confession of faith, and maturity comes through knowing more and more about Christ, then I take Paul to be exhorting us to be knowledgeable Christians, able to respond to the false doctrines which will come our way. And it falls to the ministers given by God to preach, teach, shepherd and evangelize, so that the body grows from childhood to full maturity.
In verses 15-16, Paul says “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.” Instead being tossed about, defenseless, and embracing error, we speak the truth in love. In doing this, Paul says, we grow up into maturity with Christ as head of that body to which we have been added. When those whom God has called to serve his church as ministers are fulfilling the purpose for which Jesus has sent them (preaching, teaching, shepherding and evangelizing), the body of Christ functions as it should. The church grows into maturity, and as it does so, it builds itself up in love.

What then, can we take with us from this passage?

Whenever Paul discusses the unity and maturity of the church, he reminds us that since Christ ascended into heaven, Jesus enables his people to grow to maturity by giving gifts to his church. In Ephesians 4, Paul’s point is that Jesus descended from heaven to earth to accomplish our redemption, and then returned to heaven in his resurrection and ascension. But Jesus has not left us on our own. He has given us gifts of the Spirit, and sent to us ministers of the gospel who are to preach, teach, evangelize and shepherd the saints so that they grow from spiritual infancy to full maturity. Once mature, we are able to resist heresy and error, and we see through the plots and schemes of those who oppose the gospel. There is a reciprocal relationship here. As we mature, the body functions properly. As the body functions properly, we mature. We are held together in unity through our common confession of faith, and through those gifts Christ gave to his church we are properly equipped so that as we mature and remain unified, we also grow in love. Why did Jesus give these gifts to his church when he ascended into heaven? He gave ministers to his church for the building up of his body—those for whom Jesus has died, and those for whom Jesus was raised—until we reach maturity, are working properly, built up in love.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Look back to what you wrote down under Study the Text 1 (if you are going through these questions in a group where individuals have not gone through that section, go ahead and reference that it and walk through it together). As you consider your role in the Church, whether it is on the list in Eph. 4:11 or in Rom. 12:6–8, think about how it works in tandem with other roles for the ultimate benefit of “equip(ping) the saints for the work of ministry,” building “up the body of Christ,” and helping the universal Church “attain to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God…” (Eph. 4:12–13).

2) If you are comfortable doing so in a group, share the short prayer you wrote down for Study the Text 2. If at least a few people shared, what common themes expressed in the group related to the grace the Church as a whole has as a result of Christ’s descension and ascension? How might you currently see things for which you are grateful as building up the overall spiritual maturity of the Church—not only its understanding of biblically-sound doctrine but also its practical application and outpouring of it, which should result in being built up in unity and love?
CHRIST’S
BELOVED
CHURCH
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.
1. Before we explore these two verses, back up to 4:14, and back up a little further if you need a better recap of what precedes “rather.” Last week, we did touch on the reason for sound doctrine, but we should reemphasize the point. The purpose of having a solid theological foundation and the reason for which we, together, go through studies like this can only point to love. Out of love, we speak the truth to one another. And we cannot speak truth without being able to comprehend truth. If you read God's word and study theology and the end result is only that you become puffed up in arrogance, stop what you are doing, pray, ask God for forgiveness, and repent. The last thing you need to do right now (well, maybe not the last thing) is to read large portions of Scripture or flip through dense theological texts. What you more likely need is to deepen your practices of spiritual disciplines; however, those of Scripture reading and memorization are probably not what you are ready for just yet. Left unchecked, even solid orthodoxy (right belief) without orthopraxy (right practice) can lead to “human cunning (and) craftiness in deceitful schemes” (Eph. 4:14). Satan, for one, sure knows the Scriptures.

To be sure, the stuff we are going through here is important. Knowing God’s word and theology are important—done properly, they draw us into a closer knowledge of and relationship with God. Getting beyond a mere childlike understanding, moving toward maturity, is critical, but if you have lost your childlike faith, the one that draws you to humility, unity, reverence, and affection, rather than arrogance, argumentation, division, and strife, you need to focus your energy elsewhere for a bit. Reach out to a trusted pastor or leader in the Church and ask them for encouragement for and guidance on going through some spiritual disciplines that might help you grow your affection for our triune God and your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, and then return to deep study once you are hungry for formation rather than merely information.

And with this slight detour out of the way, which has been on the heart of someone who has had to learn this lesson the hard way, we will return to the text.
2. Paul returns to his body metaphor for the Church in these two verses, which he introduced, at least in this epistle, in Ephesians 1:22–23, which we studied in week 9 (recall that he had already used it in 1 Cor. 12:12–27 and Rom. 12:4–5). Note that in “speaking the truth in love,” this body “grow(s) up”—it matures. Also note the plural pronoun here in both Eph. 4:15 and 4:13, as it relates to maturity. Here, Paul is not concerned with an individual’s spiritual health apart from the body. He has no desire for you to be “spiritual but not religious.” He writes of “the whole body, joined and held together” (v. 16). When it is “working properly,” referring to each part doing so along with the others, the body grows. So yes, the spiritual health and maturity of the individual matters, but it only really matters in connection to the whole.

Turn to 1 Cor. 12:21–26. How does this further emphasize Paul’s point in Ephesians? Remaining in 1 Cor. 12, read 27–31, noting the similarities to Eph. 4:11. To see more about “the higher gifts,” turn to 1 Cor. 14:5—Paul does rank gifts, but what is important is the building up of the Church. And since they are gifts, they only have to do with that which God has distributed. We should “desire the higher gifts,” but with the realization that only God can grant them and that they are for the benefit of the Church, not our own gain or pride. And some of us may not really want such gifts—“everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required” (Lk. 12:48 NRSV). And this is where maturity comes in. Many of us are not ready for what we think we desire. This “desire” Paul refers to must be accompanied by maturity, responsibility, humility, and a heart of service. Or plug in the fruit of the Spirit from Eph. 4:2–3 and Gal. 5:22–24. If one of these items is lacking, the gift will be a curse, rather than a blessing, to the body.

Rather than pointing the finger at others, think of a time you failed in a certain role—we all have at one time or another. And specifically think of a time you know you were to blame, at least in part. Was it because you lacked patience? Self-control? Love? Were you jealous or angry or divisive? How might the results of the gift have worked out differently if you lived out the fruit of the Spirit you have been given?
FOR A DEEPER REFLECTION:

Why Jesus Gives Gifts to the Church (excerpt)
by J. Ligon Duncan

If you want to know what your heavenly Father is like, look at Jesus, because in God there is no un-Christlikeness at all. Jesus says this to His disciples. “Show us the Father and it is enough.” “Haven’t you seen me? If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.” And Paul now extends it and says, “I want you to look like Christ. I want people to say, ‘Boy, those people, they act like Jesus.’” That’s the effect of the ministry of the Word and then their mutual ministry to one another.

Now, what’s that supposed to produce? Look at verse 14. “As a result, we are no longer to be children tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness and deceitful scheming.” In other words, they are so established in the truth that they have Biblical discernment. Since I graduated from college and started seminary a long time ago, about every five years I have seen some crazy fad sweep through the evangelical world. It may be a theological fad; it may be some sort of a technique or methodological fad. But about every five years, somebody comes along with a secret key. And the lemmings go right over the cliff following the secret key. And the apostle Paul is saying, “The reason I want the ministry of the Word in your lives and you being matured and you being united in the faith and you knowing Christ is so that you have discernment; you don’t follow after those crazy false teachings that are floating around all over the place.” So it’s a congregation that is established in the truth. …

Then, what else? Look at verse 15. “Speaking the truth in love.” Ah! He wants people who speak the truth, not just speak the truth lovingly but speak the truth in the interest of love. That is, you remember how Paul says in 1 Timothy chapter 1 verses 3 to 15 that the goal of his instruction to Timothy, to not let false teachers have any influence on the congregation and to tell the congregation not to listen to false teaching but to listen to teaching that is rooted in the truth, the goal of that instruction, Paul says, is “love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” Isn’t that interesting? The goal of Paul’s telling Timothy, “Teach them good doctrine. Teach them the Bible. Don’t let them listen to bad doctrine” is so that they live lives of love. Truth and love are not in competition. Like if you care too much about the truth you won’t be loving! The truth is designed to create people who love.

And what does this do? Well, look at the end of verse 15 and verse 16 – “to grow up in all aspects into him who is the head, even Christ. From whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” So what does all this do? It leads to us growing up together into a comprehensive, congregational maturity as a body. And notice how he comes back to love again – “building up of itself in love.” Notice that Paul’s view is, if I could put it this way, “No Christian left behind.” The kind of growth that he wants in the congregation isn’t purely individualistic. He wants the whole congregation together to grow. Listen to what Calvin says about this. “This means” – he’s talking about verses 15 and 16 – “This means that no increase is of use which does not correspond to the whole body.” Wow! And by the way, Paul says this all the time. You already heard him say it earlier in this passage, that he wants you together with the saints. He says the same thing in Ephesians 3:14-19 – “together with all the saints he wants you to know the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.” Paul is very concerned that the whole body together mature.

Why? Because the church is God’s “Plan A” and there is no “Plan B.” You are God’s plan for witnessing to His reign and rule in this world. You are God’s plan to responding to what’s happening in this crazy culture. You are the plan.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Many of us are good at speaking “truth,” at least how we see it. But how can we a) ensure that we actually know what we are talking about, and b) do so in a manner that builds up the body of Christ rather than tears it down?

