

SBS Study Booklet

The Letter to the Ephesians

The Unsearchable Riches of Christ

“the crown of Paul’s writings”

“the most divine composition”

“the most royal of all the letters”

“this letter is pure music ... What we read here is truth that sings, doctrine set to music”

“The letter to the Ephesians is one of the most important documents ever written.”

“The high point of the Pauline letters”

Like no other, this letter describes the nature, the origin and the horizon, the fullness and the effect of the Christian faith, which is anchored in a Son of God who died, rose again, and was enthroned.

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Ephesus, the City

Ephesos (Lat. Ephesus, Gr. **Ἔφεσος**, Turk. Efes) was one of the most important and oldest Greek cities of Asia Minor (today Turkey) in antiquity. Ephesos lies about 70 km (45 miles) south of İzmir, not far from the Turkish west coast (the Aegean), in the ancient region of Ionia. In antiquity it lay directly on the sea. Through sedimentation as well as climatic and seismic changes, the coastline shifted westward over time, so that today the city lies several kilometers inland and is thus no longer a port city.

Ephesos was one of the most important cities of the Roman Empire and, with well over 200,000 inhabitants, also one of the largest, and it was the seat of the governor (proconsul) of the province of Asia. Numerous public buildings were erected, financed both by the city and by wealthy citizens. These included temples for the emperors Vespasian and Hadrian, who were worshiped as part of the imperial cult. As far as mission was concerned, Ephesos had a good strategic location because of its major trade routes and its harbor.

It was international, a focal point and melting pot of various cultures and religions. Ephesos was widely known for the goddess Artemis and her enormous temple, which was one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. The worship of gods, the occult, and sorcery played an important role in this city, but also in all of Asia Minor.

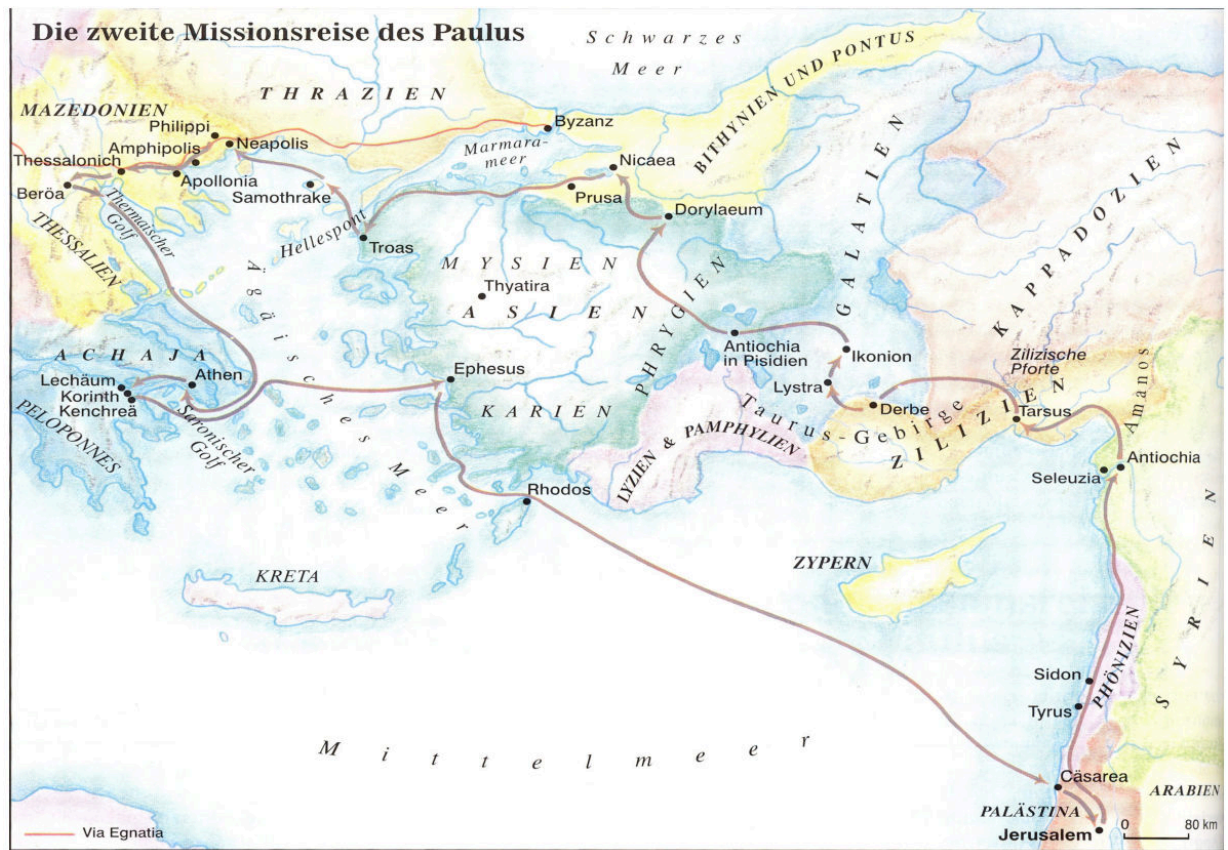
Against this background some passages of the letter become especially understandable. Overall, the letter seems to have its occasion in precisely this spiritual and religious background.

In the nineteenth century, the archaeological exploration of Ephesos began with the search for the remains of the Temple of Artemis. (Source: www.wikipedia.de)

Today Ephesos is one of Turkey's tourist attractions, with several hundred thousand visitors annually.

A Christian witness in the form of a church or congregation has long ceased to exist in this city.

The Location



Paul and Ephesus

At the end of his second missionary journey Paul came to Ephesus for the first time, but he left again after a short time (Acts 18:19-21). His third missionary journey (Acts 18:23–21:16) then led him to Ephesus, where he stayed and worked for 3 years (Acts 20:31), because the Lord had a great work for him to do there. From there, around the years 54 and 55, he wrote the two letters to the Corinthians. He wrote to the Ephesians, as well as to the Philippians and Colossians and also to Philemon, from Rome (possibly already from Caesarea), during his first Roman imprisonment, around the years 60–62. These letters all mention his imprisonment. The letters were delivered by Tychicus (6:21-22).

Paul's work in Ephesus, as a bridgehead for all of Asia Minor and beyond, was richly blessed: "This continued for two years, so that all who lived in Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord. And God did extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them," Acts 19:10-12.

And: "So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed," Acts 19:20. In this context Paul's farewell speech to the elders of Ephesus is very revealing, because here he recalls his stay and ministry of several years and describes his work: Acts 20:17-38.

Timothy and Ephesus

Without doubt Timothy was in Ephesus several times. On one occasion Paul left him behind there (1 Tim 1:3). The first letter to Timothy (and the second as well) was sent to Ephesus because Timothy was there. This letter shows that there were problems there with false teachings (gnosis, legalism, etc.) that he was to deal with.

Historical or church tradition makes Timothy the bishop of Ephesus.

John the Apostle and Ephesus

It is said of the apostle John that he lived in Ephesus for a long time. There is no biblical proof text for this, but there is the testimony of contemporaries. In early church tradition there are reports according to which John died in Asia Minor only at a very advanced age. Justin Martyr, in the middle of the second century, reports on "John, one of the apostles," as a witness who had lived "among us" (i.e., in Ephesus). Irenaeus, who came from Asia Minor (late second century), speaks in many places of the apostle John, who had lived in Asia Minor, and states explicitly that John wrote his Gospel in Ephesus and lived there until the reign of Trajan.

The letter to Ephesus, as well as all the other letters to the churches in John's Revelation, bear witness to his sphere of activity in Asia Minor.

Another church (Catholic!) tradition states that John, together with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and other women, moved to Ephesus before the destruction of Jerusalem.

Worth considering is the fact that Paul writes to Timothy about the dangerous teaching of gnosis, which John in turn also combats in his letters.

Conclusion: The big-city church in Ephesus was especially privileged and nurtured through the stays of the 2 apostles as well as of their envoys or co-workers and students, through personalities such as

Apollos and the married couple Aquila and Priscilla, and through the letters they received (before the close of the NT canon).

In AD 431 the third council of the church took place in Ephesos; its results are still recognized today. In spite of everything, sadly nothing at all is left of a Christian witness.

Occasion of the Letter

In general it is rightly said that there is no particular occasion for this letter of the kind one clearly recognizes, for example, in the letters to the Corinthians or the Galatians. This is a general letter, a kind of circular letter without special personal details, but with extensive and systematic teaching. Like no other, it unfolds the teaching about the church, the body of Christ, as well as about Christ the Head and the heavenly position of the Christian. Ephesus was a center not only of trade and finance but also of the mystery religions, idolatry, the occult, and magic. People’s lives were determined by these. The spiritual powers that Paul mentions several times played a dominant role. They were conjured up to exert influence on behalf of one’s own interests. Their influence was thus omnipresent, but far more threatening than helpful. So a further occasion can be found in the aim of instructing the believers in Ephesus, and thus in all of Asia Minor, about these powers, so that they would no longer fear them (or even take anything of them over into their new faith—see the letter to the Colossians on this), but would be on guard against their omnipresent diabolical influence (spiritual battle). There is also a warning against false and strange teachings, without these being described in more detail (as they are to the Colossians).

Content and Outline of the Letter

Paul discloses the eternal counsel and purpose of God, which includes Christ—the Son of God who became man—and believers individually as well as the church. To bring this counsel of God to its goal, Christ had to die and rise again, since those who now believe were once dead in sins. They are made into new people, fit for the presence and the future of God. Already now God’s eternal counsel is becoming visible in the present time in the life of believers and of the church.

