

# QUANTOCK MINISTRIES

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*A Bible teaching and preaching ministry  
for the Christian community*

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## SPIRITUAL WARFARE IN EPHESIANS

This letter, almost certainly written by Paul when imprisoned in Rome in about AD61, is a wonderful declaration of God's purposes for the entire Christian church. The letter may not have been addressed solely to the church in Ephesus, but this is the copy we have as part of God's Word, and that particular church was a leading body of Christians in the second half of the first century. For us it is a glorious summary of the very reason for our existence as the people of God in this present world, and an outline of the type of people consequently we should be.

Briefly, chapter one tells us of the amazing blessings of being in Christ and the power available to us. Chapter two reminds us of what we once were and the fully inclusive nature of the church for Jew and Gentile alike, all brought about through grace. In chapter three Paul shows that this is different to previous dispensations ("administrations of God's grace" - 3 v 2), then mentions the present intention of God, and goes on to describe the love and power of God towards us that will achieve far more than we can ever imagine. In the first half of chapter four we are told that we are all part of one united body, but with various callings, and in the rest of that chapter, chapter five and the first part of chapter six Paul tells us how we should live in order to fulfil the purposes of God. Finally, in the second part of chapter six Paul shows the duty and equipment we have been given in order that we may carry out God's intention for the church.

Clearly underlying the whole message of the letter is profound teaching on our involvement with spiritual warfare. This, indeed, is the heart of God's purposes for His people, the Christian church. The matter is so important that without our engagement in this battle God's glory will not be made manifest in the world and the church will be ineffective. This teaching is a great antidote to seeing the church as being just a political or social organisation, thereby losing both its power and purpose. While the whole letter contains many points that have a bearing on the subject, for a short study such as this we will simply trace four vital steps in Paul's argument.

### 1. Power. 1 v 18a and 19 – 23

*I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know... his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.*

Paul's prayer for his readers (including us) is that they might understand the available power that is inherent in being the people of God. This is illustrated by the power that Father God demonstrated when He raised Jesus, His Son, from the dead. Not only was Jesus subject to all the forces of evil that Satan threw at Him at Calvary, but he was under the bondage of the greatest enemy of all – death itself (1 Corinthians 15 v 26). "Up from the grave he arose, with a mighty triumph o'er His foes." The church is inextricably linked with Christ in that victory, as we are His body and fullness. Not only is He raised by that power far above all rule and authority, but that is where we are too, for we are seated with Him in the heavenly realms (2 v 6). Such promises are not just nice spiritual talk or theoretical high-minded concepts; they are meant to be the practical experience of God's people throughout the Church age.

### 2. Purpose. 3 v 10 – 11

*His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Paul, having explained the insight he has been given that a new administrative era in human history had dawned, a dispensation in time not revealed to past generations of God's servants, he now described the purpose for this new era. God intends that through His people His wisdom will be amply demonstrated to the spiritual powers, which have made such a catastrophic mess of the affairs of humanity. This is to be part of the eternal purpose of God, brought about at the time of His choosing, and centred on the accomplished work of Christ Jesus. The wisdom of God is the demonstration of His ability to fully achieve all His stated purposes in the history of creation, without let or hindrance. This is the ultimate victory of God over the attempts of Satan and his associates to frustrate God's purposes and deny God the redemption of His creation and people, both in time and in eternity.

The fact that this is to be achieved through the Church proves that God can rule by love and grace operating in human hearts, His people freely demonstrating a glad and enthusiastic response to His plan of redemption. It shows He does not operate by some sort of divine diktat that overrules the God-given nature of mankind; a nature designed to be in fellowship with Him. In practical terms, this wisdom of God shows that His redeeming power in the lives of His people can gloriously bring about the purest pattern of living possible this side of Heaven, and through the church it can also show the best way societies can be organised this side of the return of the Lord Jesus to rule and reign on earth.

### 3. Provision. 4 v 7 – 13

*But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.” (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

Having beautifully set out our oneness in the Lord Jesus (4 v 1 – 6) the apostle then refers to Christ apportioning grace for various aspects of Christian service, referring to Psalm 68 v 18 as a prophecy which this fulfils. In that Psalm there is a reference (v16) to the mountain of God’s dwelling for ever (the church - see Hebrews 12 v 22 – 24), the change of era from the law (Sinai) to grace (his sanctuary - v17b), and the ascended Lord giving to and receiving gifts from men. So, the giving of grace (and receiving worship through service) in Ephesians 4 v 7 – 13 is indeed the fulfilment of that passage in Psalm 68. However, and this is the important point, that Psalm was always sung on the Day of Atonement when the priest made offerings on the brazen altar and entered the Holy of Holies. In other words, as Paul the Jew would have known only too well, the giving of these grace ministries is in a direct relationship with the Atonement.

Just in case any gentile Christian had not made the connection Paul then explains the context by means of the words in parenthesis in verses 9 and 10. As Jesus died, He committed His spirit to His Father, and His body was laid in the tomb. He certainly ascended in His spirit, for He had told the repentant thief that that very day they would be together in paradise. However, during that vital period of His physical death Jesus, in His spirit, also descended to the actual place where the evil spirits were imprisoned and He preached to them, declaring His victory over them and all their evil intentions since they fell. Relevant references include 1 Peter 3 v 18 – 20, 2 Peter 2 v 4, Jude v 6, and wonderfully, Colossians 2 v 15. As this declaration of victory occurred between the cross and the empty tomb, His great triumph over demonic powers is an essential part of the Atonement. Now, Paul argues, as victory over the powers of evil is totally secured within the Atonement, the giving to the church of this particular grace is the provision we need so that we can take authority over all such powers. This is the precise means whereby we demonstrate God’s great wisdom.

### 4. Performance. 6 v 10 – 18

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore, put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.*

Looking at the actual sevenfold items of armour is a great study in itself. Suffice it to say now that here we are all called to be engaged in spiritual warfare, knowing that this is bringing glory to our God as we show His great and eternal wisdom to all spiritual powers and authorities. Because victory is in the Atonement we are assured of success when we operate according to the grace given us and under the sovereign direction of the Holy Spirit. This last point is very important as sometimes we are called to just stand, rather than fight. Keeping in touch with the Commander through prayer is vitally important on the battlefield.

To help us Paul outlines the two main arenas of warfare. Firstly, we are to stand against the devil’s schemes. These are all the thoughts, ideas, religions, philosophies, and other impulses he puts into people’s minds. As Jesus makes so clear in John 8 v 44 all such motivations are lies and deceptions, and this has been Satan’s way of working from the very beginning (Genesis 3 v 1 – 5). He does not mind what people believe, as long as they do not believe the truth – that which God has decreed and set forth in His Word. Sadly, many Christians over the years have compromised the truth by listening to the devil’s schemes, such as the theory of evolution, humanistic atheism, replacement theology, universalism, etc.

Secondly, we must always bear in mind the spiritual forces which lie behind the events all around us, whether on a personal level or right up to national and international affairs. Certainly, human beings must bear their own responsibility, for all must give an account of themselves to God. But in order to truly engage in spiritual warfare we are prayerfully to seek to discern the spiritual powers that are at work behind the actions of “flesh and blood”. Then, armed with all spiritual equipment, we are to engage under the Spirit’s direction, knowing we are fighting against defeated foes - 2 Corinthians 10 v 4 – 5.