2. Now, let us consider the inverse. At times, we want to do what we think is the loving thing by not speaking the truth in certain situations out of fear that we might offend. But you cannot separate the two. By failing to speak the truth, we then are not loving. How do we balance the two?
CHRIST’S BELOVED CHURCH
Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. 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, to 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.
1. Similar to what Paul does in Ephesians 4:17–24, he does in Galatians 5:16–26: contrasting the “desires of the flesh” with “walk(ing) by the Spirit,” or the “old self” with the “new self.” Now look to Col. 3:1–17, an earlier passage where Paul makes a very similar contrast between “selves.” In both Ephesians and Colossians, Paul is also using language resembling that which he had used in Romans 5:12–21. “Self” in Eph. 4:22, 24 is used as a gender-inclusive term in the ESV to translate ἄνθρωπος (anthrōpos), which can be translated as either “man,” “human,” or “self,” depending on context. In Rom. 5:12ff, the ESV translates ἄνθρωπος as “man,” in reference to the contrast between Adam, the “one man” through which “sin came into the world” and Jesus Christ, the “one man” through whom grace “abounded for many” (v. 16). And Paul does the same thing in 1 Cor. 15:20–22. In the earlier passages, Paul is pointing out that as a result of the fall, all humankind was in union with Adam in death, but in Christ, “those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness” (Rom. 5:17) are united in his life. In our passage in Ephesians, Paul describes what this new life in Christ looks like in contrast with the old life in Adam.

Read Rom. 5:12–21 and 1 Cor. 15:20–22, and make note of the benefits you have in Christ over against that which is in Adam. Examine what Paul writes about “death” and “life.” Is he only referring to “the afterlife,” or is he also referring to something about death and life that take place presently and physically on earth? Though we await our resurrected bodies, is there present power on earth as a result of Christ’s resurrection, as “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20)? Look to Rom. 8:9–11 for additional guidance on your answer here.

1.2 Now look back to Eph. 4:17–24, specifically vv. 22–24. Pay close attention to the verb “put off,” which in the Greek is ἀποθέσθαι (apothesthai), which is in the aorist aspect, something we can think of as “past tense” in English, connected to the aorist ἐδιδάχθητε (edidachthēte), “taught” in v. 21. We had been taught to put off our former selves, and the language assumes that this is either something that has been done or at least is possible now.
And the same goes for “put on,” ἐνδύσασθαι (endysasthai), in v. 24. Paul’s audience, including us, were taught to put off the person we were in Adam and to put on Christ. The power of Christ’s resurrection generated from his Spirit “give(s) life to (our) mortal bodies” right now! This is resurrection life to be experienced already, despite the fact that we are not yet fully resurrected ourselves.

Look at the lists with respect to your “new self” in Col. 3:12–17 and Eph. 4:23–5:4, and make note of the character traits associated with it (we will be slowly going through this list through week 29, but it is good to familiarize yourself with it now). This is what resurrection life is to look like.

2. Backing up to the beginning of this passage, in v. 17, we will now touch on the fact that Paul’s readers are to “no longer walk as the Gentiles do” (looking again at vv. 18–19, we can see that he accuses Gentiles of possessing the negative qualities of the “old self”). In the first study guide, in week 3, we noted how when our English Bibles use “Gentile,” coming from the Latin, gentillis, meaning “people,” “nation,” or “ethnicity,” it is generally translating the Greek, ἔθνος (ethnos), meaning the same. This is the same sense in which the Old Testament contrasts the people of Israel with “the nations,” from the Hebrew, גּוֹיִם (gōwyim), translated as ἔθνος in the Septuagint (see Is. 49:6 ESV). What Paul, of course, does not mean here is that “the nations” possess these negative features while Israelites/Judeans/Jews do not. A quick look through the Old Testament makes it quite evident that they, too, had been “darkened in their understanding,” “alienated from the life of God,” “callous,” “greedy,” etc. In 1 Cor. 6:11, after a similar list, Paul writes to his Corinthian audience, “And such were some of you”…BUT they “were washed…sanctified…justified.” Again, Paul is contrasting the life before Christ and the life in Christ. This is not about ethnicity; this is about old vs. new. “New” refers to the people of God, whether Jew or Gentile.

Further, as mentioned in week 20, Paul’s writing a paraenesis, in which, consistent with the Hellenistic style, he is not exhorting his audience in light of any particular vice—he assumes that as “new selves,” they are not having
any particular, widespread issue here. But he is reminding them of what
the new self ought to look like, and as he prayed in 3:14–21, he desires that
present resurrection life, that the foretaste of the consummated kingdom, be
brought about to perfection.

Assume for a moment that we see Paul’s mentioning of Gentiles here as
indicating some sort of ethnic inferiority—something that would be entirely
inconsistent with his thesis. How might we make a similar error today? Are
there certain groups within the body of Christ, whether by birth (e.g., ethnicity
or gender) or by choice (e.g., political affiliation) that we struggle to see as
new people in Christ? Are Democrats supposed to become Republicans
upon conversion or vice versa? Given the continued presence of sin and
death on this side of Christ’s return, the struggle is real, so to speak, but we
all possess the same power of the Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the
dead. So, we ought to exhort one another in love, speaking the truth in love,
to live into our resurrected lives. We ought to pray for one another as Paul
prayed for his readers, that we all may be “filled with all the fullness of God”
(Eph. 3:19).
FOR A DEEPER REFLECTION:

Putting Off and Putting On

Each of us are prone to different sins, but if there is one transgression that we all have committed, it is the sin of lying. Those who have raised children know that while you have to teach a child to tell the truth, children know how to stretch the truth almost as soon as they start talking. The great American man of letters Mark Twain was surely onto something when he said, “A man is never more truthful than when he acknowledges himself a liar” (Mark Twain and I, p. 34).

Twain’s statement, no doubt unintentional on his part, captures an essential biblical truth: “All mankind are liars” (Ps. 116:11). Born in Adam, we come into this world with a view of truth that winks at the twisting of facts for the sake of personal benefit. Since Adam was our representative, we cannot help but lie and earn for ourselves eternal death (1 Cor. 15:22), just as our first parents lied to themselves when they thought that they could eat the forbidden fruit and protect themselves from the consequences (Gen. 3:6–7).

There is hope, however, for the Christian, since those who trust in Jesus alone for salvation are not in Adam but in Christ. We who believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God no longer belong to Adamic humanity but to the new humanity that our Father is forming in the image of Jesus. This is Paul’s main point in today’s passage — we have put off our old self, that is, our Adamic nature, and have put on our new self, that is, our Savior (Col. 3:9–10). Having been given this new status in conversion, we no longer have to lie or commit any of the other sins of the tongue (included in the immediate context of verse 9; see v. 8). In fact, we betray our new status in Christ when we forget that we have put on His righteousness and behave as if we are still members of Adam and not members of Jesus.

Paul’s view, however, is based in reality; he believed that putting on Christ meant total perfection was unattainable this side of glory. Though there is a decisive change in conversion, we are still tempted to take out our old, ratty Adamic wardrobe every once in a while. But when we are tempted to do this and lie once more, we are to resist in the power of the Spirit, knowing that through personal renewal He continues to make the clothing of Christ fit us better day by day (v. 10).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. As Christian community, how can we, together, press into the realities of living lives presently in light of Christ’s resurrection? How do we exhort one another into putting off our old selves and putting on our new selves? How do we realize that we have been, as the Apostle Peter put it, “called out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9)?

2) As we exhort one another to live as our new selves, how do we ensure that we are not preaching moralism or works righteousness? We are often at risk of “cheap grace” as one chief error, but it is also easy to go to the opposite faulty extreme, neither of which understand the gospel. How do we communally embrace the grace of God and extend it to others, with the realization that grace not only saves us from hell, it changes our lives (Rom. 5:17)?

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now am found
T’was blind but now I see
CHRIST’S BELOVED CHURCH
WEEK 24

PUT ON TRUTH

EPHESIANS 4:25

25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.
1. And now, we’ll slow down and go through these virtues, one-by-one, which will take us through Ephesians 5:4 in week 29. Looking ahead for just a moment (or back, since we already read this extended section last week), notice how many of the virtues described by Paul have to do with speech, including the one we are studying now, truth. Next week, we will cover anger (v. 26); in week 27, we will cover “corrupting talk,” contrasted with the talk that “is good for building up” (v. 29). In week 28, we will get to “bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander…along with all malice,” juxtaposed with being “kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another” (v. 31). In week 29, we will go over “no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking…but instead…thanksgiving” (5:4). It seems Paul cares a great deal about how our “new selves” ought to communicate. As Christians, especially in America, we might spend more energy worried about “free speech,” while caring little about what our own “Christian speech” ought to resemble. This is probably most evident in our Facebook posts and Tweets. Even if we refrain from contributing vile speech in our posts or comments, we might like, heart, share, or retweet the horrendous speech of our favorite politicians or celebrities, which isn’t any better. We have a problem. Even if Paul was not writing in response to any particular vice among his original audience, we, as his secondary audience, who are just as much recipients of the inspired Scriptures, certainly have a vice with respect to our speech.

Before covering v. 25 in more depth, let us look to other places in the Scriptures that show concern with our speech. James 3:1–12 is a big one. The main thrust of James’ epistle is that Christians are not only hearers, but also “doers of the word” (Jm. 1:22). The “doing” is displayed not only in our works, such as giving to the needy (2:16), apart from which is faith is dead (2:17), but also by what comes from the tongue, with which we both “bless our Lord and Father” and “curse people who are made in the likeness of God” (3:9). James, though an epistle by definition, functions more like a collection of wisdom sayings, much like those in Psalms and Proverbs in the Old Testament, which also has a great deal to say about our speech (see Ps. 10:3–7, 12:2–4, 15:1–3; 34:13, 35:27–28; Pr. 6:16–19, 10:18–21, 12:17–23, 15:2–7, etc.).