Like no other, this letter describes the nature of the Christian faith, which is founded in a Son of God who died, rose again, and was enthroned at the right hand of God. **Because a man is there with GOD in heaven at his right hand, human beings can be there—already now in HIM and soon with HIM.** In HIM we are there, in the heavenly places, inseparably united with Christ forever, personally and as the church.

Outline of the letter:

Part 1: Chapters 1 – 3: Doctrinal (dogmatic) part Our standing in salvation in Christ – The indicative of salvation	
Chapter 1	
Verses 1 – 14	Praise and worship of God: What God plans and does for himself and what HE has given us; God’s purpose for the universe: Christ the Head, and our share in it

Verses 15 – 23	What we may come to know: first God himself, then God's inheritance in us, the future, and his life-giving power
Chapter 2	
Verses 1 – 10	Then and now – God's salvation: From spiritual death to the new standing in salvation in Christ in the heavenly places
Verses 11 – 22	No more separation between Jews and Gentiles: Both become one new humanity and a new temple of God
Chapter 3	
Verses 1 – 13	The special ministry of the apostle to the Gentiles: The NT church, the "new" people of God, as God's eternal purpose
Verses 14 – 21	What we should always pray for first: Intercession and praise about the power of the Spirit, Jesus' love, and God's fullness
Part 2: Chapters 4 – 6: Practical part – The life of believers The life of the new self – The imperative of salvation	
Chapter 4	
Verses 1 – 16	Exhortation to unity: The gifts and members of the body and the growth of the body, the church
Verses 17 – 32	The new self: The completely different life of believers
Chapter 5	
Verses 1 – 21	Living as God's children: Speech and conduct as imitators of God in contrast to the world
Verses 22 – 33	Christ and the church: Model for the relationship of husband and wife
Chapter 6	
Verses 1 – 9	Parents and children – slaves and masters
Verses 10 – 24:	The armor of God: Spiritual warfare

Themes

The text of Ephesians will now be treated in the form of thematic focal points. There follow several excursions on terms that occur more than once and are in any case characteristic of this letter, in that they indicate the content, goal, and intention of the letter. They form a key to understanding the letter.

Heavenly Places – How Far Are They from the Earth?

("A piece of heaven, a place from God")

The term "heavenly [places]" (Gr. *ἐπουρανίους epouraniois, plural*) is a central expression in the message of the letter; it reaches from the throne of God, the center of all power, directly into our everyday lives.

This expression appears only in this letter, which perhaps has to do with the special religious situation in Ephesus, the center of the idolatrous worship of Artemis / Diana and of other cults (magic, sorcery, occultism).

Today we distinguish only 2 heavens: heaven as the place where God dwells (**invisible**, a different dimension from the one in which we live), and the sky, the atmosphere and/or the universe, where the heavenly bodies are (**visible**).

The first readers of this letter, Gentiles and Jews, knew heaven as having several levels (usually three or seven), populated by various spirit beings (angels, demons, powers, and others). In principle this had nothing to do with the revelation of Holy Scripture, the OT, but with widespread belief in gods and with special or extreme schools of belief, also within Judaism. Paul does not reject this belief or conception but presupposes it as given and real, without imparting any further knowledge about it.

His statement is that the invisible heaven is on the one hand the place of God's throne and also the realm of the spirit world. When he says that we are fighting a spiritual battle (Eph 6:12) against the evil spirits in the heavenly places, then this battle takes place on earth—that is, very concretely in our everyday lives.

Here too it becomes clear that the heavenly places reach from the place of God's throne of government into our lives. This other dimension of the invisible heaven, this spiritual reality, intersects, permeates, or overlaps our dimension in which we live. For the invisible world this difference between visible and invisible does not seem to exist. In other words, these heavenly places are in a certain sense also in our immediate vicinity.

So this term is very comprehensive: on the one side it is the throne of God, on the other side the atmosphere of air around us, in which the spiritual and invisible powers reside (2:2).

Paul uses the term “heavenly [places]” five times, and with each mention he opens up a new aspect:

1. 1:3 says that (only) there is the spiritual wealth of blessing given and received.
2. 1:20 shows Christ there at the right hand of God, seated on God's throne. This throne is the center of the heavenly places and shows the “one end of the heavenly places.”
3. 2:6 makes clear that we too have been brought there, because we are united with Christ, are “in Christ.” Other than by being there, we could not receive the blessing. There is our true home, the epitome of our hope for the future. But here it is about the “now,” about a standing or position that we already occupy now, even though we still live on earth.
4. 3:10 adds that not only each individual believer (as an individual) is there, but the church as a whole (corporately), and that it is seen there by angels as a demonstration of God's saving action before the invisible world, especially before the part of it that has fallen away from God.
5. 6:12 discloses that there is a battle in the heavenly realms between the devil and his angels (demons) and us. They carry out their evil work in the world, on the earth. The heavenly realm intersects, so to speak, our realm in which we live, where this battle takes place. The influence of the invisible on the visible world, of heaven on earth, is massive and present.

From these texts one recognizes that, on the one hand, it is about the immediate presence of God, his dwelling place, the place of his throne. The expression “*in the heavenly [places]*” (... ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις *en tois epouraniois*) occurs only in this letter. It is a designation of place, which is made

clear by the addition “places” (or also: realms, regions, spheres, the heavenly world)—not present in the Greek text. One can also translate “in the heavenlies.” At the same time it is about the manner, the character of a thing. The blessings are not only in heavenly places; they are also “heavenly” in themselves.

This term is also about a contrast, namely that of heaven and earth, and that of **visible and invisible**. For us the latter is probably the easiest way into understanding this abstract term, though it is not the only aspect of these terms. When Jesus “ascended into heaven,” he was taken away before the eyes of the disciples (Acts 1:9); in other words, HE became invisible. The point here is not that Jesus sets out for a far-distant place, but that HE vanishes into the invisible, heavenly world, to the throne of God.

The term “spiritual blessing” leads Paul to the term “in the heavenlies,” a connection that is by no means accidental. Ancient Israel received the blessing of the Most High—namely *earthly* blessings: a land of its own, rich harvests, offspring, health.

But now it is about blessing of a kind that did not exist before, and that cannot be attained by human beings either. Before, there was blessing on earth. Now there is blessing in heaven, that is, heavenly blessings. And that means that we must be there if we are to receive it. And that is exactly the message contained in the expression “heavenly places”: heaven is open to us; there is our place, our homeland, our home. In contrast to Israel, we are a heavenly people. God wants to have us with him, and the way there is open through the risen and glorified Son of God and Son of Man. He brought us to God, not only to solve the problem of guilt, but to bring us home to the heart of God. Like the prodigal son, we are received by our heavenly Father in his house and given everything the Father possesses (Luke 15:11-32). We have been accepted and adopted as sons, and as such we are heirs to whom everything the Father possesses belongs.

Why are the spiritual blessings given to us precisely “in the heavenlies”? Because, according to God’s desire, we are to be where the glorified, heavenly Christ is. We are inseparably united with him forever, personally and together as his body, the church.

In this we will always remain human beings, created in the image of God. But through God’s intervention in Christ we will one day bear the image of the heavenly one, and then we too will be *heavenly ones* (1 Cor 15:48-49). There are beings who have always belonged to this region. In this letter they are called powers and principalities. These are angels (Phil 2:10), heavenly beings. We are earthly beings who through Christ become heavenly ones, like Christ. That will never be true of angels.

It is not only the letter to the Ephesians that emphasizes the heavenly nature of the Christian. It is the revelation of the whole NT that the church is a heavenly people:

- The Son of God came to reveal to us **heavenly things** (τὰ ἐπουράνια), which were not known before and could only be communicated by the Son of God himself, coming from heaven (John 3:12)
- We share in the **heavenly kingdom** (εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐπουράνιον/ ... into his heavenly kingdom) of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Tim 4:18)
- We have a share in the **heavenly calling** (κλήσεως ἐπουρανίου μέτοχοι), *called from heaven for heaven* (Heb 3:1)

- We have received a **heavenly gift** (τῆς δωρεᾶς τῆς ἐπουρανίου), which we taste, that is, enjoy (Heb 6:4)
- The patriarchs already sought (ἐπιζητοῦσιν, sought, looked out for) a **heavenly** (τοῦτ' ἔστιν ἐπουρανίου) **homeland** (πατρίδα)—how much more do we (Heb 11:13-16)
- We have a **citizenship in heaven** (Phil 3:20)
- (τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ὑπάρχει)
- We have a **hope** that is laid up **in the heavens** (Col 1:5)
- (διὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα τὴν ἀποκειμένην ὑμῖν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς,)
- We set our minds on the things **that are above, where Christ is** (Col 3:1-4)
- => An unfading **inheritance** is kept for us **in the heavens** (1 Pet 1:4) τετηρημένην ἐν οὐρανοῖς
- We do not look at what is seen with the eyes, but at what is seen in faith with the eyes of the heart —**things** that are not temporal but **eternal**. It is about an **eternal weight of glory** (2 Cor 4:16-18)
- With the eyes of the heart we behold the (still invisible) **glory of Christ in heaven** (2 Cor 3:18; Acts 7:55)

Heaven is opened ... It is *the* message of the NT that heaven, in which God was hidden from us human beings, especially from the Gentiles, is now opened (the curtain of the temple was torn when Jesus died), and that access has been opened not into the earthly, Jewish sanctuary but into the heavenly one.

Like a ladder to heaven ... It is just as much the message of the NT that God reveals himself from heaven in the Son and shows himself as he really is. It is like a *ladder to heaven* that connects earth and heaven and can be climbed in every direction (John 1:51; Gen 28:12). God comes to us and we go to him. In this letter we look all the way to the throne of God, on which our LORD occupies the highest place of honor—and yet at the same time HE dwells in us, who are still on earth (3:17). And in this sense we have the spiritual blessing as those who are still on earth. The heavenly places, with all their blessing, are, as it were, in our hearts. That is why these heavenly places are very near and not light-years away.

