

## ***Church Beautiful: Ephesians for Missional Church***

(Wesley White, September, 2012)

### ***Healthy Extolling***

In my family we have developed a tradition that has proven to be not only essential, but also deeply cherished by each one of us. At birthdays, along with a special meal and cake and, of course, presents, we also go around the family circle offering words of love and affirmation to the birthday person. We tell them explicitly what it is about them that we so love and why we so appreciate them. We give them examples and describe their characteristics that so endear them to all of us. We celebrate their lives among us with words and prayers that reach down into the soul and bring blessing.

In a similar way, I want to celebrate the Church. It is, of course, more in vogue these days to defend a chasm we would rather maintain between the Jesus we admire and his Church for which we are, honestly, embarrassed. But I want to suggest that although this is to some measure understandable, it is nonetheless both erroneous and unhealthy. It certainly goes against the grain of major portions of New Testament material. On the contrary, I think we can legitimately recite a litany of what attires the Church with beauty, what raises it up as laudable, what causes it to actually be appreciated in many quarters of the world. Without shoving serious weaknesses and problems under the proverbial carpet, I think we can, at the same time, openly and ardently confess all that we love about the Church.

I love the *simplicity* of the Church. I so appreciate the simple act of people coming together weekly to sing and pray and hear and apply the Word of God and share in the Eucharistic meal. It demonstrates the joy to be had in the sharing of lives so bracketed by a weekly routine and in small groups that gather at intermittent times. It rather simply provides for a myriad of ways in which encouragement for folk takes place.

I love the *consistency and faithfulness* of the Church. I recently met a fellow at conference in Derbyshire, England, who attends an Anglican Church which has had uninterrupted ministry in that area since the year 811 c.e.—twelve hundred and one years of ongoing ministry in the name of Jesus.

Consistency like this is so often matched by a real sense of *authenticity*, as local churches are not usually a collecting pool of the powerful and elite and wealthy, but people fraught with fragility and weakness and struggle and honesty and hope.

I love the *giving nature* of the Church. We should note that the United Nations, Report on Social Renewal, November, 2011, tells us that 67% of the most effective philanthropy in the last fifty years can be attributed to local Christian congregations around the world. In its wake is a more than credible level of *transformational effectiveness*, such that urban studies today confirm that the Christian Church is responsible for, by far, the greater incentive for the development of hospitals and universities and cultural centers and

services to the poor and to the advancement of civil and human rights in almost all the major cities of the world.

I love *the focus* of the Church on Jesus Christ who alone can change people from the inside out and change the world from the outside in. It focuses, in fact, on *the message* of the Church, the good news that God so loved the world that in Jesus Christ, the very Son of God, he has begun the renewal of all things, God's re-creative purposes, and the end of all that is evil, all that is the result of the destructive designs of the evil one.

And I love the *people* of the church who are learning through all sorts of ups and downs, and through joys and struggles, what it is to be the people of God; how to trust this one and only God and serve him, and how to invite all and everyone into his inclusive embrace. I love the *missionary courage and zeal* of this Church, which has sent these same people into every corner of the globe, into some of the harshest and most dangerous sectors, giving up huge bits of personal preference in order to show and share the love of Christ.

And I could go on and on about all that I love about the Church...

### ***Introducing Ephesians***

So what does this verbal litany have to do with any sort of overture to Paul's letter to the Ephesians? As we shall see—everything! What themes does it portend? What motifs arise? They are, as we shall discover, many and

varied, but with an overarching emphasis. There is, in other words, every reason to extol the Church in the world.

It is quite clear that the main goal of the Ephesian correspondence is to provide a platform for the Apostle Paul's theology of Christ for the Gentiles; that is, of course, Christ for the world, or what is undoubtedly an affirmation that this is centrally a missionary epistle. The heart of this affirmation is expressed in 3:4-8, "*...when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel—To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ...*"

A detailed reading of Ephesians, however, might lead us to more precisely suggest the broader theme of Christ for the world *through the Church*. It is the Church, after all, that is the contextual constant for the missional preaching that Paul has in mind. As in 1:22-23, "*And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*" On this account, Markus Barth contends that the overarching theme of the Ephesian Letter of Paul is nothing less than *the cosmic Christ at work in the world through the universal, but locally-based, Church of Jesus*. More specifically, Barth offers that "*only in Ephesians (1:4; 2:1-7; 3:10; 6:12-20) is the very essence of the*

*church directly identified with her stance before, her service to, and if need be her resistance against, all angels and demons, all periods and spirits that shape, represent, or terrorize the world.”* (See, M Barth, *Ephesians 1-3*, The Anchor Bible, 33.)