Looking at each of these verses in Ephesians, James, Psalms, and Proverbs, what are a couple things that we can conclude about the necessity of “Christian speech,” if you will? Beyond simply appearing to be moral, upstanding individuals, what benefit does such speech have upon the Christian community? How about beyond the Christian community? How can the way the Church speaks be “a light to the nations”? Or have we been the opposite?
2) Back to Eph. 4:25, we see that we need to “put away falsehood” and “speak the truth with (our) neighbor.” The Greek word for “falsehood” or “lying,” as the KJV uses, ψεῦδος (pseudos), is the same word from which we get words such as pseudonym or “false name.” This word is related to the verb, ψευδομαρτυρήσεις (pseudomartureó), meaning “to bear false witness,” which is used by the Septuagint to translate the idea behind the three Hebrew words, נבורי נער שקר (na’āneh ‘ēd šāqer), “bear false witness” used in Exodus 20:5, where we see the 9th Commandment. Ψεῦδος is used a total of nine times in the New Testament, with only a single use in the gospels. John records Jesus using the word as he speaks to the Pharisees saying, “When (the devil) lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (Jn. 8:44). More than simply a mistake or perhaps shoddy research, ψεῦδος implies intentional deception, deeply imbedded in one’s own character. Today, we hear a lot about “fake news,” so much so that the term has become void of meaning. Politicians toss it around when they dislike a journalist’s view of the facts or if they innocently report an error. Meanwhile, there are entire agencies, often overseas, intentionally designed to deceive the public and influence its opinion. While shoddy journalism violates journalistic ethics and is hardly truth, it is not necessarily intentional deception.

Of course, what Paul has in mind for his audience is something far beyond the low bar of just avoiding intentional falsehood. He calls for us to “speak the truth,” ἀλήθεια (alētheia), a word with far greater NT presence. To contrast our example of John referring to the ψεῦδος of Satan, let us look to the same gospel writer’s use of ἀλήθεια as applied to Jesus. This is something far beyond epistemological superiority. In Jn. 1:14, perhaps the most famous verse in the Johannine prologue, we see that the glory of the Word (the λόγος, logos—Jesus) is “full of grace and ἀληθείας.” This phrase, “grace and truth,” likely recalls the Hebrew idea of נב gode (hesed) and ויהו we’e’met), translated in the ESV as “steadfast love and faithfulness” (נב gode can mean “faithfulness” or “truth”). נב gode, combined with נב gode, refers to God’s covenantal faithfulness to his people. John, writing to both Jews and Gentiles, was likely hoping to use the covenantal ideas to reach his Jewish audience, showing them that Jesus is the promised Messiah, and the Greek philosophical idea of λόγος to proclaim to Gentiles that Jesus is the height of
reason that animates the universe, or the divine intermediary between God and humankind. Either audience should understand the height of truth here as something that is not only factual, but something loving and good and powerful—it is the ultimate truth. This is the type of truth we are to speak to our neighbor, contrasted with “not bearing falsehood against (our) neighbor” (Ex. 20:5).

With this understanding of “falsehood” and “truth,” our hope is that you have a deeper understanding of the weight of these concepts—one is demonic, the other is from above. Considering the backdrop, or at least one of them, behind Ephesians, where competing cosmic forces are at play, how might we use truth as we make “the manifold wisdom of God…known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (Eph. 3:10)?
FOR A DEEPER REFLECTION:

Speaking Truth with Your Neighbor (excerpt)
by John Piper

You recall that Ephesians 4:25 is a specific, practical instance of verse 22. Verse 22 says, “Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts [i.e., desires].” Then verse 25 uses the same word for “put off” and says specifically, “Therefore, putting off falsehood, let every one speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.”

So it is clear that falsehood is a specific characteristic of the “old nature” referred to in verse 22. Put off the old nature, specifically, put off falsehood. Why is this helpful? It is helpful because it shows us where lying comes from.

Verse 22 says that the old nature—the pre-conversion nature—is corrupted because of desires, and the thing that makes these desires bad is that they come from deceit. There is nothing wrong with desire in and of itself. What’s bad is when desire goes after the wrong things. And the reason desire goes after the wrong things is because our hearts are deceived about what is truly desirable.

But now we have seen that lying is one of the characteristics of this old nature. In other words when Paul says that the old nature is corrupt, he means (among other things) that the old nature is a liar. And this means, then, that the corruption of lying comes from the desires of deceit. Very simply this means that the reason we lie is because we have desires that we shouldn’t have, and the reason we have them is because we are deceived about what is truly desirable.

To pick up the lesson from verses 18 and 19, our hardness of heart against God leads to darkness of understanding, and darkness leads to ignorance of what is truly valuable and desirable in life, and ignorance lays us open to all the deceits of Satan who Jesus says is the father of lies (John 8:44). …

What we have seen in the connection between verses 22 and 25 is that the old nature is given to lying because it is enslaved to desires that are based on deceit. The lies of Satan beget the lies of sinners. So Paul says, “Put off that old nature—put off lying—and put on the new nature—the nature created by God and marked by righteousness and holiness that come not from Satanic deceit but from the truth” (v. 24).

The lies of Satan that beget lies of sinners have to be replaced by the truth of Jesus (v. 21) that begets truthfulness of saints. This is what is meant in verse 23 by the renewing of the spirit of the mind. The mind has to be filled

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with Satan-fighting truth. And out of that truth will come righteousness and holiness, and part of this holiness is what verse 25 calls, “speaking truth with your neighbor.”

O, how I wish we had time to go into all the truth of God’s character and promises that take away the impulse to lie. There are such incredibly great promises for God’s people that if we really believed them, the fear and greed that tempt us to lie would melt like icicles under an April sun and we would be full of freedom and light—and, therefore, truth. Truth-telling is a “work of faith” (1 Thessalonians 1:3), because faith in the goodness and sovereign power of God conquers the deceitful craving for esteem and safety and money and power that causes us to distort the truth in order to gain a worldly advantage.

But instead of going into all those promises, let’s close by focusing briefly on the one truth Paul chooses to focus on at the end of verse 25. Paul says, “Let every one speak the truth with his neighbor—(WHY?)—FOR WE ARE MEMBERS ONE OF ANOTHER.”

So out of all the relationships he could have focused on, he chooses to admonish us to tell the truth to our fellow Christians, because we are all members of one body, and therefore members of each other (1:23; 2:16; 3:6; 4:16; 5:28–30).

I think he has in mind this kind of idea: if the body is eating with a fork, and the eye lies to the hand about where the mouth is, why, the hand may stab the eye. In other words, when you deceive a fellow believer, it’s like deceiving yourself. When you mislead a believer, it means that the truth of God concerning the body of Christ hasn’t renewed the spirit of your mind.

When the truth concerning the reality of the body of Christ and your part in it really hits home and you believe it, the spirit of your mind will be transformed about how you act toward other believers. When the truth of the body of Christ renews the spirit of your mind, you will no more intentionally lie to a brother or sister in Christ than you will intentionally close your own eyes while trying to adjust the blade on a live buzz saw.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Look back to the implications you wrote down under Study the Text 1 in this section and consider how they can be put to practical use in your Redemption Community or other Christian community, among family, friends, and neighbors, in your workplace, as well as in the digital world. Is there something more to “Christian speech” than cheesy slogans and ripoffs of what is said or done in “the secular world” (if there really is such dualism)? How can we be creators in culture through our speech rather than copycats? How can we be a positive and effective light to the nations in our speech rather than just coming off as weird—or worse, hateful and judgmental?

2. Since we are specifically studying truth this week, how do the above questions and answers apply to speaking truth to our neighbors, whomever they may be? How do we balance, grace and truth?
CHRIST’S BELOVED CHURCH
WEEK 25

PUT ON
RIGHTeous ANGER

EPHESIANS 4:26–27

26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil.
1.1 As Christians, we are probably too fast and loose with our “righteous indignation” defense. Whenever we think an injustice has been committed, particularly toward ourselves, we assume we can play that card. If a driver cuts us off, well by golly, they are not only breaking the law, they could kill someone! Don't they value life? Haven't they read Romans 13? We think this is a good opportunity to show them God's anger, so an unnecessarily sustained slamming of the horn, obnoxious headlight flickering, and possibly some sign language we would not use in front of our mothers (or at least grandmothers) are warranted—no matter if our distracted road rage is now making us the offender who could harm a life as we attempt to operate a two-ton deadly weapon at 70 mph. So, this might be an easy case to see where we need to better manage our anger and chill out. But then where does Paul's admonition apply?

Perhaps before we focus on the type of anger we often think we are entitled to, we should jump to the little verse that is only five words in the Greek, Eph. 4:27, and then move toward the left. “And give no opportunity to the devil.” Paul makes a connection between anger and Satan, so we should probably first make sure we are not aligning ourselves with him before we think we are on God's side in our anger. Here, we can see Paul echoing, whether intentionally or not, Genesis 4:3–8. The connection between anger and the devil is not explicit, but we can see the result of anger tied to the work of the devil. In the Genesis passage, not long after we read of the fall and the serpent's deceptive work, we read that Cain killed his brother Abel as he “was very angry” because “the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering” but not for Cain and his. In v. 7, Yahweh says to Cain, “if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.” The devil-anger connection should be apparent here. There's an even subtler connection in 6:11–12 if you wish to look there as well. Write down any takeaways you have from this brief survey of anger thus far.
1.2 Before we think these examples from Genesis are too extreme and beyond anything relatable to us, we should realize that Jesus makes a connection between anger and murder in Matthew 5:22 (NRSV): “If you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment (for murder—see also Nm. 35:30–31).” Continuing in Mt. 5, we see that Jesus moves on to another sin of the tongue, casting insult (v. 22), and then he gets to the necessity of reconciliation in vv. 23–26. Although at this point, Jesus jumps to accusations and civil proceedings, the necessity of reconciliation still applies. One should not wonder too much why this was close in proximity to anger in Jesus’ train of thought.