Placed in Heaven ... in Christ ... There in HIM

As believers we have been placed there in Christ. “In Christ” is not (yet) “with Christ.” “In Christ” describes our position or standing that we have in HIM. That is, God regards us as **in Christ**; therefore we are already **there in HIM** and share his victorious position on God’s throne. Our standing in salvation could not be higher or more secure.

For God, who also wants to have us there in that place literally and bodily, this is already true now, because in his purpose the fulfillment is already guaranteed before the goal is reached.

An example to illustrate this, since we who think in terms of space and time find it hard to imagine that we are already in the heavenly realms now:

An elected representative of the people represents their interests in parliament. So those who elected him are, as it were, present and represented there in parliament in this representative. In

the same way we are represented and present in heaven at the throne, at the center of power, through and in Christ.

Another example, which shows how one lives in the heavenly realms in practice:

A certain species of water spider lives under water but breathes in or from an air bubble under water that it has taken down with it from the surface. In the same way we already live here out of, in, and from this heavenly world that Christ fills. The condition for such a life is, of course, to set our minds on heavenly things and to know the heavenly things.

The Separation Has Been Removed ...

The separation between the visible world and the invisible world, between the earth and the heavenly realms, has already been removed for believers: They have access to the Father. In the coming age, when Christ will be head over all things, this separation will also come to an end globally.

The Former Belief of the Ephesians in the Gods ...

In the old religion of the Ephesians, the heavenly realms were the domain of the gods, who influenced and determined their lives. They were hostile beings at whose mercy one was because of their superior power. On the one hand, the invisible world was dangerous, because no one really knew what went on there. This realm had great significance and attraction; the gods were supposed to help people reach their own goals. Occultism and magic, as well as magical formulas, were meant to make the gods compliant. The Ephesians were now freed from this fear; indeed, they had even been placed into this realm, but raised above the powers there. In Christ they had been placed at the center of power; the powers could no longer harm them. So they stood not only above the powers but also above the stars, which, as they believed, determined the fate of human beings.

Spiritual Blessings in the Heavenly Realms: What Are They?

What more could one wish for than to be blessed by God? He did it and blessed us. That is our God; there is none like HIM.

The blessing is spiritual and heavenly in nature. This sets this blessing in contrast to earthly, material blessing. It is given in the heavens.

Does that mean we have no earthly blessing? Certainly we also have earthly blessing. Our heavenly Father is the Preserver of all people, but especially of believers (1 Tim 4:10). But earthly blessing (and unfortunately we sometimes confuse it with abundance) is not promised or guaranteed to us. We cannot lay claim to it. We should be thankful if we have food and clothing – that is earthly blessing (1 Tim 6:8). We live in a fallen creation that lies under the curse. Spiritual blessing does not remove the curse and the consequences of sin; rather, it changes and fills our hearts.

Spiritual blessing exists in richness and abundance; every blessing has been given to us. This is a tremendous truth that goes beyond food and drink and all earthly wealth. What was previously out of reach for human beings now becomes our possession. What makes up the glory, the riches, the love, the purity, and the life of heaven has now been given to us in Christ. God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, lets us share in the blessings in the glory of heaven in Christ, the risen and enthroned Son of

Man. A glorified man in heaven opens the way for us and takes us along to God's heavenly treasure house.

All the spiritual blessings that exist there have become our possession. Only in Christ do we receive what no human being would ever have dared to dream of. God sacrificed his only Son and did not spare him for our sake. With him he will give us every blessing imaginable (Rom 8:32).

But do we know what the blessings and heavenly treasures are that have been given to us in Christ, of which Paul speaks right here?

When Paul places the statement about blessing right at the front of his letter, like a table of contents, then we too should first look for the blessings in this letter, and then, beyond the letter, look for parallels and further blessings in the NT. In our search we distinguish between what God has done to us and what he has made us, and what we have received. The one is the way and the access to the treasures; the other is the treasure itself.

On our journey through this extraordinary letter we encounter impressive blessings. The spies who scouted out Canaan sometimes could not believe their eyes either (Num 13). The agricultural abundance was impressive. It really was to belong to them. **What we find in the Letter to the Ephesians belongs to us here and now**, all of it without exception, even if part of the blessing will only be taken into possession in the future. We are not waiting for a special blessing; we possess it. But it is a matter of reaching out, seeking, looking, and enjoying, so that this wealth also gives us the awareness that as sons of God we are rich – and not only in the future. We should know our inheritance. “But you are rich,” Christ says to the church in Smyrna (Rev 2:9), which was poor in material goods. This is about spiritual riches, not about money, houses, and cars. Knowing the riches God has given is of great importance for our daily life of faith. What good is it to a person if he does not know that he is already the owner and heir of great riches and yet lives in poverty? His thinking, his attitude to life, and his hopes would be completely different if he knew! That is why Paul prays so intensely (twice in this letter: 1:15-18; 3:14-19) that the eyes of our hearts may be opened so that we know the blessing. God does not prescribe a narrow-gauge Christianity for us! He means it seriously that we should live in the fullness and in the unsearchable riches of Christ! Outward poverty and even persecution at the same moment are no contradiction to this! The principle of faith and hope applies: Already now – and not yet! But soon the “not yet” will be over, and we will enter into our inheritance together with Christ.

The so-called prosperity gospel is a contradiction, because it confuses spiritual and earthly blessing or anticipates heaven. Godliness is not a means to material or financial gain.

Let us begin our search. Verse 11 says that we have obtained an **inheritance**. As sons and children of God we have become heirs of God (Rom 8:17; Jas 2:5). What is the inheritance? It is first of all about Christ, whom God as the heir of all things (Heb 1:2) will set over everything. He is already exalted above all things now, but this will soon be revealed, that is, made visible to the whole creation. We have a share in this reign in glory. We are right there, up close. As the church we are his body, to which the administration of all things will be entrusted. That is a future blessing of which we already have the down payment now. We live before this horizon of glory; things are not going downhill but uphill.

In connection with the inheritance there is a further heavenly blessing: the **Holy Spirit**, who is the pledge and down payment that secures and guarantees the redemption of the inheritance (1:13-14). So the Spirit is our possession and has been given to us as the Spirit of wisdom and revelation (1:17).

The Spirit acquaints us with the riches, and he is the one who leads us to the Father (2:18). It is the Spirit who strengthens us in the inner being, so this is a blessing we can experience daily (3:16; see also 4:23, 30; 5:18; 6:18, 17). It is the Spirit of God through whom the fellowship of the body of Christ came into being and who enlivens and permeates it (4:3). This blessing is not a thing but a person, a divine person.

The **Holy Spirit** has been sent from heaven; he leads us into divine truth so that we may know (come to know) the things that have been freely given to us by God (1 Cor 2:12; John 16:13; 14:17). In this letter he is mentioned 13 times, and that surely demands corresponding attention. He himself is a heavenly gift to us, and at the same time he is the one who opens up the things of heaven to the eyes of our hearts.

The reality, the fact, that this Spirit dwells in us is not an abstract doctrine but a spiritual reality of life that can help shape and permeate every action, every process of our lives, if we give the Spirit of Jesus room. Only where HE is given room can HE fill it. We have the Spirit, but the Spirit should also have us!

In connection with the Holy Spirit, another heavenly blessing became our possession: **access to the Father as his sons, and fellowship with him**: Through him, the Spirit, Jews and Gentiles together now have access to the Father (2:18; 3:12). This is a spiritual as well as a heavenly blessing. It is spiritual because we experience it by faith. It is heavenly because it is our heavenly Father, who dwells in heaven. At this “place” we come before HIM. It is breathtaking, especially from the perspective of former sinners, that we may come before the Father without fear, in the awareness of being completely accepted as sons. This is not the moment of repentance toward God. It is a constant privilege. There we cultivate shared interests. Being occupied with the Son of the Father’s love is one of them. There we may spread out our lives, all our joys, all our sorrows. There we experience comfort and encouragement. There we find grace to help in time of need.

Fellowship with the Father and the Son is described especially by the apostle John in his Gospel and in his letters. We have eternal life, the life of heaven, of the Father’s house, in the Son.

The **fellowship of believers** is a heavenly blessing. It is a heavenly people, created by the Spirit. All believers share the same life and have the same goal. This bond, this unity of the children of God in one body and in one house, was God’s eternal and therefore heavenly plan. They share the same life and are connected with the heavenly. It is a piece of heaven when believers cultivate warm fellowship with one another, treat one another with love, and help and support one another in spirit, soul, and body. The devil can rob us of this blessing, that is, of the enjoyment of this blessing, through discord in the church.

The blessings are meant to be our practical gain. Let us get serious about exploring and experiencing our riches. Let us not stop at the realization that we are pardoned sinners, but let us go further and recognize our standing in salvation in Christ, and in this sense also “stand firm in the Lord.” The devil’s tactic is to distract us from this so that we see only what we have to give up and the difficulties, especially in comparison with the people around us who may be better off and who can live and do as they please. This way of looking at things wears us down and takes away the joy we really ought to have. Like Israel, let us also conquer the land that belongs to us. That is God’s will: Take possession of what he has given you! Be and live what you have become!

Election (Predestination): Just a Controversial Topic?

Right at the beginning of the letter it is said that the Ephesians were chosen before the foundation of the world (1:4) and predestined to sonship (1:5). Election and predestination are related in this context; the first describes a selection, the second a concrete purpose, which, however, may be preceded by a selection.

One could fill a whole library with books on this subject. As is well known, the point of contention lies in the dispute about human free will and God's sovereignty. This dispute is hopeless because it is usually conducted as an "either – or" discussion. Either it is God's sovereign selection that brings a person to repentance, or it is the free decision or choice of the person who, addressed by the gospel, repents.

