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THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS: An Expanded Paraphrase

i. *The Mystery of God's Eternal Purpose* (Ch. 1: 4-12)

(a) *Salutation* (Ch. 1: 1-2)

TO the people of God [at Ephesus¹], believers in Christ Jesus, this letter comes from Paul, apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. Grace and peace be yours from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord!

(b) *Doxology* (Ch. 1: 3-14)

All blessings be ascribed to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In Christ He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realm.

i. *The Mystery of God's Eternal Purpose* (Ch. 1: 4-12)

It was in Christ that He chose us before the world's foundation, so that we should be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He foreordained us to be enrolled as sons—sons for God Himself—through Jesus Christ; for so He willed in His good pleasure. And this redounds to the glorious praise of His grace—the grace which He lavished upon us in His beloved Son. It is in Christ too, through the shedding of His blood, that we have our redemption, the remission of our sins, so rich is His grace with which He has endowed us in ever-increasing measure, along with all spiritual wisdom and discernment. For He has made known to us His decree which was formerly hidden from men. This He has done in accordance with that purpose of His which has its origin and its accomplishment in the person of Christ—a purpose to be carried into effect when the time is ripe for it—that all things, in heaven and on earth alike, should find their one true head in Christ. It was in Christ, too, that we became the heritage of God, for we were foreordained for this in the purpose of Him who operates the universe according to His own counsel and decree. His purpose was that we, who were the first to place our hope in Christ, should be the occasion of His glorious praise.

ii. *The Unity of Jew and Gentile in Christ* (Ch. 1: 13-14)

Not only so, but in Christ you Gentiles also became God's heritage, when you heard the true message, the good news which brought your salvation. Yes, it was in Christ that you too by the exercise

¹ This phrase is absent from several ancient authorities for the text, including the earliest, papyrus 46.

of your faith were sealed with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of promise. The Spirit of promise I say, because He is the pledge of that inheritance which will be ours on the day when God redeems those whom He has set aside as His own; and that will be the consummation of His glorious praise.

(c) *A Prayer for Wisdom* (Ch. 1: 15-2: 10)

So then I, for my part, hearing of your faith in Jesus our Lord, faith which serves as an example to all the people of God, never cease giving thanks on your behalf. I remember you continually in my prayers, as I ask the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father all-glorious, to give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation that you may come to know Him more and more. I pray for the enlightenment of your spiritual vision, so that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you, what the wealth of the heritage which is His in His holy people, and what the surpassing greatness of His power displayed in us who believe.

i. *God's Power in Raising Christ from the Dead* (Ch. 1: 19b-23)
That power is the effective operation of His mighty strength which He exerted in the case of Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and made Him sit at His right hand in the heavenly realm. There now He sits enthroned, high above all principality and power, might and dominion, and every name of renown whether belonging to this present age or to the age to come. He has put everything beneath His feet; He has given Him as supreme Head to the Church which is His body—the body or complement of the One who fills the whole universe with His presence.

ii. *God's Power in Raising His People from Spiritual Death*
(Ch. 2: 1-10)

You too have experienced this life-giving power of God. Once you were dead by reason of your trespasses and sins, when your way of life was marked by these things. Then you lived according to the common course of this world, under the sway of that potentate whose dominion is in the air, I mean in the spirit which now operates among the disobedient. Among the disobedient, indeed, we all had our way of life once, following the desires of our lower nature, doing the will of that lower nature and mind. We were by our very nature subject to divine wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God—so rich is His mercy, so great the love which He lavished upon us—God, I say, brought us to new life along with Christ even when we were dead by reason of our trespasses; it is by grace that you have been saved! And not only so, but He raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realm in Christ Jesus. Why? In order that, throughout the com-

ing ages, He might display the surpassing wealth of His grace by the kindness which He has shown us in Christ Jesus. Yes, it is by His grace that you have been saved, by the exercise of faith (no thanks to yourselves; it is all God's gift), not by works—and therefore no one can boast as if it were his own achievement. We are God's workmanship; we were created by Him in Christ Jesus for good works—good works which God prepared for us long ago that they should mark our way of life.