### ***Universal and Local***

There is little doubt but that both local and universal aspects of the Ephesian perception of the Church (as Barth infers) are critical to its missionary calling. We can agree with New Testament scholarship that underlines Ephesians' emphasis on God's *ekklesia* as tending to suggest the multiple and distinct earthly representations of the one heavenly and eschatological assembly. This understanding is much to be preferred over and against the view that Ephesians envisions only the universal earthly church. Such a distinction, more than likely, would never have occurred to the Apostle Paul.

Some resort to that sort of bifurcation on the basis of the exalted Christology that is certainly a hallmark of the letter and alluded to in what many scholars refer to as “the cosmic Christ.” Max Turner (London School of Theology), for example, thereby applies this to the portrayal of the church itself, suggesting that it is “the letter’s ecclesiology of cosmic reunification that has deservedly given it a place of singular import in contemporary theological discussion.” (See, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, 190.) This is understandable in light of Paul’s stress on the exaltation of Christ over all things that vie for dominion, especially the principalities and

powers (1:21-22) and Christ's role in bringing all history to completion (1:10). But even that, nonetheless, is only part of the Christological picture that Paul has in view. There is also Christ who suffers for us (1:7) and by whose cross reconciliation is accomplished for humanity in particular (2:16). Furthermore, Christ relates organically to the church as a "head" to a body (1:23; 4:15-16) and we are adjured, pastorally, to forgive one another "just as God in Christ forgave you." (4:32)

Perhaps we would do better to simply allow that we are drawn to Ephesians both because of its *literary forcefulness* and because of its *majestic focus* in terms of the high place of Christology within it. Ralph Martin expresses what many of us intuitively feel when he described Ephesians as "an exalted prose-poem on the theme of Christ-in-his-church." (See, R Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon*, 5-6.)

The vocabulary of Ephesians itself is noteworthy in this regard, lending a great deal to its aura of beauty, eloquence and intrigue. In Biblical material this is only heightened by the presence of *hapax legomena* (the Greek phrase referring to words that are not found in any other comparable literary contexts) in various writings. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians this is indeed prominent, with at least eighty words that are not found in any of the other Pauline correspondences. Morgenthaler's statistical analysis of word usage in the New Testament reveals that four of these are found exclusively in the Septuagint; sixteen are outside the Septuagint only; thirty-eight are to be found nowhere else in the New Testament at all; and five cannot be traced to

any Greek documents of the pre-Christian period. Interestingly, however, many of them do occur throughout the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. (See R Morgenthaler, *Statistik des Neutestamentlichen Wortschatzes*, 175-80.)

The lofty Christology (centered in core creedal material of the early church and clearly a trademark of those churches associated with Paul) is likewise highlighted in Ephesians by the use of Old Testament texts that are read Christologically. These include Psalm 8 and 110 as referenced in Ephesians 1:2-23, Isaiah 57 and 57 as referenced in Ephesians 2:14-18, Psalm 68 as referenced in Ephesians 4:8-10, and Isaiah 26 and 60 as referenced in Ephesians 6:10-17.

Furthermore, we are certainly correct in agreeing with those who maintain that in Ephesians Paul rather deliberately identifies with the earliest beliefs of the early church by interjecting significant material from traditional sources such as creeds, liturgical elements, hymns, and household codes. (See C Arnold, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed., G. F. Hawthorne, 239.) Confessional formulae of this kind are found in the following passages in Ephesians: 1:3-14, 20-23; 2:4-7; 10, 14-18, 20-22; 3:5, 20-21; 4:4-8, 11-13; and 5:2, 14, 25-27. And yet, at the same time, as Arnold allows, Paul likewise shows himself to be “a fresh thinker and advances his readers’ understanding of Christ, the church, and eschatology.”