We have to accept that there are some biblical truths that we cannot explain, that is, that are hard for us (for our understanding) to imagine. This applies, for example, to the person of Jesus, who was God and man at the same time. It also applies to the fact that God is one and yet three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But the limits of our understanding, even as children of God, also concern existential questions of life, such as the question of suffering, perhaps in our own lives, but in any case the undeserved suffering in the world.

The same applies to the topic of pre-election. How can it be that there are those who are chosen and those who are not? If we were to decide in favor of a limited selection by God, one would rightly have to object: Why then should the gospel be proclaimed to all people? If, on the other hand, we were to decide that everyone can be converted by free choice, then election makes no sense, or hardly any.

Election does not make the sinner's decision of faith unnecessary. The sinner is called to repentance and faith in spite of election.

I have learned, and have been allowed to make it my conviction: Human responsibility and the working of the sovereign God in election do not exclude each other but are present at the same time. This does not explain or resolve the tension of the simultaneity of two seemingly contradictory elements. We have to bear this tension, just as is true of many a question in our personal life of faith.

This is about the greatness of our God and not the greatness of our understanding.

A comparison can be helpful. A railroad track consists of two rails that must always run parallel and never cross. So it is with God's sovereignty, in which he makes his selection, and so it is with the responsibility of the human being, who must be converted. The track is a picture of salvation history, in which precisely these two aspects can always be seen. It is a divine and therefore unsearchable mystery how God reaches his goal, and does so in such a way that he is glorified and no one can ever reproach him. On the horizon the rails then converge. So it will be at the end: God will also reveal this mystery, and the perfect will have come. Then we will understand his actions much better (1 Cor 13:9-10).

The **two aspects** are also found in the passion of Jesus Christ. On the one side is the full responsibility of all who were directly and indirectly involved in the murder of Jesus. The other side is the act of God, who gave up his Son as the Lamb of God, as a sacrifice for sin. That is God's wisdom. The murderers will have no excuse by appealing to God's plan. They are fully responsible for the murder of Jesus. But it is God's infinite grace that even the murderers can be pardoned on the basis of Jesus' sacrifice!

C. H. Mackintosh compared one-sided emphases – whether on the sovereignty of God or on the responsibility of man – to a bird with only one wing, or to a boat that is supposed to be propelled with only one oar. We cannot resolve the tension that exists between these two poles. It remains until we are in the light. Instead of trying to resolve this tension, we should let the tremendous force of divine grace have its effect on us and let it fill us as a mighty comfort and encouragement, which must also become visible in zeal for the lost.

We have been chosen – out of the world (John 15:19). His choice favors the weak and the poor of the world (1 Cor 1:27-28; Jas 2:5). That is why we can speak of a gracious counsel. God's chosen ones enjoy his special protection (Rom 8:33). They also have special duties (Col 3:12). We are chosen as individual creatures (John 1:13), but also as a whole church (Eph 3:8-11; 1 Pet 2:9). The apostle Paul was sure of the election of the Thessalonians because he saw the work of faith among them (1 Thess 1:4). As far as we know, he had no insight into God's eternal counsel as to who would obtain salvation and who would not. Rather, he worked all the harder so that the elect might obtain salvation (2 Tim 2:10).

Every believer may rejoice and take courage from having already been known in God's heart before all time, from having been foreknown and loved by God even then.

Sonship and Being Children: Simply the Same Thing?

We were once "sons of disobedience" (2:2; 5:6) and "children of wrath" (2:3); now we are sons of God, since we have been predestined to sonship (1:5), and God's "beloved children" (5:1). So we can live as "children of light" (5:8). As children and sons we have free "access to the Father" through the Holy Spirit (2:18; 4:6; 5:20).

In Paul's time, among the Romans, a child was regarded as the property of the father, just like the wife and the slaves. He became a son, and thus also an heir, when he came of age. As a son he was in a different position from a child; he had become a counterpart to the father and his successor. In Roman law there was also adoption to sonship, which made the adopted person an heir and severed all old family ties forever.

The believer is son and child at the same time. It is not as in ordinary life, where a child becomes a son and is then no longer a child. The apostle John does show exactly this process of growth (1 John 2:13-17), but there too it holds true that we are children and sons at the same time. In other words, a child of God should be spiritually grown up. These two designations, which are both possessions of faith at the same time, describe different aspects of our relationship to God our Father.

Being a **child** speaks of birth, that is, new birth, life from God, of security and inheritance (John 1:12; Rom 8:16-17, 21; 1 John 3:1-2, 10; 4:2). **Sonship** speaks of acceptance, that is, adoption, of spiritual adulthood, and also of inheritance. In terms of how it comes about: One becomes God's child by birth, a son of God by adoption.

Sonship is a relationship of trust in which we say to God: ABBA (dear) Father! Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6. God has adopted us as sons for himself, in whom HE takes delight (1:5) and with whom HE can talk about his eternal plans (Eph 1). The redemption of our body will make our sonship complete (Rom 8:23). Then the Son of God will be seen on us and in us by God himself and by all people. Furthermore, sonship has to do with God's discipline (Heb 12:5-7), with holiness (2 Cor 6:17), with freedom from the law (Gal 4:7), and with glory, now and in the future (Heb 2:10).

The Letter to the Ephesians reveals God's eternal plan, which he wants to share with his sons, and reveals God's future, which he wants to share – with the unique Son of the Father as its eternal center – with his many adopted sons (and daughters).

The Lord Jesus Christ is never called a “child of God”; HE did not experience a new birth. HE is the eternal Son of God and of the Father (2 John 3). HE always was this; HE did not become it by adoption as we did. As the Son of God, HE is the model, the “prototype” of our sonship: We will soon be conformed to the image of the Son, so that HE may be the firstborn among many brothers (Rom 8:29).

As a man, too, HE is the Son of God, because as such he was conceived by the Holy Spirit, by God, and not by Joseph, his legal father.

Sit – Walk – Stand: God's Order

This is the title of one of the much-blessed books by the Chinese Christian Watchman Nee. Using Ephesians, he explains the Christian life with these terms. This order corresponds to what Ephesians teaches us. God's saving act, as described in chapter 2, leads us out of spiritual death into life, and in Christ all the way up to God's throne. There Christ has taken his seat, and because we are in HIM, the same applies to us. **Our standing in salvation is in Christ, and it includes that we too are seated and have come to rest in God's fullness of salvation.** It includes a complete crediting of salvation in Christ, in that everything that was necessary to end the old and create the new has been accomplished by Christ. It is the full, the perfect salvation, which is given to us irrevocably in Christ once and for all. From chapter 4 of the letter onward, the heading of verse 1 then applies: “Walk worthy of the calling with which you have been called!” The Christian walk begins out of rest, out of secure salvation. The walk is not an effort to reach this position, but exactly the reverse. We live each day with the firm knowledge that we have been accepted once and for all. As Christians we live out of salvation, not toward salvation, let alone with the risk of losing this salvation. Only in this knowledge are we truly able to live up to the responsibility into which this calling has brought us.

The third “posture” of the spiritual, inner person is **standing**. Unlike our earthly body, the spiritual person manages to take all 3 postures at the same time. He is always seated with Christ in the heavenly realms; he never again leaves this place! At the same time we are constantly in our everyday lives, where the new self that we have put on in salvation walks. Finally comes standing, being steadfast. The exhortation to stand, that is, to be steadfast and immovable, shows that we can be driven by the enemy and the world out of the position into which we have been brought, out of the fullness of blessing into which we have been placed. That sounds contradictory, because it was just emphasized that this position cannot be lost. That is correct, but what God's enemy, the devil, and his host of angels are after is that we forget the knowledge of these truths of salvation and the fullness of blessing, that they no longer mean anything to us, and that we live like the world, which does not know God.

So there are 2 sides to our salvation: the objective and the subjective, the indicative of salvation and the imperative of salvation. The objective side of our salvation is inviolable, forever. The subjective side includes what we make of it in our lives, whether we put it into practice, whether we really walk worthy of this calling. “Standing” belongs to this. “Standing” means that our standing in salvation, the fullness of salvation and blessing (or rather the enjoyment of the blessing), is a practical reality of our everyday lives.

The NT Church: Since When Has It Existed? (Eph 2 + 3)

At first glance this question seems unfounded, or, to put it differently, is it even relevant? Of course the church in Ephesus came into being through Paul's missionary work. The church in Ephesus knew the hour of its birth. The hour of birth of the worldwide church, however, lies 3 decades earlier: At Pentecost in Jerusalem the NT church, the church of Jesus Christ, came into being through the baptism with the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13). Just as Jesus himself had announced, all believers, the scattered children of God, were "made to drink" in and with one Spirit, whereby they were all joined by the Spirit into one body (a spiritual body), and this body became the body of Christ, joined to the heavenly Head.

This church did not exist in the OT. That was not possible, because the Holy Spirit did not dwell in people on earth as is now the case with NT believers. Nor was there yet in the OT a heavenly Head, a Christ who had descended and ascended. There is no church or congregation from Adam onward to which believers belonged.

But that still does not fully answer the question in the heading. At the beginning of chapter 3, Paul interrupts the flow of his writing and inserts a parenthesis. He emphasizes the special nature of his apostolic ministry. As the apostle of, or for, the Gentiles (Gal 2:7), he had received a special revelation. God had shown him and entrusted to him something that had not been known before. He calls this the "**mystery of Christ.**" He had already described it briefly in chapter 2. There he describes how God's saving work is no longer limited to his earthly people but applies to all people. In this, the Gentiles are not incorporated into the status of the old people of God – which would have been a considerable blessing – but God creates something new out of both, namely one new humanity and a new temple. What is not yet conspicuous in chapter 2, Paul describes in emotional words in chapter 3: This action of God is not a reaction to the utterly lost situation of the Gentiles, and not least of the Jews, who had become guilty of the death of the Messiah; it is not an emergency plan but his eternal and sovereign purpose. Before all time God had this extraordinary plan to create the church, and that from all people. In this plan concerning the church the whole wealth of Christ unfolds.