(d) *The Gentiles made Heirs of the Promises* (Ch. 2: 11-22)

Remember, then, that once you were Gentiles by natural birth. Those who bore the external mark of hand-made circumcision referred to you as "The Uncircumcision". At that stage of your existence you lived apart from Christ; you were aliens so far as the commonwealth of Israel was concerned; you had no part in the covenants which embodied the promise of God. In this world you had no hope, no true God. But now—now, in Christ Jesus—far off as you once were, you have been brought near through the sacrifice of Christ. He, He is our peace; He has joined the two together in one; He has broken down the barrier that kept us apart, our mutual hostility. In His own body He did away with the old code of laws with all its regulations, so that in Himself He might create one new man out of the two, and thus make peace. Yes, He planned to reconcile both to God as fellow-members of one body, and this He has done by means of the cross, where He put the old hostility to death. Now He has come to proclaim His good news: "Peace to you who were far away, and peace to us who were near."¹ For in Him you and we alike have access to the Father, in one and the same Spirit. So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens; you are fellow-citizens with God's holy people, members of His household; you have been built on to the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, stones in that building whose chief cornerstone is Christ Jesus Himself. Harmoniously bonded together by Him the whole building is rising to be a holy sanctuary in the Lord; and you also are being built together into it—the place where God dwells by His Spirit.

(e) *The Prayer for Wisdom resumed* (Ch. 3: 1-13)

Therefore I offer up prayer for you—I Paul, prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles.

i. *The Mystery of Christ* (Ch. 3: 2-7)

You have heard—have you not?—of the stewardship of God's grace which was committed to me for you Gentiles; you have heard

¹ Cf. Isa. 57: 19.

how by divine revelation His secret purpose was made known to me. I wrote to you briefly about this before, and if you read what I wrote you can learn how I came to understand that secret purpose, which is embodied in Christ. In former generations this was a mystery, not made known to men as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. And this was the sum of it—that the Gentiles were to be fellow-heirs, members of the same body, joint sharers of the divine promise to be realized in Christ Jesus and conveyed through the gospel. Of this gospel I have become a minister by the gracious gift which God imparted to me, working effectively by His power.

ii. *Paul's Stewardship of the Mystery* (Ch. 3: 8-13)

Yes, to me, less than the least of all God's people though I am—to me this grace has been committed, to carry to the Gentiles the good news of Christ's incalculable wealth, and to bring into the light of day my stewardship of the mystery, discharging it before the eyes of all. This is the mystery which from ages past was laid up in concealment in God Himself, the Creator of all. But now, with its unfolding, principalities and powers in the heavenly realm may come to know through the Church the many-splendoured wisdom of God, in accordance with His eternal purpose, decreed by Him in Christ Jesus our Lord. And it is in Christ Jesus our Lord, through faith in Him, that we have our free birthright and our right of access, with full confidence to exercise it. Why then, please do not be downcast because of the afflictions I endure for you; if only you knew, they are your true glory!

(f) *The Prayer for Wisdom Concluded* (Ch. 3: 14-19)

Therefore, I say, I offer up prayer for you: I bend my knees to the Father from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth receives its name, and this is my prayer: May God grant, in the wealth of His glory, that you may be inwardly strengthened with power through His Spirit! May Christ dwell in your hearts by faith! May you be rooted, firmly founded in love so that you are enabled to grasp with all His holy people the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ, which far exceeds all knowing! So may you be filled up to the measure of God's own fulness!

(g) *A Doxology* (Ch. 3: 20-21)

Now to Him who can work far and away beyond all our asking or thinking, according to His power which operates within us, to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

II. THE NEW COMMUNITY IN THE LIFE OF BELIEVERS (Ch. 4: 1-6: 24)

(a) Unity in Diversity in the Body of Christ (Ch. 4: 1-16)

So then, prisoner in the Lord as I am, I beg of you to live in a way that befits the calling to which God has called you. Let your lives be marked throughout by humility, gentleness and patience, and mutual loving forbearance. See to it that you are bound together in peace, preserving the unity into which the Spirit has brought you.