It can be argued, in fact, that both the local and universal conceptions of the Church are paramount in what is yet another prominent theological emphasis in the letter to the Ephesians, intoned in Paul's oft-repeated phrase, "in Christ." It is the ubiquitous Pauline notion that understands the Christian experience as summarily expressed in the concept of being enveloped by and surrounded by the community as defined by Jesus, and given expression in such phrases as "in Christ Jesus" (εν Χριστω Ισου), or simply "in Christ" (εν τω Χριστω). "In Christ" and its parallels occur thirty-nine times in the Ephesian letter, the first being found in the opening verse of the Epistle (1:1) when Paul identifies himself as "*an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints, those who are in Ephesus, to those who are faithful in Christ Jesus...*"

But the phrase can also to be found in 1:3, 1:10, 1:12, 2:6, 2:7, 2:13, 3:6, and 3:11, to cite but a few references. However, what is of even greater significance is the probability is that in Ephesians to be "in Christ" is not to be misconstrued as an individualized designation, but is concomitant to being in the Body of Christ, the Church. I suggest that it is, in fact, yet another metaphor (perhaps restricted to this particular Pauline Letter) that intends to get at the spiritual essence of the Church itself. As Ernst Best insists, it entails the idea of "*one Body in Christ.*" (See, E Best, *One Body in Christ: A Study of the Relationship of the Church to Christ in the Epistles of the Apostle Paul*, 141.)

## ***The Social Trinity and the Gracious God***

Another key theological emphasis that is particularly pertinent to understanding God at work in the world through Christ's Church is the involvement of the three persons of the Trinity, frequently highlighted by Paul throughout this letter. What we might refer to as "Trinitarian activity" is found in eight separate passages within the epistle. We can note this specific emphasis, for example, in the centrally structured prayer that we come to in 3:14-21, which we shall turn to in greater detail later in this chapter. Its Trinitarian focus is quite clear, with a rehearsal of the role of the Father in verse 14, the empowering Spirit in verse 16, and the indwelling Christ in verse 17. Similarly, we could reference 4:4-6, noting the Spirit in verse 4 (ἐν πνεύμα), Lord (εἰς κυριος referring to Christ) in verse 5, and the Father (εἰς θεος και πατηρ παντων) in verse 6 as the basis for Paul's urgent appeal that the Church walk in unity.

These sort of texts stress the social nature of trinity and humanly derived sociality to such an extent that the German theologian and sociologist, Gerd Theissen, goes so far as to describe Ephesians as "sociomorphic". (See, G Theissen, *The New Testament: Understanding the Bible and Its World*, 167.) What he has in mind is nothing short of social displays of truth that are highly focused in and around living relationships. It accents socially driven, experientially based approaches to truth seeking, rather than that which is inordinately abstract.

Social derivatives of Trinitarian action are also highlighted in 2:18, in which both Jews and Gentiles, equally, have access to the Father (προς τον πατερα) through the one Spirit (εν ενι πνευματι) because of Christ (οτι δι αυτου). Even more blatant, however, is the vision of social cohesion based on what are certainly creedal elements (laden with Trinitarian formulae) that we find in 4:4-6, already noted above. Andrew Lincoln suggests that Paul's intent is ultimately behavioural, evolving out of Triune oneness itself, which "can now be seen to be the only consistent expression of the foundational unities he enumerates here." Paul is reminding us of the distinctive realities to which we are committed, reinforcing both "the sense of cohesion he wants them to have as members of the Church and the sense of their distinctive identity vis-à-vis the surrounding society." (See, A Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, 238.)

This is all the more potent given the overarching character of God that the letter to the Ephesians assuredly promotes. He is the true God, known and determined and experienced by "the surpassing riches of His grace." (2:7) Max Turner rightly maintains that no New Testament writing "more joyfully celebrates God's grace in the gospel than does Ephesians, nor does any contain so rich and concentrated a vein of theological gold." (See, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, 186.)

This Pauline penchant for grace-laden language particularly correlates to that one theme, previously discussed, and common to all parts of Ephesians, that applauds what it means to be and live "in Christ." *In him*, Paul declares, the

outpouring of grace was decided in eternity and is carried through in history. *In him* this grace was and is being revealed through the preaching of the word and in the building up of, the ordering of, and even the suffering of the church. Furthermore, *in him* believers demonstrate grace that is defined by the wealth of God's kindness towards us.