Paul says that this purpose was not known to a single person in the OT. So one will search the OT in vain for statements about the church. There are typological and figurative statements, but these could only become such once the church existed.

That the NT church is not simply a continuation of God's history with his old people Israel is of great significance. The NT church does not replace Israel as God's earthly people, nor does it take over the promises to Israel. The church comes onto the scene as something new, out of God's eternal purpose, and as such has nothing directly to do with the history of Israel. This history is only suspended, interrupted for a certain time. This time is the time of the church, which lasts until this church is caught up into heaven. With Israel God will reach his goal; all his promises and prophecies about his earthly people will be fulfilled.

We live in a time when the history of the church of Jesus is nearing its end. In order to fulfill the prophecies to Israel, such a nation must also be in this land. This has already been fulfilled, even while the Christian church is still on earth. We are already living in a kind of transitional period – in biblical words, in the last times!

So the Letter to the Ephesians confirms the heavenly position of the church and makes clear that nothing greater can come from God's hand than to belong to this spiritual corporate body called the

“body of Christ.” Nothing of the kind is said of Israel or of any other nation or group of people.

Let us briefly return once more to the relationship between the NT church and Israel. In God’s dealings there is continuity and also discontinuity. This means that on the one hand God moves forward in his salvation history, as was promised in the OT. For example, Joel’s word about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit experienced a preliminary or partial fulfillment at Pentecost in Acts 2. The New Covenant, announced in the OT, includes the church. But on the other hand, with the church God also begins something completely new. At this point a short excursion into the Letter to the Romans is probably helpful. In chapter 11, God’s saving work for the blessing of humanity is compared to an olive tree.

The olive tree is a picture of God’s blessing: how it is promised and to whom it comes, who loses it and who gains it, and how in the end it is enjoyed again by those who had once forfeited it.

The olive tree does not specifically represent the people of God, Israel; rather, it shows the sphere of blessing as it was promised to the patriarchs and as it is fulfilled in Christ. The people of Israel were first under the blessing, and the high point would have been to accept the Messiah, who in his person was the blessing promised to the patriarchs. Only some did so and received the blessing. The others were cut off. The few were united with the believers from the nations. These too now share by faith in the blessings of the patriarchs. They too are heirs and spiritual sons of Abraham, children of the promise. But the original, natural branches do not remain in unbelief. The day is coming when they will be saved and grafted in again and find their way back onto God’s path, when they will experience the blessing once promised as a nation, as ethnic Israel.

The Gentile believers are not incorporated in the sense that they become Israel. How are the nations supposed to become Israelites? In their new position they share the same blessings as the Jewish believers, but in their new position there is neither Jew nor Greek, Gal 3:28.

The picture of the olive tree, even though it was designed by God himself, must not be overstretched.

The olive tree represents the system of patriarchal blessings, from the covenant with Abraham to the New Covenant. The growth of the tree is the progress of history. The olive tree is a kind of corridor of blessing through history, which one enters by faith. This corridor includes many of God’s thoughts, including the church, and it leads to the end of his history, which he himself is writing in the hiddenness and sovereignty of his throne.

The Fullness of God: The Goal of All Things

The unfathomable riches of Christ break through every dam and flood the whole world – not to drown people as in the Flood, but to fill them with these fabulous riches of Christ and to plant them into the body of Christ, the church, and to make them heirs, so that they can experience the day of the restoration of all things, when Christ will step forward to become the Head of all things at the end of the ages.

The terms “fullness” and “fill,” as well as related terms, appear several times in this letter:

- the riches of grace which HE has made to **overflow** toward us (1:8)

We have a giving God who gives out of his superabundance, because of his **great** love.

- ... the church, which is his body, the **fullness** of him who **fills** all in all (1:23)

Here the church has the breathtaking privilege of bringing Christ to fullness. Not that he would ever need anyone, but the point is that the church is his body. God takes the glorified man Jesus and gives him to the church as a gift, namely to be the Head of the church. The church in turn becomes his body, by which HE is complete **as man** (not as God the Son). Another picture from chapter 5 makes clearer what this means: Christ unites himself with the church, just as husband and wife become one flesh, as Adam and Eve once did. With the church Christ is brought to fullness, and we will stand in this union for all time. Christ will always show himself in this way and will always be seen in this union with the church, by people and angels and God. HE, as Head together with his body, will fill everything. The whole universe will bear this stamp of his omnipresence and his blessing.

- ... that you may **be filled to all the fullness of God** (3:19)

That is God's goal and blessing for us. Only in God do we come to fullness and to rest. We desire nothing else than to be filled with his power, that Christ may dwell in our hearts, and that we may know the love of Christ. God wants to make his home with us, change our lives, and let his fullness flow through us to others. We will not reach the whole fullness of God himself on earth, but it is already beginning.

The fullness of God is not something impersonal, as is believed in some religions, but the triune God himself, as HE has revealed himself in Jesus and through the Bible.

- He who descended is the same one who also ascended far above all the heavens, **that he might fill all things!** (4:10)

Even now HE fills everything; the invisible world, the heavenly realms, are permeated by Christ's victory. Even if the powers are still up to their mischief, Christ's victory is being demonstrated to them by means of a redeemed church. Their days are numbered, and soon nothing will stand in the way of the filling of all created things by the Son of God.

- ... to the mature man, to the measure of the full stature of **the fullness of Christ** (4:13)

It is not only the individual believer who finds his goal in the fullness of God. The whole church is placed in this dynamic process of growth in just the same way. Here, too, the goal is nothing less than the fullness of Christ himself. The fullness of Christ means that HE fills, permeates, equips, guides, and blesses the church and brings it to its goal in glory.

- ... be **filled** with the Spirit! (5:18)

This call to let something happen to us is meant to lead us to clear out of our lives everything that competes with God and his goals. HE can only fill us when we are empty of ourselves and of our own desires. But then HE can come fully into his own and give authority and ability for whatever ministry we are called to.

This letter is filled with the riches of Christ. They make us full of God, of Christ, and of the Spirit. In this way, on the one hand, our existential thirst for life is quenched (Ps 42:1-2; John 4:13-14; 7:37-39), and in this way God reaches his goal with us; that is, only as people filled by God will we be imitators of God.

Old Testament Typology and the Letter to the Ephesians: Is It Really Possible?

The OT gives us a plausible and illustrative foreshadowing of the teaching of this letter. In this teaching, believers are described as already placed in heaven. This is typologically foreshadowed in the entry of the people of Israel into Canaan. This promised land was exceedingly fruitful, as the spies had already testified. But there were also mighty enemies there. This corresponds to the heavenly places into which we have entered through the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. The mighty enemies correspond to the evil principalities and powers explained earlier. The Jordan River is a picture of death, which had to be crossed in order to get into the land. Joshua is a type of the Lord Jesus as the victor on God's throne (Eph 1).

This type makes clear how this situation is a present and spiritual reality. The heavenly places are not far away, for both the spiritual battle and the enjoyment of heavenly blessing take place in our lives, in the church, at our workplace, and in our homes. That is why we must not interpret this teaching about the heavenly places geographically, let alone cosmically, but spiritually. In very practical terms, heaven is not far away; it is as near as Christ himself, who dwells and works in my heart. That is why, at the heart of the letter, Paul also prays "that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith" (3:17-19).

Finally, an overall view of our Christian position and life in typology: We have been rescued out of the world (Egypt) through the death of Jesus (the Red Sea) and brought into the wilderness. The world in which we find ourselves has become a wilderness for us. We do not really belong there, for Jesus says that we are not of the world. We are on a journey, on the path of faith toward the goal, the heavenly kingdom of our Lord. Yet at the same time it is true that through the death of Christ and his resurrection we are in HIM in the heavenly places.

For Israel only one thing could apply; for us both apply, that is, wilderness and Canaan at the same time. Figuratively speaking, we have our feet in the desert sand and our head, or better our heart, in heaven (where our treasure is).

Christ the Head: Unity, Function, and Representation

In this letter Christ's role as head is shown in at least 2 ways: 1. as head over all created things (1:10, 22) and as head of the body, his church (1:23).

The head (in Greek nothing other than the biological "head" of a human being) has various aspects:

1. Unity: of head and body. The picture speaks of an organic and living unity.
2. Function: In the organic unity of the human being, the head and the body are placed in a certain order, and each part has its specific functions and tasks. This also includes the aspect of hierarchy, in which the head stands at the top.
3. Representation: What we usually remember of a person is the face. The head stands for the whole person (e.g., a passport photo). The head of a state, the Federal President, takes on representative duties toward the other nations of the world.

These 3 aspects can almost always be found again wherever Christ is called head.

It is interesting how the Greek term (*kephale* κεφαλή) was used back then. Besides the head of a human being or an animal, it denoted what is outstanding and what stands in the first or uppermost

place (e.g., Eph 5:23 and elsewhere). Likewise the word was used for the mouth of a river, for a source, for the origin of a thing, or for the beginning of an epoch.

In the OT, fathers are called heads of their families (e.g., Num 1:4).

Israel had been appointed by God to be the head of all nations, that is, to occupy an outstanding position over, or in the midst of, the peoples, Deut 28:13. Here it is less about a hierarchical position and more about being a light for the peoples with regard to God. In the NT the term “head” is applied to Christ. When he is called head, he is always so as man, for as head he always stands in a relationship to human beings. He is head as the glorified and enthroned man, on the basis of his completed work of redemption.