Moving to the left in Eph. 4:26–27, we can see that reconciliation was important to Paul as well. “Do not let the sun go down on your anger.” This does not require a great deal of interpretive work. If you are angry with them, take the initiative to be reconciled to them immediately. And do not take “do not let the sun go down” too literally as a legalist looking for a loophole would. Set the standard higher. If you are angry with someone at 9:00 AM, do not wait until 6:00 PM to seek reconciliation. Maybe try to do it before lunch. In Mt. 5, Jesus used “You have heard” to refer to bad interpretations of Old Testament law, and then he sets the standard higher. Similarly, do not be a legalistic bad interpreter of the sunset clause here. The gospel requires greater grace, not greater legalism and loopholes. Also in Mt. 5:25, Jesus said, “Come to terms quickly with your accuser.” And yes, this is for the benefit of not ending up in prison. But we should not pretend that holding on to anger rather than quickly seeking reconciliation does not have consequences that could be avoided.

Why else might quickly seeking reconciliation and getting over our anger be important? Are there any other biblical principles or illustrations that apply here?
1.3) And moving further leftward, we can return to righteous anger. “Be angry, and do not sin.” Ὀργίζω (orgizō), “angry,” is used seven other times in the New Testament, and we already covered one instance. One of the instances we see in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Mt. 18:34), another in the Parable of the Wedding Feast/Great Banquet (Mt. 22:7; Lk. 14:21), and another in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15:28). The other two instances in are Revelation (11:18, 12:17), which we will not cover here.

Read each of the parables in their entirety (though you can pick just one account of the Parable of the Wedding Feast/Great Banquet). What is common about the anger of the master in the first parable and the king/master in the second pair? And what sets the display of anger of the Prodigal Son’s brother apart? What can we learn about righteous indignation from these teachings of Jesus?
FOR A DEEPER REFLECTION:

Commentary on Ephesians 4:26
by John Calvin

Be ye angry, and sin not. Whether or not the apostle had in his eye a part of the fourth Psalm is uncertain. The words used by him (Ὄργιζεσθε καὶ 
υὴ ἁμαρτάνετε) occur in the Greek translation, though the word όργίζεσθε, 
which is translated, be ye angry, is considered by some to mean tremble. 
150 The Hebrew verb רג (ragaz) signifies either to be agitated by anger, 
or, to tremble. As to the passage of the Psalm, the idea of trembling will be 
quite appropriate. “Do not choose to resemble madmen, who rush fearlessly 
in any direction, but let the dread of being accounted foolhardy keep you in 
awe.” The word sometimes signifies to strive or quarrel, as, in that instance, 
(Genesis 45:24,) “See that ye fall not out by the way;” and accordingly, the 
Psalmist adds, “Commune with your own heart, and be still,” — abstain from 
furious encounters.

In my opinion, Paul merely alludes to the passage with the following view. 
There are three faults by which we offend God in being angry. The first 
is, when our anger arises from slight causes, and often from no cause 
whatever, or at least from private injuries or offenses. The second is, 
when we go beyond the proper bounds, and are hurried into intemperate 
excesses. The third is, when our anger, which ought to have been directed 
against ourselves or against sins, is turned against our brethren. Most 
appropriately, therefore, did Paul, when he wished to describe the proper 
limitation of anger, employ the well-known passage, Be ye angry, and sin 
not. We comply with this injunction, if the objects of our anger are sought, 
not in others, but in ourselves, — if we pour out our indignation against 
our own faults. With respect to others, we ought to be angry, not at their 
persons, but at their faults; nor ought we to be excited to anger by private 
offenses, but by zeal for the glory of the Lord. Lastly, our anger, after a 
reasonable time, ought to be allowed to subside, without mixing itself with 
the violence of carnal passions.

Let not the sun go down. It is scarcely possible, however, but that we shall 
sometimes give way to improper and sinful passion, — so strong is the 
tendency of the human mind to what is evil. Paul therefore suggests a 
second remedy, that we shall quickly suppress our anger, and not suffer it to 
gather strength by continuance. The first remedy was, Be ye angry, and sin 
not; but, as the great weakness of human nature renders this exceedingly 
difficult, the next is — not to cherish wrath too long in our minds, or allow it 
sufficient time to become strong. He enjoins accordingly, let not the sun go 
down upon your wrath. If at any time we happen to be angry, let us endeavor 
to be appeased before the sun has set.

12 "John Calvin, Calvin's Commentaries, vol. 41, Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the 
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. If your group has not gone through the Study the Text section for this week, walk through it together and then discuss how unrighteous anger and the work of the devil relate and how reconciliation should be brought into the situation. How does anger destroy community? How does reconciliation foster the unity Paul cares so much about in Ephesians and elsewhere?

2. Read the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Mt. 18:21–35) together. Are you more often the master? Or the unforgiving servant? Discuss how righteous anger might not have much to do with injustices committed against us personally (though it can), and how it perhaps might have more to do with how to respond to injustice, in this case, lack of mercy, committed against our neighbors. What are some examples today that might justify righteous anger? How can exercising that anger play out? For the answer to this last part, be sure to consider things like due process, whether offenses take place within Christian community or beyond it, whether the offender has been spoken with, etc. Remaining in Mt. 18, vv. 15–20 is probably a good place to start. 1 Cor. 5:1–13 is another. Taking vengeance yourself is not what is in mind here, whatsoever (Rom. 12:14–21). Above all, reconciliation is the goal.
LET THE THIEF NO LONGER STEAL, BUT RATHER LET HIM LABOR, DOING HONEST WORK WITH HIS OWN HANDS, SO THAT HE MAY HAVE SOMETHING TO SHARE WITH ANYONE IN NEED.
1.1 We are taking a break from what we do with our tongues and lips this week to focus on what we do with our hands. Paul focuses on three primary things here: theft, work, and charity/works of mercy. Remember the broader theme here in Eph. 4:17–5:4, the putting off the old self and putting on the new self. And this theme fits with other Pauline motifs of death and life, Adam and Christ. And beyond empty moralism or simply being “good people,” these virtues within these categories are for the purposes of living unto resurrection life, building up and creating unity within the Church, and participating in Jesus’ inaugurated kingdom, unto the benefit of all the nations, to which we are to be a light. There is a new way of life, a new era, so let us walk in it (Eph. 4:1). Under King Jesus’ reign, pilferers become philanthropists (Mt. 19:1–10).

In the list in Colossians 3:5–10, which is rather similar to Paul’s list here in Ephesians, “thief” has no parallel, but he certainly makes reference elsewhere, like in 1 Cor. 6:10, where he writes that they “will (not) inherit the kingdom of God.” This is in a passage we referenced in week 23, where we highlighted that “such were some” (of Paul’s readership), who were then “washed” and “sanctified” and “justified” (v. 11). Paul assumes that those who have been washed—both by the Holy Spirit and fire and also by the sign from water in baptism, as touched on in week 20—sanctified, and justified no longer practice things like theft and will inherit the kingdom of God.

To Paul, the new self does not just stop doing something negative; he/she, rather, does something opposite and positive in his/her life in light of Christ’s resurrection. Here, he/she works instead of steals—he/she does not just remain idle and delight in the fact that he/she no longer steals. Paul, for one, was a big fan of working with his hands (see 1 Th. 2:9 and 4:11), while he commands the Thessalonians to not be idle and eat of that from which others toiled (2 Th. 3:6–15). But he does not just leave it as “If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat” (v. 10), a verse many of us like to throw around to avoid charitable giving or as a defense for certain economic policies. Idleness was something Paul needed to address in Thessalonians. So that was his emphasis there. Paul’s audience in Ephesians does not seem to have such an issue, but he does remind them of the virtues of work and generosity. We can assume here that “anyone in need” in Eph. 4:28 is either unable to work or able but making an insufficient income, not unwilling like at least some folks in Thessalonica. In Rom 12:13, Paul also wrote to “contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality,” and in 2 Cor. 9:9, quoting from Ps. 112:9, he writes, “He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever,” referring to the “cheerful giver” that God loves (v. 7).

Consider this progression here, going from the old self (thief) to the new self, who not only avoids idleness and who works for a living, but who also gives, when he/she used to take. Comment below with whatever comes to mind about this amazing transition from death to life.
Beyond thieves turned laboring benefactors, Paul leaves a broader principle here that gets none of us off the hook, lest we think we can skip this verse if we have never stolen (that should still leave almost nobody—Have you ever over/under estimated a figure on your tax returns unto your benefit? Have you ever logged hours on a timesheet you have not worked?). What Paul shows his audience here by referring to thieves is the impact repentance has not only on one’s lifestyle and livelihood but on the broader community. You can insert virtually any other sinful behavior into Paul’s formula and make it apply to you. Try it. Make it personal.

“Let the X no longer Y, but rather let him/her Z…so that A.”
Why do we work? Some hold a 40-hour-a-week job simply to receive the paycheck. They glance at the clock all day, waiting for the moment when they are freed from their labor. Their reward comes on payday. Others stay in a certain job to receive a promotion that will give them more benefits. Others work because they hope for a good bonus at the end of the year. Some try to make as much money as possible so as to ensure security for the future.

What does the Apostle Paul say should be our reason for working? Speaking to the Ephesian elders, Paul reminded them of the words of Jesus: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Yes, we are blessed to receive a paycheck. God blesses our labor. He wants us to work at our jobs with all our hearts, as unto Him. But the bigger blessing comes to those who give. And that leads us to rethink why we work 40 hours a week anyway. We all work to gain. But do we work… to give?

In Ephesians 4:28, Paul claims that the reason we should labor is so that “we may have something to share.” This cuts against both the conservative American mindset that sees everyone individually fending for themselves and the liberal American mindset that keeps entire groups of people dependent on government funds. Paul tells the non-worker to stop being a parasite in the community, to get a job and start helping others. But he tells the diligent worker to keep on laboring, so that he can receive the blessing that comes from giving.