The Apostle's commitment to the concept of grace is well known (the term *χαρις* can be found in Pauline literature more than 100 times), but perhaps no other passage rivals its exposition as what we find in Ephesians 2:4-10. The emphasis on grace in verses 7,8, and 9, flows out of God's own character, described in verse 4 as "rich in mercy" and based on God's "great love." It is not, however, love of a general sort, but is particularized by Paul as that love "with which he loved us" (*ην ηγαπησεν ημας*, aorist active indicative). It is, we might say, love that is directed via grace.

We should also note the colon in the Greek grammar preceding verse 4, that ties it in an explanatory fashion to the contrary notion of wrath. This is as much as if to say that what we have here may be an example of Paul's radical theological departure in suggesting that God's response to human situation of being "children of wrath by nature" is nothing less than grace, rather than judgement. The inference here, of course, is that in resorting to the language of "wrath," the Apostle must be referring to the work of the evil one (as verse 2 injects), or to human nature in the aftermath of the Fall, but not necessarily referencing the wrath of God, as is more often assumed.

Beyond all this, the use of the vernacular of grace in 2:7 is clearly an intensification of that grace which is first introduced in 1:7. Here in 2:7, Paul adds the adjective “surpassing” (υπερβαλλον), as it is similarly used more broadly in the Ephesian letter in connection with the love of Christ (3:19) and the power of God (1:19). It is an example of the rather purposeful use of hyperbole, expressing the importance of the trio of love, power and grace. In fact, there is a grammatically purposeful connection (repeated use of the same vocabulary) between 1:19-21 and 2:4-7, particularly in the manner in which υπερβαλλον (surpassing) is incorporated so as to reinforce the virtues of grace. Andrew Lincoln, once again, has this in mind when he suggests that “if the raising of Christ from the death to sit in heavenly realms was the supreme demonstration of God’s *surpassing power*, then the raising of believers from spiritual death to sit with Christ in the heavenly realms is the supreme demonstration of God’s *surpassing grace*.” (See, A Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, 110.)

### ***Missional Church and Urban Ephesus***

I suggested at the outset that Ephesians is, at its core, a missionary letter. Missional ardency is obviously imbedded in the heart of Paul generally, but it is also, in the case of Ephesians, more specifically occasioned by the social and spiritual realities defined the city of Ephesus itself. It was an urban center of considerable renown, not only because of its comparative size, but even more so because of its historical reputation as a place of spiritual influence.

Significant in the background of Ephesus in terms of urban sociology is the year 550 B.C., when Croesus, king of the province of Lydia, captured it and actually endeared himself to its people by contributing large amounts to the construction of *the great temple of Artemis*. Alexander the Great took control of Ephesus in 334 B.C., but it eventually came under Roman rule, and by the time of Caesar Augustus (63 B.C. – 14 A.D.) population estimates for the city exceeded 250,000. Its administrative and commercial importance during the New Testament era is attested to by a respected archaeological study of Roman milestone markers that clearly demonstrates how mileages to others cities were usually measured from Ephesus. (See, D French, “The Roman Road System of Asia Minor,” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. G. Hawthorne, 249.)

The temple of Artemis undoubtedly had the most influence on the cosmopolitan culture of Ephesus as a whole. Oster, for example, contends that “the most prominent and significant cult in Ephesus during the first three centuries of the Roman Empire was incontestably Artemis Ephesia.” (See R Oster, “Ephesus as a Religious Center Under the Principate,” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II.18.2 (1990), 1699.) In its history, this Ionic temple was the largest building throughout the expanse of the Greek world and was made entirely of marble. The cult of Artemis was famed for the celebration of “mystery rites” and with the practice of magic. This connection with Greek cultic mystery rites may well be why Paul resorts to such similar language in the third chapter of Ephesians and gives it prominence in terms of

a missionary approach that deliberately revolves around “the mystery of Christ.” (3:3)

The arts, as well, were a distinctive feature that gave the city of Ephesus an image of renown. Its theater, for example, had a seating capacity of 24,000, and was situated on the side of a hill that looked down upon a “beautiful colonnaded street that led directly to the harbor.” (See, C Arnold, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 249.) Luke reminds us (Acts 19:23-30) that this very theater provided the backdrop for mob action that was incited by the guild of silver shrine makers for the Artemis cult when their livelihoods were threatened by the ministry of Paul.