- He is the “head of the corner,” that is, the cornerstone by which everything is aligned and must be aligned. He holds everything together. God made him this after the builders rejected the stone, Christ. In this way God made him the sole source of salvation for the whole world. There is salvation in no other name under heaven, Acts 4:11-12.
- In Rom 5 from verse 12 on we also find Christ as a head in contrast to Adam. Even though the word head is not literally used there, one can still see that Adam is the head, that is, the beginning and origin, of humanity fallen into sin. Christ is the beginning and author of a new and redeemed human race.
- Christ is the head of the body, the church. Through the Holy Spirit all believers were baptized into one body at Pentecost (1 Cor 12:13) and joined with the glorified Christ in heaven, the head of the body. As head of the body, Christ is the heavenly source for the church on earth, from which it receives everything it needs to fulfill its function on earth. The role of the head is not that of ruling over the body but of supplying, providing, caring, and loving. That is also exactly the model for husband and wife in their marriage. My head does not rule over my body; my body is not forced to obey my brain. The essence of head and body is the unity of the organism, the automatic functioning of the whole. The commands of the brain are carried out automatically, without compulsion and subjugation. Because the brain directs, the head has special significance, and yet neither is the head anything without the body, nor the body anything without the head, as Paul once says of man and woman. The church represents its heavenly Head, Christ, here on earth. And in just the same way the church is represented by Christ in heaven before God and the angels.

The 3 aspects of the Head of all things in the future millennial kingdom **and** in the new creation look like this:

1. Unity: There is no longer any separation or rupture within creation, nor any separation of creation from God. Without the Head all things were as though dead, useless and worthless to God. In connection and unity with Christ, joined like a head with the body, everything is restored and brought back to God.

2. Function: Because the unity of head and body makes complete influence possible into every corner of existence, everything will be shaped by the Lord Jesus. Everything will function as he wills.

As Head of all things he will, like the mouth of a river, let an unstoppable, broad, and deep stream of blessing flow into all things; everything will be immersed in the fullness of the greatness and blessing of the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. Representation: All things will be brought by him into complete harmony with God. God will then be perfectly glorified forever. All things will then have God's good pleasure through Christ, who possesses God's unrestricted good pleasure. As God sees his Christ, so he will then look upon all things. This unprecedented state will have no end. The old has passed away; behold, everything has become new.

The 5 Gifts: Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers – Still Today?

One focus of the Letter to the Ephesians is the church as the body of Christ. The fact that this body still exists today in its practical realization after 2,000 years of church history (even if, sadly, it is no longer visible in the unity of one body) has its reason in the fact that the glorified Christ has given gifts to his body. These gifts prove that Christ is the glorified Head of the church.

Interestingly, there are two "kinds" of gifts here: 1. everyone has a gift, which is of immense importance (4:7), and 2. there are believers who as persons are Christ's gifts to the church. These gifts are people with the ability – recognizable to everyone around them – of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher.

In this connection, the two other main texts on this topic, namely 1 Cor 12 and Rom 12, must of course also be consulted and compared. There one finds more gifts of grace than those named here. These, however, seem to be the most important or perhaps the greatest gifts, especially since they are directly identified with the person here.

One can easily imagine what these gifts mean and what their ability consists of. But the question remains whether these gifts, that is, all 5, are still given to the church by Christ today.

It is generally said that the first 2 gifts are no longer given. The apostles were a fixed number of 12 plus 1. Nor are there prophets any longer, because the canon of Scripture is closed and accessible to virtually all Christians. The work of the apostles, or their gift to the church, is then still present today in their writings, the NT.

Another view holds that all 5 gifts are still given today. In principle, this statement also reads as timeless and always valid. The church functions to this day with the help of these 5 (person-)gifts and the gifts of grace that every member has.

The fact that Barnabas is once called an apostle in the same breath as Paul (Acts 14:14), that Paul speaks of several apostles who were with him in Thessalonica (1 Thess 2:6), and that Andronicus and Junias may possibly be counted among the apostles (Rom 16:7) permits the conclusion that there were not only 12+1 apostles.

In this view, apostles today are of course not people who continue an apostolic line, as is practiced, for example, in the New Apostolic Church. Nor have apostles today seen Jesus with their physical eyes. The 12 apostles of the Lamb will forever have a special status, or remembrance, in the foundation of the eternal city. Apostles today no longer have the significance they had in the first century, but their ministry does have similar characteristics.

I count as apostles today those who stand at the beginning of revivals, who plant churches, who are leaders of Christendom. Certainly they have no apostolic authority, but they play an enormously important role when it comes to the growth of the body. On this, a quotation (Thomas Jettel): "The word (*apostolos* **ἀπόστολος** messenger; envoy) is used in the NT in various senses. Jesus appointed the Twelve as his first messengers. Paul was likewise appointed directly by the Lord as a special

messenger (Gal 1; 2 Cor 12:12). James also seems to have held a special position (1 Cor 15:7; Gal 1:19). These were foundation-laying apostles (Eph 2:20; 3:5), apostles of the first quality, so to speak, of the first rank; they received their message directly from the Lord. But the NT does not limit the term apostle to them. Others such as Barnabas (Acts 14:4; cf. Gal 2:8-9), Silas and Timothy (Acts 17:1, 4; 1 Thess 1:1-2; cf. 2:6-7), and Titus (Titus 1:5; 3:12) are called 'apostles' in a broader sense. They did not have the same quality and authority, but they carried out an activity similar to that of the foundation-laying apostles. They were evangelists and teachers, showed new groups the way, and traveled about as teachers. Their activity was one of leadership, but not tied to one place. This group can also be called 'missionary teachers.'"

The same applies to the prophets. We know little about this gift, only that all 3 relevant texts (on the gifts) (Eph 4, 1 Cor 12, Rom 12) include it. Otherwise NT prophets are mentioned only here:

Acts 13:1: Now there were in Antioch, in the assembly there, **prophets** and teachers: Barnabas and Simeon, called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

Acts 15:32: And Judas and Silas, who were themselves also **prophets**, encouraged the brothers with many words and strengthened them.

Prophets in the 1st century were also those who, as long as there was no NT yet, revealed truths, that is, could pass them on. Those who were not apostles but whose letters nevertheless came into the NT, such as James and Jude, can also be called such. Now that the NT canon is complete, this ministry is no longer needed today, and that is why this ministry of inspired writing of Scripture no longer exists.

Prophets today are those who are able – and in this they resemble those of the OT – to recognize and expose the spirit of the age, who uncover and denounce dangerous trends in Christendom. Such people are uncomfortable precisely because they put their finger on the wound. Their ministry is exhortation. They do not foretell future events, nor do they reveal new truths. That was not, and is not, the ministry of the prophets of the NT, and so not of our day either.

The New Self: Where and How It Becomes Visible

Neither religions, nor education, nor politics, nor genetics has produced a new human being, even though it has been tried again and again. Anyone who tries to think objectively about the human being – about what he always was and what he is and does even today – will inevitably arrive at the necessity of a new self.

God the Creator did not "repair" or "reform" the human being who had fallen into sin and lives in sin. The law could not accomplish that either; it only confirmed that he cannot be improved. The old self can no longer be improved. The cross of Golgotha is the end of the old self. In our place Christ takes upon himself the judgment and the death of the old self. In the resurrection of Christ a new self comes forth – we are his masterpiece, a new creation – which is created in accordance with God himself (4:20-24; Rom 6:1-11; Gal 5:16-26). This concerns first of all, and as long as we live on earth, our heart, the inner person, and not yet the body. It concerns a person's thinking, his attitude to life, his will, and also his feelings. But in its practical effect the new is not immediately there fully and completely, as if we had been made perfect at a stroke. The new is placed in us like a seed that is meant to grow. The power of the Spirit and of the living Word, through which we were born again, brings about a constant

and continuous transformation into the image of Jesus. To the Ephesians Paul speaks of “being renewed in the spirit of your mind.” This process of change has **2 sides**: On the one hand, it is God’s working and power on which we must rely in order to experience this process of renewal. But on the other hand, we are held fully responsible and called to do, to act, and to decide as befits this new self. To put it in other words: We exert ourselves as if it depended on us, and in doing so we trust in God, without whose working nothing can succeed. In this sense Jesus, the true vine, says when it comes to fruit for God: “Without me, or apart from me, you can do nothing.”

So from the new birth onward, the new self is my new personality, but in an old environment. It is not my surroundings that have changed; I have been changed and am constantly changing in a process of spiritual growth.

This is how Paul describes the new life as it shows itself in the relationships of life and society familiar to us:

Ch. 4:1-16: In the Church, in the Body of Christ

Here the new life is intent on holding itself back and not pushing its own way in church life or riding roughshod over others. Our conduct should serve to maintain the practical unity of the church. In the same way, every member is included in the responsibility to promote the spiritual growth of the church, for each one has received a gift from Christ.

Ch. 4:17-24: The Fundamental Difference from the World

There can hardly be a greater contrast than between a life in the world, far from God, and a life from God, in a son’s fellowship with the heavenly Father. The fullness of meaning and the permanence of these two ways of life differ like day and night.

Ch. 4:25-32: Commandments for the New Life: Speaking, Working, Forgiving

Paul begins to point out various details of how the new life breaks through in everyday life. Anger and shouting, rage and bitterness can only belong to an old life in which there is no real meaning and love. Stealing should be a thing of the past; our speech is positive and edifying. It does not pull down but lifts up.

Ch. 5:1-14: Imitators of God: Jokes, Sexuality, Light / Darkness

In a godless world we are to be nothing less than imitators of God. Dirty jokes, delight in the filth and dirt of a crooked and perverse generation, are no longer heard from us. Sexuality is a precious and at the same time very fragile gift of God. There is no longer any voluntary heart fellowship with the world. Rather, as lights in the world we are signposts into the light and into the day.