Too many of us think only of receiving. The bigger our paycheck, the better our house, the nicer our car – the more prestige we obtain in the eyes of others. Jesus’ way is radically different. The bigger our paycheck, the more we can give away.

1.1 Consider the formula we borrowed from Paul at the end of Study the Text 1.2: “Let the X no longer Y, but rather let him/her Z…so that A” and walk through it as a group. Think about the implications X and Y have upon your community, both within the Church and beyond. What kind of parasite has your sin been in your community? How about Z? In light of your work, or whatever the positive inverse of the negative X or Y you listed might be, how is that benefiting not only you and your family, but the broader community? What do your neighbors gain as a result of your Z? Now how about A?

1.2 Going even further, beyond the immediate impact of your work, or whatever your Z might be, what else is occurring? If Z is generating an income and contributing a beneficial product or service to the community (this implies that you are not a strip club owner, title loan vender, etc. who exploits the vulnerable), what value are you giving beyond that, as A? In sum, how does the broader community benefit as you step “out of the darkness and into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9)?
CHRIST’S BELOVED CHURCH
Ephesians 4:29–30

29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.
1. Returning to speech, Paul contrasts that which corrupts with that which builds up, in a formula similar to the one he used for stealing in Eph. 4. 28—stop doing X, but instead Y, so that Z. The adjective Paul uses for the negative speech, σαπρός (sapros), was one Jesus liked to use, as recorded four times in Matthew and twice in Luke, where Jesus juxtaposes good fruit and σαπρός fruit (Mt. 7:18; Lk. 6:43) and good fish and σαπρός fish (Mt. 13:48). With this imagery, Jesus makes a connection between actions and the person committing an action and without equivocation says, “A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit” (Mt. 7:18). There’s no dancing around “cannot” here. Οὐ δύναται (ou δύναται) simply means “is unable,” “impossible”—“not gonna happen.” Further, in each of these passages, Jesus refers to the judgment. Trees not bearing good fruit will be “cut down and thrown into the fire” (Mt. 7:19). Bad fish will be “thrown…into the fiery furnace” (Mt. 13:50). And, more directly related to Eph. 4:29, “on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Mt. 12:36–37). New selves do not bear the fruit our old selves bore.

This is not to say that Christians will never sin. If that were the case, we would all be damned. Take a look at 1 John 3:4–10. In v. 9, John writes, “No one born of God makes a practice of sinning,” which contrasts with children of God who “practice righteousness” in 1 Jn. 2:29. John uses this word ποιέω (poieō), often translated as “practice,” a total of thirteen times in his first letter and another three times in his third, generally in connection to doing or committing righteous acts versus those that are sinful. Ποιέω implies “habitual performance” (Thayer). KJV generally translates it in this context as “commit,” but “practice” in ESV and NASB makes the essence of this habitual idea more clear. So, the Christian should not make a habit of sinning, but rather should make a habit of performing righteousness. Upon conversion, this does not happen overnight. As with any discipline, it takes practice and effort to cultivate a habitual routine. This is part of our ongoing sanctification. Indeed, when we become believers, sin has “no dominion over” us (Rom. 6:14). But that does not mean its presence is entirely gone. We then begin to be transformed (2 Cor. 3:18) as we “put on the new self, which is being renewed” (Col. 3:10). The verb here for “being renewed,” ἀνακαινούμενον (anakainoumenon), has a continuous (or present) aspect, implying an ongoing or progressive action rather than one that has been completed (perfect aspect). And mercifully, we are not left to ourselves to see completion brought about, for “he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6), that is, when Christ returns as all things are made fully new (Rev. 21:5).

And when we do sin, there of course is grace. “(W)here sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (Rom. 5:20). But, “(b)y no means” “(a)re we to continue to sin that grace may abound” (Rom. 6:1–2). Bottom line, the new
self should not resemble the old self. This is not “cheap grace” here. The Christian will be transformed, while those without Christ will continue to bear bad fruit.

Though this detour here could have occurred as we have gone through any of the items in Paul’s list in Eph. 4, we are applying it here to “corrupting talk,” which is bad fruit produced by the nonbeliever and that which is “good for building up,” blossoming from those in Christ. For those of us still engaging in corrupting talk, bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, malice, etc. (Eph. 4:31), which is arguably all of us from time to time, how should we go about ensuring that it becomes less and less habitual? What about other sins of which we become convicted?

2) As we discussed last week, we do not just replace theft with idleness; we labor and give. Here, we do not just become mute after we abandon corrupt talk (though that is arguably at least progress); we use speech that “build(s) up” and “gives grace to those who hear.” Again, this is not empty moralism or individual piety; it is something that benefits the community and fosters unity. And this is about far more than avoiding four letter words and replacing them with cheesy euphemisms. We can tear people down without a single contribution to the proverbial swear jar. The word the ESV translates as “building up” is οἰκοδομή (oikodomē), from οἶκος (oikos), meaning “house,” and δέμο (demo), meaning “to build,” so literally, “to build a house.” Our speech is to be constructive and edifying, which is how the KJV and NASB translate οἰκοδομή, not destructive and damaging. As for “giv(ing) grace to those who hear,” “grace” comes from χάρις (charis), the same word used for God’s grace, but in this context, we can think of speech that offers kindness, affection, or friendship and which fosters joy, delight, and pleasure.

What are some examples, whether biblical or otherwise, of each type of speech?
3. It may initially seem that Paul takes a strange detour in 4:30 as he transitions to “not griev(ing) the Holy Spirit,” but when considering how all the traits of the “old self” that need to be “put off” (Eph. 4:22), it should make sense that they bring sorrow to the Spirit of God. We can see this as echoing Isaiah 63:10, where the prophet writes, “But they,” referring to Israel, “rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; therefore he turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them.” And this is in the midst of the prophet “recount(ing) the steadfast love of the LORD” (Is. 63:7) and all he had done for his people. In our rebellion, we grieve the Holy Spirit, whether by our speech, theft, etc. However, in Eph., on this side of the cross, the Spirit is not our enemy. Rather, we are “sealed for the day of redemption,” referring back to Eph. 1:13, which we went over in the first study guide in week 7. Rather than revisiting that concept of “sealing” here, let us refer back to Study the Test 2 and 3 from that week. The point here is that we should not simply be satisfied that we are protected from death and preserved for eternal bliss without concern for the fact that the one who seals us experiences deep sorrow for our sin. Again, “Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?”

Not only does our corrupting talk tear down community, it grieves the Spirit of God. How do these notions further your understanding of the importance of living unto resurrection life as new selves over against pointless personal piety? Do we actively worship God and serve and love our neighbors, or are we just consumers looking for self-esteem boosts and inflating our hubris?
FOR A DEEPER REFLECTION:

3 Questions to Consider Before You Share
by Elizabeth Garn

We live in an age of opinions, and most days it feels like everyone and their brother is desperate to share them. We’re bombarded each time we check the news or pick up our phone. From the simple You’re Eating that Cupcake Wrong clickbait to the emboldened Twitter acquaintance decrying everyone who disagrees, an unprecedented number of opinions knock on our door each day.

Social media enable information—and false information—to spread at the click of a button. And heightened levels of anonymity create emotional distance from others. It’s possible to engage in a heated argument with a friend of a friend on Facebook we’ve never met. We can battle the opinion, and forget there’s a real person on the other side.

Strong convictions aren’t bad. God has given us minds to think and reason, and we ought to steward them for his glory. But the way we present our positions is crucial. Not only is it significant to our own spiritual well-being and the well-being of our relationships, but it’s also incredibly important to God. Our reactions to opinions—and the way we share our own—is directly tied to how people view God. As his image-bearers and ambassadors, we have the weighty responsibility to represent him well.

How we speak reflects how we love. And be assured, the world is listening. Before you share your opinion, whether online or in a conversation, here are three questions to consider.

1. Does it need to be shared?
   It may seem trivial to mention, but so many of us forget we don’t always have to share our opinion. In most cases it’s okay (or even better) to simply hold our tongue. We’re under no obligation to react to someone else’s opinion. The ease with which we can post a comment online can easily yield emotional, unconsidered responses. As Proverbs reminds us:

   When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise. (Prov. 10:19)

   Those who guard their mouths and their tongues keep themselves from calamity. (Prov. 21:23)

   Before you speak, ask yourself if it really needs to be said.

2. Will it benefit those who hear?
One of the most striking things about the way Jesus spoke was the content of his words. Not only were they powerful, but everything he said was of value to his hearers.

Even in his more casual conversations, Jesus was careful with his words. This is fitting, since God is a God of words. His created the universe with them. As those made in his image, words are part of the way we reflect him to the world around us. May our words exemplify the wisdom of Ephesians 4:29: “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasions, that it may give grace to those who hear.”

Before you speak, ask yourself, Will sharing this opinion build up others? Will it be good for those who hear?

3. Can I speak with kindness?
If you’ve decided you have an opinion worth sharing, and you’re convinced it will build others up, the final thing to consider is whether you can say it kindly. This is often the hardest step. Opinions, even trivial ones, have the potential to divide and cause misunderstanding.

If you speak, do so in a manner that is kind, respectful, and full of grace. Again Proverbs observes: “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Prov. 15:1). Speak with softness of heart and softness of disposition.

So when sharing your opinions in conversations or online, labor to uplift others and exalt God. Avoid rash words and reckless comments. The smallest of words carry the power to harm and heal: “There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing” (Prov. 12:18).