With the urban situation of Ephesus itself clearly in mind, the missionary nature of the Ephesian letter is all the more underscored and comes out in the strategic placement, specifically, of the excursus on Paul’s apostleship to the Gentiles, commencing with the second prayer in the epistle (3:1). The prayer, however, is rhetorically interrupted, erupting in the missionary language of 3:2-13, highlighted in verse 8 as the grace supplied “to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,” only to recapture the mode of prayer beginning in verse 14. This strategic placing of such strong missionary vernacular within the bridge-like prayer (leading into the practice orientation of chapters 4, 5 and 6) only serves to heighten the importance of the missionary vision that is at the heart of Paul’s ecclesiology.

Similarly, the cosmic extension of all that pertains to the role of God and Christ in the created order may be similarly emphasized by Paul in this letter with the same missionary goal in mind. Markus Barth singularly grasps this as he rightly contends that “liberal borrowings from pagan mythology are made in order to communicate Christ’s cosmic role in language that is understood by men of the Hellenistic world.” (See, M Barth, *Ephesians 1-3*, The Anchor Bible, 8.)

In fact, Paul’s missionary zeal is likely behind the ongoing debate as to whether or not the Ephesian correspondence is deliberately poised as a challenge to Gnostic teaching. If it is, as it would appear to be, it might explain the Christocentric and ethical approach to knowledge in the letter on the basis of Paul’s missional passion. It ends up promoting what some have referred to as a Church-in-society, or a theology-of-revolution approach to ecclesiology that forbids the church to aim only at the salvation of individual souls instead of pressing for communal life and service. (See, P Pokorny, *Der Epheserbrief und die Gnosis*, 73.) Barth concurs, maintaining that God in Ephesians “must not be confined to the atmosphere above the earth and the secret sphere of the cult. Rather, the crucified Lord is in the center, he who is Lord over all that is created,” thereby requiring “the saints’ political, cultural, economic responsibility for the problems that plague the world.” (Barth, *Ephesians, 1-3*, The Anchor Bible, 18.)

## ***The Church of the Ephesian Moment***

The missional vision of the epistle is certainly driven by an eschatological hope that Paul has in mind when he advocates for the church's maturity, in the language of bodily growth, in attaining to "the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ." (Eph.4:13) In the Ephesian context, it is a vision compelled by the gospel's surprising inclusion of Hellenistic society in which references to *Kyrios Iesous* carry much more cultural weight than the *Messianic* language more familiar to Jewish ears. Because of the richness of the gospel in this regard (3:6), Paul's ideas of the future take on both a social contour and a present day reality such that he can emphatically declare that in Christ "you too are being built together with all the others (συνοικοδομεισθε) to a place where God lives through his Spirit." (Eph.2:22)

It is, therefore, much more than merely an inferential picture of how cultural variations, distinct and valuable unto themselves, are to be united *in one body*, adding lustre to the beauty of the Church. Rather, it is a full-blown celebration of the sundering of the wall of partition occasioned by nothing less than God's grand goal of *shalom* that is actually *given flesh* in the person of Christ. (Eph.2:14-18) It is a picture that yet retains its eschatological pull as we seek a more complete understanding of Christ—knowing the "full stature"—and so implement bringing together, rather than dividing, diverse culture-specific segments of humanity as we ensure that Christ himself is more and more known.

Andrew Walls has poignantly reminded us of the historical significance of this particularly Pauline social-eschatological priority in what he refers to as “the Ephesian moment.” (See, A Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, 72-81.) It was a priority, determined by the meaning of being *in Christ*, that decidedly would not settle for the formation of two culturally distinctive Christian communities, but emphatically insisted that there was to be *only one*. It did not last long, according to Walls, as Gentile-missionary success and the implications of the diaspora of the Jewish church and the destruction of the Jewish state (70 c.e.) all circumstantially conspired to allow monocultural norms to regain precedent setting power in what became trend-setting strategic approaches to church and mission.