Ch. 5:15-21: Making the Most of the Time, Alcohol, Worship in the Church

God grants special moments to show himself through us, works that HE has prepared, so that we may walk in them. Children of God and of the light do not live aimlessly and passively. They use the time available, act thoughtfully, with sense and understanding, which has been renewed in them. They do the will of God. They do not get drunk on alcohol, which makes one sluggish and unsober and does not bring one closer to the Lord.

Instead of an intoxicant, the Spirit should completely fill and fulfill us. Then we can also be of benefit to others in the church. Then genuine heartfelt praise and thanksgiving become possible out of a full heart. This builds up not only ourselves but all who hear it.

Ch. 5:22-33: Marriage of Husband and Wife – Christ and the Church

A marriage is a lifelong task that does not work well on its own or automatically. Back then the wife was property, and absolute obedience was required of her. In antiquity there was no commandment to husbands to love their wives. But the light of the gospel leads wives out of this situation: Husbands are to love their wives, and that according to a standard that cannot be surpassed: just as Christ loved the church.

Wives, in turn, should not now think that they could rebel against their husbands in the light and freedom of the gospel. They too should apply to themselves the model of Christ and the church: Just as the church as the body is subordinate to the head (Christ), so also wives to their husbands. All this action in imitation of Christ, concerning husbands and wives, happens voluntarily and without compulsion, out of the conviction of renewed hearts.

Ch. 6:1-4: Children and Fathers

Children, whether believers or not, are to obey their parents. This will be a blessing to them. The sixth commandment of the ten words to Israel applies: timeless and always valid, a commandment for the life and blessing of parents and children.

Fathers, or parents, are to deal with their children lovingly but firmly, so that they have courage and grow up, accept the Lord and follow him, and simply become adults so that one day they can live independently and start families of their own.

Ch. 6:5-9: Working Relationships: Masters – Slaves, Believing – Unbelieving

Even though slavery in this form no longer exists today and has been abolished thanks to the influence of the gospel, we draw from these exhortations principles that can also be applied to today's working relationships.

The most important principle is at the same time quite simple: Every Christian is first of all accountable to his heavenly Lord. We do not want to please people but our eternal Lord. Yet pleasing him will in most cases mean obeying our earthly master. It is not constant criticism or resentment in the heart toward the boss that marks the Christian. This is a complex topic, but the Christian considers how he can be a witness for the LORD and the gospel here too.

Ch. 6:10-20: Spiritual Conflict on Every Front

Finally, as an appeal and a summary of everything said so far about the practical life of faith, Paul points out that the spiritual and invisible front runs through all areas and situations of life. Many Christians do not realize the danger from the invisible world and live as if the devil did not exist. Paul is saying, as it were, that he cannot possibly cover every life situation in this letter. But instead he shows us the armor of God, with which we can stand firm in the LORD in every situation and danger of life.

Principalities and Powers: The Evil One and the Invisible, Heavenly World

There is no letter in the NT in which terms that speak of personal spiritual powers in the invisible world occur as often. Other letters, including Paul's, also speak of them (e.g., Rom 8:38; Col 1:16; 2:15; 1 Pet 3:22), but not with this frequency, and that is a characteristic of this letter.

Let us give Paul the floor and quote all the texts that name these beings:

- ... and he seated him (Christ) at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above **every principality** (πάσης ἀρχῆς *pases arches*) and every **authority** (ἐξουσίας *exousias*) and **power** (δυνάμεις *dunameos*) and **dominion** (κυριότητος *kuriotetos*) and every **name** (*onoma*) that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come, and has put all things under his feet ..., 1:21-22.

Christ as man is exalted above each and every conceivable spiritual personality. These occupy a high position in God's creation, but Christ's position is exalted above them, because it is on the throne of the Most High, at the right hand of God.

- ... according to the **prince of the power of the air, of the spirit** that is now at work in the sons of disobedience ..., 2:2

The powers exert concrete and massive influence on world events. They influence not only centers of government but also ordinary people, namely all who are spiritually dead and thus at the mercy of the powers. Here they clearly turn out to be hostile to God, that is, devilish. If anyone among these beings is a prince, it can only be the devil. And Scripture says so too: Matt 25:41.

- ... so that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known through the church to the **principalities** and **authorities** in the heavenly places, ... 3:10

God's saving work and its result, the church, are presented to the whole invisible world as a proclamation of the wisdom of God. The powers have to marvel and, gnashing their teeth, back down. The victory belongs to our Christ, and the church is his "spoils"; the powers have lost.

- from whom every **family** in heaven and on earth is named, ... 3:15

Even though at first glance these powers are not being spoken of here, it is nevertheless made clear here that they too are creatures and receive their name from the Creator. This makes clear to the Ephesians that these powers are not autonomous, nor are they (all-)powerful gods, but subject to the Creator. In this connection it is interesting that in magic it was important to address or conjure the spirits by their names.

- "Having ascended on high, he led **captivity** captive ... 4:8

Here, too, the connection is not immediately obvious. But the captivity existed through the power of darkness, which Christ broke through the cross and the resurrection. Here Jesus' ascension is a triumphal procession after the accomplished and victorious work of redemption.

- ... that you may be able to stand against the schemes (μεθοδείας *methodeia*) of the **devil** (διάβολος *diabolos*). For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the **principalities** (ἀρχαί *archai*), against the **authorities** (ἐξουσίας), against the **world rulers** (κοσμοκράτωρ *kosmokrator*) of this darkness (σκότος *skotos*), against the **spiritual forces of wickedness** (πρὸς τὰ πνευματικὰ τῆς πονηρίας *pneumatika tes ponerias*) in the heavenly places. 6:11-12

Here, in connection with the powers, the devil is named for the first time. He is the chief, the “general” of these powers (cf. Matt 12:22ff.). With this the powers are unmasked; it is clear that they are always enemies and do everything to hinder and harm God’s work in us and in the whole world.

How is it that this topic is a central one in this letter? The Ephesians did not live, as we do today, in an “enlightened,” modern, or postmodern age. Their life, the society of that time, in that city, in Asia Minor, in the Roman Empire, was shaped by idol cults. Ephesus was permeated by religion in every level of society from which people came to faith in Christ. Life was determined by the worship of Artemis, whom the Romans called Diana (see picture). Furthermore, Ephesus was a center of magic and occult practices. B. M. Metzger says: *“Of all the Greco-Roman cities, Ephesus, the third largest in the empire, was by far the most attractive place for magicians, sorcerers, and charlatans of every kind.”* Luke reports (see below) that a large number of such books of magic with incantations and occult contents were burned by those who believed the gospel. The Jews also had their magic and had a share in this spiritual darkness. A mixing of Jewish, Hellenistic, and Roman cults was the order of the day (syncretism). In addition there was astrology, the belief in fate as determined by the stars. They determined life; they were threatening, real, demanding. No one was really free of it. This idolatry was the bridgehead, the means by which the powers mentioned by Paul gained direct influence over the Ephesians and over people in general. These powers were commissioned, by being addressed by name and with incantations, to do whatever would achieve people’s goals and advantages, especially over other people as well. These powers caused fear; because of their “omnipresence” one could never be safe.

The questions now were: What about those who believed the gospel? Did the powers still have influence? Was Christ on a level with the powers, was he superior to them, or even inferior? Were they still at the mercy of the powers? How were they to behave toward the powers? Or should these cults be kept up alongside their new faith?

Among other things, this time can be compared with the voodoo cult in Haiti and Africa, where people live in fear of the gods. But when they believe the gospel, this bondage and fear is broken. The influence of the gods in and through these cults is different from the way it takes place in the Western world. Yet there it is just as real, even if not as obvious. There, in Haiti and Africa, and in many other parts of the world, people believe in the gods; they are part of everyday life. Among us, people do not believe in these beings. But precisely that already gives the devil an advantage in keeping people in bondage.

In our latitudes this bondage and power of darkness has for the most part nothing to do with possession. In our society it is an interplay of the world, of the lusts and desires of human beings, and of the invisible powers (2:2). The world system is steered by the devil, and so an environment has already been created in which people are drawn away from God. Added to this is that man himself wants sin and not God, to whom he must submit. These 2 preconditions open up every opportunity for the evil invisible powers, which work in the air, that is, in our immediate surroundings, to reinforce all this in their favor. In doing so they concentrate on important key positions (government, school, education, technology, leisure), and also on nature, in order to harm human beings in every respect. Ultimately, however, this happens within the limits God permits. We must imagine that the extent of the rebellion against God in the invisible world is comparable to what we experience in the visible world.

A main target of these world rulers of darkness is, of course, those who have been snatched from their power and whom they can no longer snatch out of the hand of the Father and the Son. Since believers are safe there, they try to destroy the believers' life of faith and above all their zeal for the gospel. That is what they have to fear, because the gospel can free people from their power. The gospel of the grace of God is the proof that their days are numbered.

When Paul lists various terms by which these angelic beings are designated, he uses those that were used by the people and the cults themselves, by Jews and Gentiles alike. With regard to these beings he adopts the worldview of those days, because in a certain way it corresponded to reality. What Paul does not do, although we might have wished he would, is to set out a hierarchy of the angelic world, or an organizational chart of the devilish enterprise for producing his devilish schemes. The terms suggest a hierarchy. The Gentiles knew of such a hierarchy in the angelic world. Paul says only what is really important and simply presupposes the personal reality of powerful creatures that are therefore superior to human beings. What matters to him is to proclaim the subjection of these powers to Christ and the liberation of believers from their dictatorship. But just as important to him is that, though defeated, they nevertheless attack the believer wherever they can. The Christian is thus called to the highest vigilance against demonic (worldly, sinful) influences. He is to expose these schemes and resist them. In this way being a Christian becomes a battle, but one that can be won in the power of the victor, the exalted Lord Jesus Christ. **The Letter to the Ephesians enables its recipients to live out their new position in Christ consciously in the face of the powers, in dependence on their Lord and the might of his strength.** We can probably only faintly relate to how they felt, but all the more should we take these influences seriously in our own time.