Taking time to consider these three questions sets us apart from the noise—the noise of shouting opinions and cutting down others. Whatever words we type or speak, may we begin with prayer: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer” (Ps. 19:14).
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Consider what we went over in Study the Text 1 this week related to Jesus’ teaching on those who produce good fruit versus those producing bad fruit. It should be “evident who are the children of God, and who are children of the devil” (1 Jn. 3:10)—it should be externally visible. What does this practically mean? Is it our Christian t-shirts that make it evident? Is it a K-Love decal or ichthus (fish) on the back of our cars? Is it using cheesy lingo or Christianese? Or is there something beyond just being different for the sake of being different? Are there ways to be countercultural that aren’t anti-culture or creating a subculture so closed off to others that we are hardly “a light to the nations”? What constructive things, whether in our speech or otherwise, can we do to show that we are citizens of the kingdom of God deeply invested in his physical creation and people?

2) What about those we have harmed with our speech? In some instances, it may be seemingly benign (to us), but what about those who have been bullied or harassed or verbally abused? Or, have we participated in or laughed at racist, sexist, or homophobic jokes? What about those who have become recluses, suicidal, or even threatening to others due to speech that tears down? As James wrote, “the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell” (Jm. 3:6). Have we considered the implications of our speech, even if it occurred long before we came to faith? Even as we become new selves, the effects of our speech remain. Apologies can’t always repair the damage that has been done. How might we be able to mend those situations and help build those up whom we’ve torn down? How can we give grace to them?
SERMON NOTES:
CHRIST’S BELOVED CHURCH
4:31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.  
32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.  
5:1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.  
2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.
1) Last week, as we covered Eph. 4:29, we essentially went over the material here in v. 31. Return to the section and review your notes if necessary, as we will not recap that here. Paul is really just giving further examples of “corrupting talk,” which we should have covered sufficiently. Write down any further thoughts that may have come to mind over the last week, as you have meditated on the type of speech the new self should exhibit and the communal and spiritual benefits of such speech.

2) V. 32a essentially gives us further admonition in light of v. 29b. But Paul also makes a connection to forgiveness as he writes about edifying speech. The character our new selves ought to exhibit flows from what God has done for us in Christ and by the Spirit. We can see echoes here of what’s become known as “the Lord’s Prayer” in Matthew 6:9–13 and Luke 11:2–4. “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Mt. 6:11). Matthew then records Jesus going on to say that those who forgive will be forgiven by the Father; those who do not will not be forgiven. This really should not be a concern for Christians because we should understand that those who have already been forgiven by the Father for sins past, present, and future have put on our new selves. As such, we do what redeemed people do—we imitate God (Eph. 5:1), which includes forgiving others. Of course, this is easier said than done. But as we covered last week, this is a spiritual discipline that requires practice and time in order to make it a habit. We are not left to ourselves to figure out how to imitate God. We are “being transformed into (his) image” (2 Cor. 3:18), and “being renewed” (Col. 3:10), by the one who “began a good work in (us)” and “will bring it to completion” (Phil. 1:6).

What we should further understand about forgiveness, the reason both God extends it to us and we extend it to others, is relational. It brings about reconciliation. It is for the sake of community and unity. It builds up and gives grace. It is not merely letting one off the hook or minimizing offenses. It is realizing the serious weight of the offenses committed while also longing for
wholeness to be brought to both the offender and between him/her and the offended. God does not forgive us because our sin does not really matter. He does not just say “it’s all good; don’t worry about it,” as we tend to do as we suppress the hurt committed against us. Our sin “grieve(s) the Holy Spirit” (Eph. 4:30), as we covered last week. The verb Paul uses that is translated as “forgiving,” χαρίζομαι (charizomai), comes from χάρις (charis), a word we covered last week that is generally translated as “grace,” but can also mean “kindness” or “favor.” Thus, while χαρίζομαι indeed refers to pardoning, it also means showing kindness or favor.

God forgives out of his loving-kindness, his ἰνοτότος (heseḏ) that we covered in week 24. This is a covenantal act that is purely relational and communal. God desires restoration in communities, not merely unrepentant sinners roaming free without punishment or consequence. It is his kindness that leads us to repentance (Rom. 2:4). Μετάνοια (metanoia), repentance,” literally means “a change of mind.” As we receive forgiveness, whether from God or one another, we are to have a change of mind, disposition, and character. We are not to remain unchanged or unaffected. And when we experience grace, we extend it to others. Upon this, community thrives and unity prevails. This is how new selves live unto resurrection life.

How does this help us rethink of our notion of forgiveness, provided that there was some misunderstanding? How does forgiveness do more than get us off the hook?

3. Do you ever think of us, the Church, as “a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God”? If you are a newer Christian, you might not even have any idea what that means. Προσφορά (prophoria), “fragrant offering,” and θυσία (thusia), “sacrifice,” as one might suspect, refer to the sacrificial system in the Old Testament. Both Προσφορά and θυσία are used in the Septuagint in Psalm 40:6 to translate the Hebrew מִנְחָה (minchâh), meaning “offering,” and זֶבח (zebach), meaning “sacrifice,” respectively. “In θυσίαν and προσφοράν you have not delighted, but you have given me an open ear.” Hebrews
10:5–7 quotes Ps. 40:6–8, as the author explains that “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Hb. 10:4). Christ “does away with the first order (the sacrificial system) in order to establish the second… the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all” (Hb. 10:9–10). “(S) acrifices…can never take away sins…(b)ut…Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins” (Hb. 10:11–12). Christ is that once for all “fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph. 5:2)—a pleasing aroma. But as we “share Christ’s suffering…(and)...the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon (us)” (1 Pt.4:13–14), we become that fragrant offering as well. Paul earlier also wrote in 2 Corinthians 2:15 that “we are the aroma of Christ to God.” But while “vain offerings...(and) incense (had become) an abomination to (Yahweh)” (Isaiah 1:13) because sacrifice and burnt offerings lacked steadfast love and knowledge of God, which is what God truly desires (Hosea 6:6). Back to Eph. 5:2, in Christ, we share as that pleasing aroma, which occurs as we “walk in love, as Christ loves us and gave himself up for us.”

What does it mean to you that God actually delights in you? In Christ, we are not only pardoned from sin because “God so loved the world” (John 3:16), but God actually likes us. Perhaps one of the most profound verses that captures this amazing love is Zephaniah 3:17: “He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.” That is, we make him sing. Now that is a great God.
FOR A DEEPER REFLECTION:

God’s Communicable Attributes

Omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, infinity, self-existence (aseity)—these are some of the incommunicable attributes of God, those attributes of our Creator that He does not share with His creatures. However, the Lord also has communicable attributes, or attributes that He does share with human beings to at least some degree. Passages such as Genesis 1:26-27, which teaches that we are made in God’s image, presuppose that there are some things that human beings hold in common with the Creator that other creatures do not. We are like God in ways that nothing else in creation is like God, although we are not so like Him that there is no distinction between Creator and creature. Furthermore, Paul’s exhortation to imitate God in today’s passage also indicates that human beings, particularly Christians, have the capacity to reflect the character of the Lord and His attributes in who they are and what they do (Eph. 5:1).

When we speak of God’s communicable attributes, we are referring primarily to His moral attributes such as love, goodness, and kindness. In one sense, we must not forget that there is a basic incommunicability of even these attributes, for insofar as such things as the love and goodness of God are infinite, we cannot imitate them. Nevertheless, because we bear God’s image, there is a manner in which we exhibit these attributes by way of analogy. For example, the kind of love we have as creatures is not identical to the kind of love our Creator possesses. However, at the same time, our love is not wholly dissimilar, such that there is no point of contact whatsoever with the love of God. Our Creator loves truly that which is lovely. As regenerate people, we possess the capacity to do the same.

Consider also God’s attribute of holiness. The holiness of God encompasses several concepts, including the fact that He is inherently set apart from creation and that He is morally pure, without any hint of darkness or sin. We cannot possess holiness in the sense of being inherently set apart from creation; however, by the renewing work of God’s Spirit, Christians are continually purified over the course of our lives (1 John 3:3).

Space prohibits us from studying all the Lord’s communicable attributes. We close today with a brief look at wisdom. Our Creator is the “only wise God” (Rom. 16:27), but in His grace, He shares His wisdom with us. In our fallenness, we are foolish creatures, but our Lord has given us His Word, by which He grants us wisdom by His Spirit (Prov. 1:1-7).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In Study the Text 2 for this week, we discussed the notion of forgiveness, and how it is so much more than simply letting someone off the hook. And it not only has personal benefit; it has tremendous communal value. Think of a time you either received forgiveness from someone else or extended forgiveness to another in the utmost biblical sense of achieving reconciliation (yes, there are exceptions for certain offenses where reconciliation simply is unwise, yet forgiveness is still required). Did that have any sort of positive impact in the broader community beyond you and the other party?

2. We have covered both how we can “grieve the Holy Spirit” (refer to week 27, Study the Text 3) and how God delights in us (Study the Text 3 from this week). The actions of our old selves bring sorrow to the one who has secured us for all eternity, while the actions of our new selves, as we imitate Christ, join in the fragrance going up to God. How do these polar opposites function in community? How can we encourage one another to “walk in love”? What can we do together that brings delight to God?
CHRIST’S BELOVED CHURCH
3But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. 4Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.
1. We left off last week with Paul writing to his readers that as they walk in love, they are pleasing to God. In Eph. 5:3–4, the contrast between the behavior of the old self and new self continues, as Paul gets into sexual immorality, other types of impurity, and covetousness, then he gets back to corrupt speech, and finally to the edifying speech of thanksgiving.