There is one body, and one Spirit, just as the calling to which God has called you involves one common hope. There is one Lord, one faith and one baptism. There is one God and Father of all, He who rules all, pervades all, dwells in all.

But while we have all these in common, to each of us severally a special "grace" has been given, in the measure with which Christ has bestowed His gift on each. That is why the Scripture says:

When He ascended up on high,
He led off a train of captives,
And gave gifts to men.¹

Now when it says "He ascended", this can only mean that first of all He descended into the depths beneath the earth. He who so descended is the one who has now ascended, high above all the heavens, to fill the universe with His presence. And it is He who has given some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers. He has given them in order to equip the people of God for their work of ministry, so that the body of Christ may be built up, to the point where all of us together, in the unity of our faith and our knowledge of the Son of God, reach the maturity of fullgrown manhood, the stature that befits the body which is the complement of Christ Himself. Thus we shall no longer be spiritual infants, tossed about and carried this way and that with every wind of teaching as it blows, misled by men's sleight of hand and crafty practice of deceptive stratagems. Rather we shall live by the standard of the truth, and grow up every way in love to match Him who is the head—for it is from Christ that the whole body, adjusted and fitted together by every ligament with which it is supplied, by the harmonious functioning of each and every part, acquires the power to grow up as a perfect organism, built up in love.

(b) The Old Life and the New Contrasted (Ch. 4: 17-24)

This is what I mean; this is what I urge upon you in the Lord's name: do not live like the Gentiles any longer. They live amid futile thoughts, with darkened minds, estranged from the life of God

¹ Ps. 68: 18.

because of their inward ignorance and the obtuseness of their hearts. They have become morally insensitive and have given themselves over to wanton living, indulging in all sorts of impurity and covetousness. This is not the way of Christ which you have learned—if indeed you have paid heed to Him and learned from Him, for it is in Jesus that all truth resides. The way of Christ involves the stripping off of the old Adam-nature which marked your former way of life—the old nature which is doomed to destruction as the outcome of its deceptive desires. It involves your spiritual renewal, the renewal of your mind, and the putting on of the new nature, the new personality which has been created in the image of God, in true righteousness and godliness.

(c) *Precepts of the New Life* (Ch. 4: 25-5: 2)

So then, have done with falsehood; tell the truth to one another, because we belong to one another, we are fellow-members of one body. Don't let your anger degenerate into sin;¹ don't nurse your resentment after sundown and so give the devil a foothold in your life. The former thief must give up stealing; instead, he must work hard and do good with his hands, so that he may have something to share with people in need. See that no foul language escapes your lips: let your conversation be wholesome and helpful for the instruction of others as occasion requires, imparting grace to those who hear it. Do not cause pain to God's Holy Spirit, who has sealed you for the day of final redemption. Have done with all harshness, ill-temper, anger, brawling, slander, and malice of every description. Be kind and compassionate to one another, and forgive one another just as God forgave you in Christ. Thus you will be imitators of God, as befits His dear children. Let your lives be full of love, for Christ loved you and gave Himself up for us as "a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

(d) *Old Darkness and New Light* (Ch. 5: 3-21)

But as for fornication, impurity and covetousness, they should not even be topics of conversation among you; they are quite unsuitable subjects for the holy people of God. Have done with foul and foolish talk too, and flippancy as well. These are unseemly things on Christian lips, which should be employed rather in thanksgiving. Be well assured of this: there is no portion in the kingdom which is Christ's and God's for anyone who is a fornicator, anyone who is impure or covetous—for covetousness is downright idolatry.

¹ Cf. Ps. 4: 8.

Don't let anyone mislead you with empty verbiage. It is these things I have mentioned that bring down God's wrath on those who disobey Him. Have no part or lot with them. Once you belonged to the darkness, but now in the Lord you belong to the realm of light. Live as befits the children of light. The fruit of light consists of all kinds of goodness, righteousness and truth. Learn by experience to approve of what pleases the Lord, and have nothing to do with the sterile deeds of darkness. No; expose them rather, for the things they do in secret are too shameful even to be mentioned. But all things are made manifest by the light when they are exposed to the light. And whatever abandons the darkness and is made manifest by the light belongs henceforth to the light. Hence the well-known saying:

Wake up, O thou that sleepest,
And from the dead arouse thee,
And Christ shall shine upon thee.