It is time, however, to agree with Walls that we are currently witnessing a new dawning of the Ephesian moment, only in a richer and even more diverse fashion. “Developments over several centuries,” says Walls, “reaching a climax in the twentieth, mean that we no longer have two, but innumerable, major cultures in church. Like the old Jerusalem Christians, Western Christians had long grown used to the idea that they were guardians of a ‘standard’ Christianity; also like them, they find themselves in the presence of new expressions of Christianity and new Christian lifestyles that had developed or are developing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to display Christ under the conditions of African, Indian, Chinese, Korean and Latin American life. And most of the world’s Christians are now Africans, Asians or Latin Americans.”

It is a moment that calls for our response. How will we react to the moving of the Spirit throughout the world in ways that challenge cultural sensitivities and habits? I suggest that that Walls is right in alerting us to two potential dangers. “One lies in the instinctive desire to protect our own version of Christian faith, or even to seek to establish it as the standard, normative one. The other, and perhaps the more seductive in the present condition of Western Christianity, is the postmodern option: to decide that each of the expressions and versions is equally valid and authentic, and we are therefore each at a liberty to enjoy our own in isolation from all the others.”

Ephesians, however, encourages us to reject both of these approaches as not only dangerous, but also missionally deadening. Churches that fall prey to either danger, even unintentionally, cannot help but severely hurt themselves, to say nothing of the truncated version of “the mystery of Christ” (Eph.3:4) they will necessarily embody. Paul’s eschatological vision is far nobler and grander, straining toward “the fullness of Christ” that is expressed in exuberance over the potential of multicultural flavouring and the highlighting of socio-economic equity in which the voices of the poor are centrally attended to at the theological table. “None of us can reach Christ’s completeness on our own,” concludes Walls. “We need each other’s vision to correct, enlarge and focus our own; only together are we complete in Christ.”

### ***Conclusion: Becoming the Church that Paul Prays For***

Although the theological argument of Ephesians is complex, its structure, on the other hand, is surprisingly simple. Harold Hoehner divides Ephesians into two easily discernable parts that he refers to as *the calling* of the church (chapters 1-3) and *the conduct* of the church (chapters 4-6). (See H Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 61-64.) The “Amen” at the end of chapter 3 coupled with the commencing of clear and direct exhortation in the opening verses of chapter 4 marks these divisions out as deliberately and literarily composed.

Some suggest, however, that the juxtaposition of belief and behaviour, preaching and teaching (*kerygma* and *didache*), indicative and imperative, corresponding similarly to chapters 1-3 and 4-6, is, in fact, overly simplistic and even overwrought. Barth, for example, alternatively suggests that 1:1-13 is *an overture* to the whole that follows. 1:15-2:22 serves as a *first part*, describing God’s perfect work. Praise for the ongoing work of God as revelation to and through his people forms a *second division* (3:1-4:24). And finally, a *third segment* (4:25-6:20) encourages readers to let their light shine in every sphere of living. (See Barth, *Ephesians*, The Anchor Bible, 56.)

It must be admitted that the simpler two-fold division of “doctrine and duty” is substantiated statistically by the use of the *imperative*. It occurs forty-one times in Ephesians as a whole; only once in chapters 1-3, but forty times in chapters 4-6. Furthermore, *conduct* (or *social behaviour*) is clearly the major

idea in chapters 4-6 as the major divisions in these last three chapters revolve around the idea of what it means to *walk*. It is the Greek word περιπατεω (peripateo), and it is reiterated in 4:1, 4:17, 5:2, 5:8 and 5:15. The repetition of this metaphor certainly urges us to consider the significance of περι (peri) in Paul's choice of περιπατεω (peripateo) as perhaps indicative of "*perimeter* (full circumference) *walking*" that must entertain the entire scope of life. It is advocating for the holistic application of faith; faith that touches upon the whole of the person and the social environment.

As we examine the Apostle's deliberate structuring, what is of even greater import is to note that—what separates the sections of the letter that are defined by doctrine and duty (the calling of the church and the conduct of the church) is an incredibly potent and critically situated *prayer* in 3:14-21:

*<sup>14</sup> For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, <sup>16</sup> that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit **in the inner man**, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup> might be enabled to comprehend, **with all the saints**, how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, <sup>19</sup> to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. <sup>20</sup> Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all we ask or imagine, according to the power that is at work within us, <sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (emphasis mine)*

Though there is so much worthy of delving into in terms of the theological content of the prayer, let's limit our comments to nothing more than the structuring of this prayer around *two critical clauses*. Verse 16 provides the first of these with the prepositional phrase, "***in the inner man***" (ΕΙΣ ΤΟΝ ΕΣΩ ΑΝΘΡΩΠΟΝ), where it sets the parameters of what Paul is praying for as pertains to *personal soul development*, characterized by strength that is derivative of the power of the Holy Spirit.