Scripture itself reports that angels have power over nations. Daniel 10 speaks of princes, that is, angelic powers of the kingdoms of Media and Persia, as well as Greece. The charismatic personality of Alexander the Great and his meteoric rise can be understood much better from this perspective. The angelic prince Michael is assigned to the people of Israel. In Deut 29:26; 32:8 (the LXX and the Old Latin translation read: according to the number of the angels of God) this is extended to all nations.

The gods of the nations are vanity; they are nothing, not real gods. There is no God besides YAHWEH. But on the other hand, the world of demons hides behind these idols (1 Cor 10:19ff.). In this way there was a direct influence of the visible on the invisible world.

Luke's detailed account in the Acts of the Apostles (ch. 19) confirms the remarks made above:

“ He (Paul) went into the synagogue and for three months spoke openly, holding discussions and persuading them about the things of the kingdom of God. But when some hardened themselves and did not believe¹ and spoke badly of the Way² before the crowd, he separated from them and set the disciples apart, holding discussions daily in the school of Tyrannus. This went on for two years, so that all who lived in Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord. And God did extraordinary miracles through the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were taken from his body and laid on the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out.

But some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists also undertook to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying: I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches! Now it was seven sons of a certain Jewish high priest, Sceva, who were doing this. But the evil spirit answered and said to them: Jesus I do know, and Paul I know about; but you, who are you? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, got the better of both of them, and overpowered them, so that they fled out of

that house naked and wounded. This became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was exalted. And many of those who had become believers came, confessed, and made known their deeds. And many of those who had practiced sorcery brought their books together and burned them in front of everyone; and they calculated their value and arrived at fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord grew with power³ and gained the upper hand⁴.” (translated from the German Elberfelder Bible)



Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! Acts 19:23-40

“At about that time, however, no small uproar arose concerning the Way⁵. For a certain silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver temples of Artemis, brought the craftsmen no small income; and when he had gathered them together, along with the workers employed in this trade, he said: Men, you know that our prosperity comes from this income; and you see and hear that this Paul has persuaded and won over a large crowd, not only of Ephesus but of almost all Asia, by saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all. Not only is there a danger for us that this business will fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be counted as nothing and that her magnificent greatness, which all Asia and the inhabited world worship, will be destroyed.

When they heard this and were filled with rage, they shouted, saying: Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! And the city was thrown into confusion; and with one accord they rushed into the theater, dragging along with them the Macedonians Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul’s traveling companions. But when Paul wanted to go in among the people, the disciples would not let him. Some of the Asiarchs⁶ too, who were his friends, sent word to him and begged him not to go to the theater. Now some were shouting one thing, others another; for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together. They pulled Alexander out of the crowd, whom the Jews pushed forward. Alexander motioned with his hand and wanted to make a defense before the people. But when they recognized that he was a Jew, *one* voice arose from every mouth, and for about two hours they shouted: Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! But when the town clerk had calmed the crowd, he says: Men of Ephesus, who among human beings would not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis and of the image that fell from heaven⁷? Since this cannot be disputed, it is fitting for you to be quiet and to do nothing rash. For you have brought these men here, who are neither temple robbers nor blasphemers of our goddess. If, then, Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against anyone, court days are held, and there are proconsuls; let them bring charges against one another. But if you have a request about other matters, it will be settled in the lawful assembly. For we are also in danger of being charged with rioting because of today, since there is no reason we could give to account for this commotion. And when he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.” (translated from the German Elberfelder Bible)

The Armor of God: Spiritual Warfare – but How?

The instructions about the spiritual battle are to be understood not so much as a closing note but as the climax of the practical part of the letter. In any case, we have before us a kind of summarizing closing speech. It can be compared to that of a general to his soldiers before the battle begins. It is good to picture a little of this drama and tension before the battle in order to properly assess the urgency of the spiritual battle.

The Christian life is a constant battle. To illustrate this, Paul uses the picture of a soldier, probably a Roman one; such soldiers were part of the street scene in Ephesus at the time. With this picture he underlines the immediacy and also the brutal reality of war, which applies to the spiritual battle as well. Actually, he uses here the word for a wrestling match in the arena, because he wants to emphasize how close the enemy is. In this sense one could compare the heavenly places to a heavenly arena.

In the typology we have already spoken of the battle that actually and literally took place in Canaan back then. Paul says that our struggle is not against flesh and blood, that is, not against people, but against the spiritual (invisible) forces of wickedness in the heavenly realms (6:10-20). To stay with the

picture: These forces of wickedness want with all their might to prevent us from living in Canaan, that is, from living out our Christian position in Christ in the heavenly realms. What they want to achieve is that we do not taste and enjoy the heavenly wealth of blessing, live it out, and bear witness to it. These powers want to destroy our life of faith, dry it up, and push it back into the course of this world from which we have come. Through conformity to the course of this world, the witness of God's new self in Christ and the witness of the gospel die. The way there is not demonic possession but sin.

Let us remember: In Christ the Ephesians had been raised once and for all above these mighty and numerous angelic powers. So they no longer needed to fear them. That was a relief and a liberation that we today can hardly comprehend. But here they could have made a fatal mistake. The threat was still there, but no longer in the way it had been before their conversion. These spiritual powers were still to be feared now, because the believers had once again become the target of attack. But now the point was to prevent the realization of their high position of victory in Christ. The powers could no longer rob the believers of this position, but they could rob them of a life in, or from, the power of this position. Now it was not the violence but the cunning of the devil that was to be feared. The believers encountered these schemes in the world, in every place and in every situation of life, in marriage and family, at the workplace, and in the church. This demands the very highest attention and concentration in the life of faith. These are real beings and powers that move in the air, that is, in our immediate surroundings, and that are constantly working toward our fall and defeat. But Paul sees us in the position of strength, not only regarding our standing but also in our life of faith: In HIM we are strong, stronger than these powers, which are defeated. Outside the power of Christ we have no chance, for these beings, these powers, are stronger and more cunning than we are.

How these powers work, what their strategy and tactics are, becomes clear from the spiritual armor we are to put on. There our weapons are **truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and the Word**. From this it is evident that the enemy wants to destroy our life of faith through untruth, unrighteousness, discord, unbelief, and doubt. **It is indeed the morality of our Christian life that is in the enemy's sights.**

The evil influence of these invisible, devilish heavenly hosts does not necessarily show itself in possession, as some assume. This influence is cunning and seductive. We are dealing with the angel of light, who comes along piously disguised. It is not about something spectacular, in the sense that we attack and confront the evil powers in order, for example, to drive them out of a city or a territory. This kind of warfare, which is practiced in the charismatic movement, can in no way be derived from this text of Paul (nor from any other text). Even though we might perhaps expect it because of the occult, sorcery, and magic in the city of Ephesus. No, **the battle is not a crusade, neither against unbelievers nor against demons**; it is a battle that seeks to strike our spiritual life at its most vulnerable points through discord in marriage, family, and church. After all, in him we already hold a position of victory over these powers, and therefore that is exactly what we should be and live.

It should be mentioned that there can be, and are, encounters with demons and possessed people. This applies especially to countries where sorcery is a firm and deep part of the culture and where, consequently, there is much possession. But true believers, those who in Christ are raised above the powers, cannot be possessed. The influence of demons can reach into the lives of believers, less through occult oppression than through a worldly way of life. That this fact is connected with the invisible world is underestimated today!

Not every sin or conformity to the world can be connected with these powers; “there isn’t a demon behind every bush.” It is the world, our flesh, and the spiritual world that want to bring us down. It is influence from within, from without, and the supernatural influence of the invisible world.

How can our battle be characterized; what kind of battle is it? From Paul’s instructions one must conclude that it is not an offensive battle. It is about “withstanding,” “resisting,” and “standing.” So we are to hold our position and not give up or surrender what is our heritage of faith and our experience of faith. The only offensive weapon is the sword, which, however, is also indispensable for defense in close combat.

Nevertheless there is something offensive in this description. The proclamation of the gospel is the frontal attack on the kingdom of darkness. The gospel is the weapon with which the devil’s prey can be snatched from him. Good footwear, with readiness for the gospel of peace, speaks of mobility and movement in the battle of proclaiming the gospel.

It is not mentioned in the text, but it is encouraging that not every battle is fought alone. Our formation is the army of the Lord, in which we stand and fight together in the church as Christ’s fellow soldiers.

Nevertheless, this reminder: The armor does not grow on us the way feathers grow on a bird; we must put it on, actively use it and apply it in our everyday lives.

Ephesus and Colossae

Every more or less systematic Bible reader will have noticed a certain similarity or parallels between the letters to the churches in these two cities. They were written at the same time, as was the Letter to Philemon. In this respect a comparative study is certainly worthwhile.

At this point it should suffice to note that historical-critical theology, which has made it its task to find out everything that cannot be true, postulates that the Letter to the Colossians was not written by Paul and in turn served as a model for a writer of the Letter to the Ephesians (likewise not Paul).

That is only one theory among many. We believe the self-testimony of the Scriptures, which name Paul as the writer, in the greeting, in the middle, and at the end of the letters.

Nor is it surprising that two churches only about 180 km apart had, not exactly the same, but similar problems. Accordingly, the letters can show a number of parallels.

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Notes

1. Or: and were disobedient.
2. That is, the Christian way or the Christian confession.
3. Another reading: So the word grew in the power of the Lord.
4. Or: proved itself mighty.
5. That is, the Christian way or the Christian confession.
6. That is, representatives of the people who were also responsible for religious festivals.
7. Literally: from Zeus.