Pay careful attention to your conduct, then. Live like wise men, not fools. Buy up every opportunity, for these are evil days. Don't be witless, then, but get an understanding of the Lord's will. Don't be drunk with excess of wine; that leads only to riotous behaviour. Let your fulness be that which the Spirit imparts. Speak to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs; sing and make music to the Lord in your hearts. Always give thanks to our God and Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; and show a submissive spirit one to another out of reverence for Christ.

(e) *The Christian Household* (Ch. 5: 22-6: 9)

i. *Wives and Husbands* (Ch. 5: 22-23)

This submissiveness should be shown by the wives to their husbands; it is a duty which they owe to the Lord. The husband is head of his wife as Christ is head of the Church—His body, of which He is the Protector.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her, to consecrate her for Himself, cleansing her by the washing of water accompanied by the spoken word. This he did in order to present the Church to Himself all decked with glory, holy and blameless, with no spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind. In this way husbands also ought to love their wives like their own bodies. No one ever hated his own body; he feeds it and cares for it, just as Christ does for the Church—for we are members of His body. "This is why a man will leave his father and mother to join his wife, and the two of them will become one flesh".¹ There is a deep mystery in this scripture; I am applying

¹ Gen. 2: 24.

it to Christ and to the Church. But the practical lesson is this: each and every one of you must love his wife like himself, and the wife must take care to respect her husband.

ii. *Children and Parents* (Ch. 6: 1-4)

Children, obey your parents in the Lord; this the proper thing for you to do. "Honour your father and mother"—that is the first commandment which has a promise attached to it—"so that you may prosper and live long on the earth."²

Parents, don't annoy your children; bring them up with Christian training and discipline.

iii. *Slaves and Masters* (Ch. 6: 5-9)

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, as your single-hearted service to the Lord. Don't work only when someone's eye is on you, as though you had to please men; consider that you are Christ's slaves, doing God's pleasure, and do it heartily. Serve your masters with good will; do it as for the Lord and not for men, for you know that whatever good thing anyone does, he will get it back from the Lord, be he slave or freeman.

And you masters, do the same to them; make no use of brow-beating methods. You know that you and they alike have a Master in heaven, and there is no favouritism with this Master.

(f) *The Panoply of God* (Ch. 6: 10-20)

For the rest, be strong in the Lord, strengthened by His mighty power. Put on the complete set of armour which God supplies to enable you to stand firm against the devil's stratagems. It is not with human beings of flesh and blood that we have to contend, but with principalities and powers, the world-rulers of this domain of darkness, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm. So take up the panoply of God, and you will be able to withstand the foe when the evil day comes, putting forth all your exertion and not yielding an inch. Stand firm, then. Let truth be the belt round your waist, put on righteousness as your breastplate, and see that your feet are shod with "the preparation of the gospel of peace."³ With all these take up the shield of faith; with it you will be able to quench all the evil one's incendiary darts. Take the helmet of salvation too, and the Spirit's sword, the word spoken by God. And keep on praying; pray continually in the Spirit's power with prayer and supplication of every kind, and keep alert to this end in all your persevering supplication for all the people of

² Ex. 20: 12; Deut. 5: 16.

³ Cf. Is. 52: 7.

God. Pray for me too: pray God to give me the right words to speak as I open my mouth; pray Him to grant me a great sense of Christian liberty as I make known His revelation in the gospel. For the gospel's sake I am His ambassador, even if I am a handcuffed ambassador—pray that I may declare the message boldly, as indeed I ought to do.

(g) *Final Greetings* (Ch. 6: 21-24)

Tychicus, my dear brother, a right trusty servant in the Lord, will give you all the news, so that you too may know how things are going with me, and how I am getting on. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know how it fares with me and have your hearts encouraged by him.

Peace to the brethren, with love and faith from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. May grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with undying love!