The second is found in Verse 18 with yet another prepositional phrase, "***with all the saints***" (ΣΥΝ ΠΑΣΙΝ ΤΟΙΣ ΑΓΙΟΙΣ), where it sets the parameters of what Paul is praying for, in a contrasting way, pertaining to what we might call the "collective comprehension" of the expansive love of Christ. It deliberately specifies the collective experience ("with all the saints") as that context in which to discover "*how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ; to know this love that surpasses knowledge.*"

This entire Pauline prayer is constructed around those two divisions so that we can clearly see and hear what it is so importantly suggested: yes, this prayer confirms Paul's holistic concern for an inner enabling that is the result of the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the context of personal soul growth. But, if we hope to have any experience with, any capacity at all to comprehend this immense, expansive love of Christ—it's width, length, height and depth—it will only be as we do so *with all the saints*.

There are, as well, a number of critical factors with which to grapple in terms of what the Apostle means to suggest. First, when Paul uses the term, “to know”, it is almost certainly the case that he is resorting to Septuagint vernacular that borrows from the Hebraic sense in which “to know” is an expression of sexual intimacy. It is imbedded in the Greek word *γινωσκω* (gnosko), but getting at that intimate experience of the love of Christ that is not limited to cognitive knowledge, but is more about intimate, experiential knowledge.

Second, when Paul uses this sort of dimensional language, by speaking of *width, length, height and depth*, it is very likely that he is lending his support to an emphasis in Wisdom literature, from both biblical and extra-biblical sources that has in view nothing less than the *four dimensions* of the entire cosmos. They may even refer to the four pillars of order which Jewish tradition listed as Law, Politics, Religion and the Creative Arts.

This approach, therefore, to the collective comprehension of the expansive love of Jesus certainly includes our own, overtly therapeutic experience as those who participate, empowered “*in the inner man*”. But it is also much, much broader than that so as to embrace the width of the socio/religious structures, for example, that impinge upon humanity and the length of the political realities, for another example, that affect the whole world. It embraces the heights of creative-artistic freedoms, for example, that remind even the most depraved of a transcendent truth that beckons them, as well as

the depth of the judicial equities or inequities, for another example, that are meant to reflect the very heart of God.

These four dimensions are meant to implicate (in the most positive of senses) the powerful love of Jesus Christ, which is intended, via the Church, to impact the principalities and powers, to which the Apostle refers later in the epistle (τας αρχας...τας εξουσιας, Eph.6:12) that govern the orders and functions of the world. They are, in fact, those powers that attempt to dictate the very contours of the universe and, indeed, the entire cosmos. And they are only dealt with in a manner that is widely inclusive, referred to here by the Apostle as within the contextual protection of *“with all the saints.”*

Finally, it is vital that we take aboard the ecclesiological significance of what the Apostle Paul has in mind with his inclusion of this seemingly insignificant little phrase, *“with all the saints.”* It is not simply a perfunctory statement of function, nor is it a simple reference to historical chronology. Rather, it is yet another metaphor for the localized Body of Christ. Andrew Lincoln states it best when he suggests that the caveat of the phrase demonstrates how the *“comprehension the writer desires for his readers is not some esoteric knowledge on the part of individual initiates, not some isolated contemplation, but the shared insight from belonging to a community of believers.”* (See, A Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, 213.)

It means, in other words, the Church and the Church’s domain in which to so grasp, so comprehend, the vastness of the love of Christ that we are able to

envision its intended application to every single sphere of what it means to be human, in the broadest dimensions conceivable. That is to say that we bring that love to bear upon the four dimensions that make up nothing short of God's cosmic agenda. And it is for this reason that this centrally situated prayer of Paul concludes with one of the most sublime benedictions in all of the Bible: *"Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or imagine, according to the power that is at work within us, to Him be glory **in the church** and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen"* (3:21) (Emphasis mine)