Beginning with sexual immorality, we will look at the Greek word used by Paul, πορνεία (porneia), also meaning “fornication,” which is the word used by the KJV and NRSV here. As is probably evident, this word is also related to pornography, etymologically from πόρνη (pornē), meaning “prostitute,” combined with γράφω (graphó), meaning “to write” or “record,” so literally, it means “to record a prostitute.” In Ephesians, πορνεία covers all sexual sin, whether adultery (or extramarital sex), being depicted in, creating, or consuming pornography (sins of both prostitution and lust), homosexuality— anything against God’s design for sex within the confines of marriage between one man and one woman for life, for both procreation and pleasure and intimacy (see Gen. 2:24; Prov. 5:19; Mal. 2:14–16; Matt. 19:4–6; 1 Cor. 6:12–20, 7:1–5; Heb. 13:4).

Why does God care so much about sex?

2) Impurity, ἀκάθαρτος (akathartos), is technically a different category. It can be translated as “uncleanliness” in a ritual or ethical sense, and is understood as being the opposite of ἅγιος (hagios), meaning “holy” or “set apart.” These competing terms in Hebrew, כָּנָם (tame), “unclean,” and קָדוֹשׁ (qadosh), “holy,” have a rather significant presence in what is known as the Holiness Code in Leviticus 17–26 (e.g., Lev. 17:15, 19:2). We cannot even begin to scratch the surface of the code here, as well as contemporary Christian views on which statutes still apply today and which were abrogated with Christ’s sacrifice. There are views on one extreme that say to essentially throw away the entire Old Testament to views on the other that say Christians are still to follow every letter of the law. Somewhere in the middle is probably the right view, which makes distinctions among moral, civil, and ceremonial law (we’re getting beyond just the Holiness Code here). These distinctions
are consistent with an understanding of the law from the Reformed tradition, one in which Redemption Church stands. Ceremonial law has to do with ritual holiness, which no longer binds believers, as they have been fulfilled in Christ (see Mark 7:19). Civil or judicial law regulated Israel as a political entity, distinct from other nations, and also no longer binds the believer. Ephesians has made quite clear that this distinction no longer exists (Eph. 2:15). This is not to say that there are not good moral principles in either category, but the point is holiness and uncleanness are not determined by them. And last of three is the moral, which applies to believers today. Paul gives plenty of moral law in Ephesians, which comes straight from the Torah. The 10 Commandments is another good place to start for moral law (Ex. 20:1–17; Dt. 5:1–21). We unfortunately can’t go through all 613 laws in the Torah here, but it is good to be aware of the distinctions.

In any event, the broader concept applies. To “be holy” as God is holy is to be set apart unto him. Our uncleanness was washed away by Christ’s blood, and now we live as new, clean, set apart selves dedicated unto the Lord. We’ve spent several weeks now on what such a life looks like. Such things are holy activities going up as pleasing and acceptable aromas to God. Impurity, then, is the opposite, including the corrupt talk, theft, and sexual immorality we’ve already gone over.

What are some tangible ways we can describe being “set apart” today? And remember from past weeks, we want to be an attractive countercultural community, not a weird one that fails to be a light to the nations.
3. Covetousness falls under the 10th Commandment (Ex. 20:17; Dt. 5:21). Covet is not a word found too often in our current vocabulary. The Hebrew, נַפְרָה (chamad), has a range of meaning including “selfish desire” and “take pleasure in”—basically desiring something that isn’t yours, like “your neighbor’s house…your neighbor’s wife…or anything else that is your neighbor’s” (Ex. 20:17). It is also idolatry, which Paul writes in Eph. 5:5. Avoiding covetousness is important for several reasons. For one, it shows that we aren’t grateful for that with which God has blessed us. Secondly, it leads to strife with your neighbor, which affects community. Thirdly, it can lead to theft, which we covered in week 26 and is both a violation of the 8th Commandment and is the opposite of what we’re called to do: work and be generous (Eph. 4:28). Fourthly, it can lead to adultery, hence violating the 7th Commandment (see the relationship between these?). Each of these commandments, including 5, 6, and 9 are considered by some theologians as being under “the second table of the law,” which all have to do with community. The first four have to do with loving God. Jesus summed up these, and the entire law for that matter, into two great commandments: love God, and love your neighbor (Mt. 22:37–40). And we can’t do one without the other. God desires that our affection toward him be vertical, looking up to him, and horizontal, looking out to those he loves—everyone around us.

Consider the relationship between various sins, such as those studied above and how a single sin can disrupt God’s created order. Then consider why holiness, something distinct from personal piety, is so important to God.
4. We have already studied corrupt talk quite a bit, so we’ll skip to thanksgiving. The Greek word here is εὐχαριστία (eucharistia), the same word from which we get “eucharist,” referring to the Lord’s Supper. “And (Jesus) took a cup, and when εὐχαριστέω (he had given thanks), he gave it to them, saying…” (Mt. 26:27). Over against “crude joking” and “foolish talk,” thanksgiving is another form of good, uplifting speech. And it’s so much more than mere words. Contrasted with covetousness, which shows our ingratitude, thanksgiving demonstrates that we are grateful for what God has blessed us with. Jesus, when sharing the Passover seder with his disciples, wasn’t just going through the motions with his disciples (דֶּשֶׁר, seder, literally means order). When he took the cup of blessing, we assume he was actually thankful for God’s provision, for the community he was enjoying, and for how he had liberated his people from slavery in Egypt.

Consider the contrast between covetousness and thankfulness and how either might be present in your life.
FOR A DEEPER REFLECTION:

Sexual Purity: 16 Things You Need to Know

by Randy Alcorn

I’ve developed the following material and presented it to many young people and their parents over many years. When my now married daughters were teenagers, I honed it further for sharing and discussion with them and the young men who asked to date them.

What follows is an abridged version of the longer material, “Guidelines for Sexual Purity.”

1. Sex is good. God created it, God called it “good,” and it existed before there was any sin in the world.
Sex was not created by Satan, Playboy, the Internet, or some pervert lurking in the shadows of a porn shop. However, God requires us to address sex within his intentions and requirements, not the world’s (Ephesians 5:3-4). God designed sex for the sacred union of marriage between a man and a woman, and reserves it for that union.

2. Like all good gifts from God, sex can be misused and perverted.
Water is a gift of God, without which we couldn’t survive. But floods and tidal waves are water out of control, and the effects are devastating. Likewise, God designed sex to exist within certain boundaries. When exercised in line with God’s intended purpose, it is beautiful and constructive. When out of control, violating God’s intended purpose, it becomes ugly and destructive.

3. The boundaries of sex are the boundaries of marriage.
Sexual union is intended as an expression of a lifelong commitment, a symbol of the spiritual union that exists only within the unconditional commitment of marriage. Apart from marriage, the lasting commitment is absent and the sex act becomes a false expression, a lie. Sex does not become permissible through subjective feelings, but through the objective lifelong commitment of marriage.

4. Your sexual purity is essential to your walk with God.
Sexual purity is not an option for an obedient Christian; it’s a requirement. God’s will is centered on our character and moral purity much more than on our circumstances, such as job and schooling: “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality” (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

5. You are vulnerable to sexual immorality.
Don’t kid yourself that it can never happen to you—it can. “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” (1 Corinthians 10:12). If you think you’ll never fall sexually, you’ll fail to take precautions to keep it from happening.

6. You are targeted for sexual immorality.
The more involved you are in serving Christ, the greater vested interests Satan has in destroying you and God’s work in and through you. The evil one wants to take you down and to use your life as a bad example to other Christians. God requires that we be holy and pure instruments to be used by Him (2 Timothy 2:20-21). But as powerful as the evil one is to tempt us, God is infinitely more powerful to deliver us and has given us in Christ all the resources we need to live godly lives (2 Peter 1:3-4).

7. Your body belongs to God, not you.
“You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:20). When you came to Christ, when you affirmed Him as Lord of your life, you surrendered your entire self, including your body, to God. He paid the ultimate price for it: the shed blood of God Almighty!

8. Sexual purity begins in the mind, not the body.
“Above all else, guard your heart [mind, inner being], for it is the wellspring of life” (Proverbs 4:23). Be careful what you expose your mind to. If you’re on a diet, don’t go to Baskin & Robin’s. If you do, your resistance will break down. If you want to abstain from lust, you don’t go places and watch movies and programs and read things that stimulate lust. Don’t give your mind junk food. Be sure you’re getting spiritual nutrition.

9. Since God doesn’t want you to have premarital sex, neither does He want you to do that which prepares your body for premarital sex.
There is a continuum of physical contact that begins with things like sitting close and hand-holding on the near side and moves to sexual intercourse on the far side. Scripture does not spell out exactly what “intermediate” behavior is permissible, but one thing is certain—the line must be drawn before either of you becomes sexually stimulated.

10. Once you let your body cross the line, it will neither know nor care about your Christian convictions.
Some Christians pray God will protect their purity, then willfully put themselves into temptation and wonder why God didn’t answer their prayer. No matter how fervently you pray that you will not fall into immorality, you will fall if you continue to make choices that feed your temptation toward immorality. Don’t allow your choices to undermine and invalidate your prayers.

11. If you have sexual intimacy with someone outside marriage, you are stealing from God and the other person.
Since he or she belongs to God, not you, that means you are borrowing this person for the evening. Be careful what you do with what doesn’t belong to you. You’ll be held accountable to his or her Owner.
12. God has your best interests in mind when He tells you not to have premarital sex. Sex is not just something you do—sex is someone you are. It is linked to the welfare of your whole person. Having sex outside of marriage is self-destructive in every sense. Sexual purity is always for the best—not only for God and others, but for you.

13. God would not tell you to abstain from impurity if it was impossible to obey him. Sex is something everyone can abstain from—it is a strong desire, yes, but never an emergency, never a necessity. “The grace of God teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age” (Titus 2:12). You can and should draw upon your resources in Christ, and say “no” to temptations to sin.

14. Satan will lie to you about sex, but Jesus tells you the truth. Jesus said of Satan, “When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). Satan is a liar, but Jesus is the truth and the truth-teller (John 14:6). He said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32). Those who believe Satan’s lies about sex end up in bondage. Those who believe Christ’s truth about sex end up free.

15. You must learn to think long term, not short term. Good or bad, you will always reap what you sow—you will always harvest the consequences of your choices. “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows” (Galatians 6:7). The lifelong consequences of sexual impurity are worse than we can imagine. The lifelong rewards of sexual purity are greater than we can imagine.

16. If you’ve violated some of these guidelines, confess, repent and implement a plan to prevent future violations. When you confess and repent of your sins, God will cleanse you:

“As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12).

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Even if you are no longer a virgin you can and should commit yourself to secondary virginity—to remain sexually pure from this day forward, preserving yourself only for your marriage partner, should God choose to give you one. You need more than good intentions to maintain your purity—you need a plan. If you are committed to a relationship with a growing Christian discuss it honestly and formulate a plan to prevent falling back into premarital intimacy.

Live in such a way as to hear your Lord say to you one day, “Well done.” Get on the right side of the universe’s moral system. Honor God by living in sexual purity. If you do, you’ll experience His blessing and rewards not only today, tomorrow, and ten years from now, but throughout eternity.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In an age where sex and the alleged liberation of the individual reign supreme, thinking about how our choices about sex, and our choices in general, affect others around us seems to rarely occur. Discuss with a group first how a certain sexual ethic can destroy community. Think about the parties involved, the future consequences that don’t seem to matter today, etc. And then discuss how the biblical sexual ethic can have a positive impact in society. Is there more than just our personal liberties at stake here? Is it possible to surrender the rights we have for the sake of others (alluding loosely to 1 Cor. 9 here, Paul is referring to biblically warranted rights, not the rights permitted in a pluralistic society that may or may not align with biblical principles)?

2. What do we tend to covet? Is there an example of something we wanted that led to discord between neighbors? How can we, together as a community, become a more thankful people rather than a covetous people?
CHRIST’S BELOVED CHURCH
WEEK 30

WALK AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT

EPHESIANS 5:5–16

5For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7Therefore do not become partners with them; 8for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), 10and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. 11Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. 13But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, 14for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” 15Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.
1. This passage is far more lengthy than those we’ve covered in past weeks. For the sake of brevity, we can’t zero in on each verse here, but luckily, Paul is reemphasizing much of what he’s already written, and which we’ve already gone over with a decent amount of depth.

He again touches on sexual immorality, impurity, and covetousness, though he hasn’t really broken his train of thought anyway. The new information he introduces here is that those who do such things have “no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God” (Eph. 5:5). Paul’s audience—whom he’s already referred to as saints (1:1), described blessings they have in Christ (1:3–14), thanked for their faith (1:15), acknowledged as having been saved, and “seated…in the heavenly places” (2:5–6)—is not in danger of lacking inheritance in the kingdom. Paul also must be assuming that his readers have an awareness of what he means by “kingdom,” βασιλεία (basileia), a word he only uses once in Ephesians, though he did touch on “inheritance” (1:11, 14, 18), which we covered in week 6 in the first study guide. Review Study the Text 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3, where we also touch on how inheritance relates to kingdom.

Though it would be helpful to elaborate deeply on kingdom theology (or inaugurated eschatology) here, that would also be yet another worthwhile study on its own. What we can say with brevity here is that, as Eph. 2:6 indicates, Paul’s audience, including us, have been brought into the kingdom already (see also Col. 1:13–14), but it has not yet arrived in fullness (1 Cor. 15:20–24). But those apart from Christ inherit nothing now, nor in the future. As new selves, we already have an inheritance; we are living unto resurrection life today. We benefit from the power of Christ being raised from the dead now. We presently experience “peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). As we covered already, in week 27, as new selves, we do not make a practice of sinning, whether sexual immorality, impurity, covetousness, etc. We practice righteousness. What this passage should serve as is a reminder of who we are, a reason to give thanks (5:4), and encouragement to evangelize, so others may participate in the spiritual blessings and inheritance we have in Christ and know that they, too, can receive the power of the Holy Spirit that can enable them to practice righteousness.

What can what we have covered tell us about our identity? Even if we still sin occasionally, if we covet for example, does that make us a coveter? Or are we a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17) habitually practicing righteousness, though not always? Can we enjoy this inheritance now, as new selves, without bearing the shame of who we once were?
2. Paul again refers to “the sons of disobedience” in 5:6, a title he gave in 2:2 to those who are influenced by “the prince and power of the air,” which we covered in week 10 of the first study guide. Remember, Paul is still writing in the midst of a cosmic struggle, where evil spiritual forces have real influence on the present earth. In this case, they are deceiving Christians into believing that they can live the life of the old self. They are preaching a “cheap grace,” for example, that says you can get your get out-of-hell-free card and live like hell for the rest of your life. This is pure deception, and such teachers will incur God’s wrath. Review Study the Text 1 from week 7 in the first study guide, where we looked to the Parable of the Sower. What can be said here is that these deceivers are convincing seeds along the path, the rocky ground, and the thorns that are firmly planted in the good soil… and yet, they bear no fruit (see week 27, Study the Text 1 on fruit). Granted, Paul’s readers are “children of light” (5:8), so they should be able to discern that such teaching is false, but as with the rest of Paul’s admonition, he’s not necessarily assuming his readers make a practice of doing things associated with old selves, including clinging to deceptive teaching, but he certainly is reminding them of who they are and what to avoid.

Are there any lies that you have listened to that have affected, even if only temporarily, what should be your life as an imitator of God?
3) As Paul reminds his readers that they are “children of light,” another way of referring to them as new selves, and how they are to “walk” (echoing where he began this longer section in 4:1), he tells them to not only avoid “the unfruitful works of darkness” but to also “expose them.” This is not an invitation to gossip, which would be engaging in the destructive speech he’s already spent a great deal of time condemning. This is instead an opportunity to do just what Paul is doing. Proclaim and demonstrate what it is to walk as a child of light and explain what the inverse looks like. The hope is that we can help lead others to repentance through our kindness (Rom. 2:4), just as God did with us before we entered into his marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9). To illustrate this further, Paul then quotes something in v. 14, which does not come straight from any Old Testament passage but likely combines a few verses from Isaiah (60:1, 9:2, and 26:19). What a beautiful prayer, that all in our midst would awake and see the light Christ is already shining.

What exactly does the proper way of exposing darkness look like? We’ve probably seen two extremes: not exposing at all, for fear of offending people, or bringing shame, judgment, and agony upon people, which is hardly our role. What should we do instead?
As light is thus efficacious, and as it is accessible, or may be obtained, therefore the Scriptures call even upon the sleeping and the dead to arise and meet its life-giving beams. Διὸ λέγει, scil. ἡ γραφή. As this formula of quotation is never used in the New Testament except when citations are made from the Old Testament, it cannot properly be assumed that the apostle here quotes some Christian hymn with which the believers in Ephesus were familiar; or some apocryphal book; or some inspired book no longer extant. We must understand him either as referring to many exhortations of the Old Testament Scriptures, the substance of which he condenses in the few words here used; or as giving the spirit of some one passage, though not its words. Both these methods of explanation may be sustained by appeal to similar passages. The apostles in quoting the Old Testament sometimes combined several passages in the same quotation—and sometimes give as the teaching of the prophets what is nowhere taught or asserted in express terms, but is abundantly or clearly implied in what they say. At other times again, the reference is obviously to some one passage, and yet neither the Hebrew nor Septuagint is accurately followed, but the general idea is reproduced. We without the authority and divine guidance of the apostles deal in the same way with the word of God, of which almost every sermon would furnish examples. It is generally assumed that Paul here refers to Is. 60, 1, “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.” Or, as De Wette renders it; “Auf, werde licht, denn es kommt dein Licht, und die Herrlichkeit Jehovah’s gehet iber dir auf.” Up, become light; for thy light comes, and the glory of Jehovah riseth over thee. The analogy between this passage and the quotation of the apostle is plain. There are in both—1. The call to those who are asleep or dead to rise. 2. To receive the light. 3. The promise that Jehovah, Lord, or Christ, equivalent terms in the mind of the apostle, would give them light. There can, therefore, be little doubt that it was the language of Isaiah Paul intended in substance to quote. Beza thinks that Is. 26, 19, “Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust,” &c., is to be included in the reference; and others join Is. 9, 2, “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.” It is true that in these, as well as in other passages, the power of light, i. e. of divine truth, its advent in the person of Christ, and the call to those who are in darkness to accept it, are included. But the probability is that Is. 60, 1, was the passage most distinctly in the apostle’s.

Those asleep and the dead are in darkness, and therefore those involved in spiritual darkness are addressed as sleeping. The light which comes from Christ has power to reach even the dead—as our Lord, in the use of another figure, says, “The hour is coming, and now is, that the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live,” John 5, 25. This does not mean that the dead must be revived before they hear the voice of the Son of God, but his voice causes them to hear and live. So the passage
before us does not mean that those asleep must arise from the dead and come to Christ for light; but that the light which Christ sheds around him, has power to awake the sleeping dead. Thus the passage is a confirmation of what is said in the preceding verse, viz., that every thing made manifest by the light, is light.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How do we see ourselves, together as a community, as presently partaking and participating in God's kingdom? How do we seize our inheritance and make the most of it, not only for ourselves, but for others, rather than squandering it, as the Prodigal Son did (Lk. 15:11–32)?

2. We are called to be a light to the nations. This phrase, from Isaiah 49:6, is one we’ve probably referenced a dozen times in this study guide. As we walk as children of light, that light is supposed to provide illumination for others. We are not the light. Christ is. But as imitators of Christ, that light should shine through. Jesus said, “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Mt. 5:16). It’s not only our evangelism that provides illumination; it’s also our works. How can we be children of life who show Christ’s light to our neighbors?