

Proposal (1) –

“Learning to receive from the Holy Spirit and serve God through the Holy Spirit” –

Session 1 – part 1:

Through the last year, leaders at Newbold have been aware of a new season of the Spirit emerging. In this season of the Spirit, our understanding is that God is calling us to be more sensitive to the moving of the Holy Spirit and through his gifting and empowering, to nurture a community that together glorifies God and blesses those around us.

To see fruit from this new season, we must open ourselves up to what the Spirit wants to do. Just as a farmer ploughs up the ground to prepare for new seed to be sown; so, our prayer time was there to open our hearts in preparation for the sowing of the seed of God's word. So that, in the day of His battle, we, his troops will be ready and willing. For our study, we are taking our lead from Paul's letter to the Ephesian church, because in this letter, Paul very specifically calls on the believers to better understand their walk with God and engage more deeply with the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer

Q.1 – Jonathan gave two main points of instruction yesterday – what were they?

1.1 Introduction – Why did Paul write?

Paul is writing to a Gentile Church in Asia Minor. He seems to have identified a problem, which goes something like this. You Gentile believers have not properly understood who you are now in Christ Jesus. Consequently, you are not engaging fully with the blessings, the new life or the work God has given you; you seem to be holding back. Rather than being confident in your true identity, standing firm with your feet on solid ground, you are like toddlers, struggling to stay on your feet. Paul describes them as:

¹⁴ “... infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.” (Eph. 4:14)

Because you have not fully taken hold of the truth, you are being pushed around and thrown off balance by all kinds of teachings and deceitful scheming of people that keeps you captive in your old life. **Brothers and sisters, I want you to stand firm in your new identity and live as conquerors and overcomers.**

The reason for them holding back and being tossed around appears to relate to their life experiences before coming to faith; experiences that still had a strong hold on their thinking. In two areas they appear to be struggling with a victim mentality – in their identity and in their authority:

1.2 Magic and evil spirit powers: - Luke tells us in Acts 19, that a number of believers in Ephesus had previously practiced sorcery; some evil spirits were being driven out and 'possessed' people were cured. (Luke tells of new believers bringing their magic scrolls to be burned; they had a value of £500,000 in today's money.) (Acts 19:11-20) By implication, this shows that many people worked in magic, but many more would have trusted in, been under the power of, or in fear of magic spells, curses, evil spirit powers etc. etc. [Simon the sorcerer had power over the people of Samaria in Acts 8:9-13.]

Right away in Chapter One, Paul speaks of these spirit powers being defeated and put in subjection under the feet of Christ (Eph. 1:20-23), and then in Chapter 6 he calls believers to remember that their fight is not against 'flesh and blood,' (the people who took advantage of them), but the evil powers:

*¹¹ “Put on the full armour of God, so that you **can take your stand** against the devil's schemes. ¹² 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.” (Eph. 6:11-12)*

Understanding the powers and their impact:

Paul tells us three things about these powers:

- 1) They are at work in the world undertaking "the devil's schemes;"
- 2) Their location is said to be "in the heavenly realms" – this is the realm of all spiritual power; Christ is seated there, far above all other power and authority (Eph. 1:20-21), and
- 3) These powers work behind the scenes, propagating the darkness in "this dark world." These powers promote disobedience to God, through deceptive ideologies, ungodly teachings, and lifestyles that work completely against the wisdom of God and his purposes for humanity. These 'powers' continue the rebellion that Satan began in the Garden of Eden, where he undermined God's words and encouraged disobedience. Their activity nurtures all the harmful activity we see in our broken world. This is the world we all grew up in, which Paul refers to in these verses:

"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts." (Eph. 2:1-3)

1.3 Racial tensions and division: – Under the Law of Moses, God's people were called to be separate and distinctive, being a light to the other nations. God's intention was that through their lives, they would reveal the glories of being "the people of God" (Isa. 49:6). However, most of the time that command got twisted and the Jews became prideful, looking down on other nations and thinking they were better than everyone else. The Jews called themselves "the circumcision" and despised the Gentiles, calling them, "the uncircumcised" (Eph. 2:11) Rather than being a light, the Jews were filled with pride and began to arrogantly judge the Gentile nations, becoming hostile towards them. Consequently, the Gentiles had bad things to say about the Jews. Paul sets out the Gentiles' old life situation in Chapter 2:

*¹¹"Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands) — ¹²remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world." (Eph. 2:11-12) – Their life experience was **"We are excluded."***

However, Paul goes on to speak about this 'hostility' between Jew and Gentile being destroyed in the work of Christ on the cross:

Christ ... "has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two (Jew and Gentile), thus making peace, ¹⁶and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility." (Eph. 2:14-16)

The hostile division that existed between Jew and Gentile came out of a corrupted understanding of the law. When Jesus came, he fulfilled the whole law, thereby, making it obsolete for those who would put their faith in him. This is why Paul can speak of Jesus destroying the barrier – the law was the barrier.

Having destroyed the barrier, the Lord's purpose was to create in himself - in his spiritual body – (those who would receive his salvation by faith – i.e. the church) – 'one new humanity.'

"His purpose was to make the two groups of people become one new people in him and in this way make peace." (NCV Eph. 2:15) [Effectively, a whole new race of people.]

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come or that person has become a new creation; the old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Cor 5:17)

"Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation." (Gal 6:15).

Paul is saying, previously, you were two groups of people, divided in the flesh. But now, in Christ Jesus, you are a new creation, united in the one Holy Spirit.

Has everything really changed?

We can imagine, that after a lifetime of rejection and harsh treatment, those Gentiles who got converted would struggle to see themselves as equal with the Jews in God's purposes. It seems from what Paul writes, that they saw themselves as still unworthy of full acceptance and saw themselves as second-class Christians. The sense being, that they could not move forward because they were second-best/excluded. Much of the first part of Paul's letter seems to bear this out (Ch 1:3-14; 2:12-13; 2:17-22 & 4:3-6).

*¹³ "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ... ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. ¹⁹ Consequently, **you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.** (Eph. 2:13-20)*

The Gentiles had to take hold of their new identity knowing they were fully accepted and included and not living as victims of their past.

Christ Jesus has changed everything:

What we see in Chapter One is Paul telling them what has happened to these powers. Christ Jesus defeated them at the cross, robbing them of their power to enslave people in sin, condemnation and death. Now, through faith in Christ's finished work on the cross, his followers/we are freed from their powers and in Christ Jesus they/we carry an authority to stand against them. Their only weapons are schemes of deception, lies and distortion. These schemes are used to try and divert the followers of Christ from their blessings and the fulfilment of their true calling in the kingdom of God.

Then in Chapter Two, we see Jesus destroying some of the destructive works that these powers had brought into Israel and the nations - *destroying the barriers and the dividing wall of hostility* (2:14).

Paul's words of reassurance and encouragement were vital for these believing Gentiles, who were still being bombarded by constant threats of spells and curses and a lifetime of rejection and humiliation from the Jews. The power of the 'powers' is destroyed, and their destructive works are being overturned.

We too have negative life experiences – feeling we are victims of our past:

We might not be like the Ephesians, struggling with the impact of magic and evil spirit powers, but we may have memories of painful life experiences of rejection, humiliation, abuses or addictions that have worked against us, both before and after we believed. These can be powerful influences that hold us back from entering into all that God has for us. In addition to these, we all still experience the pressures and temptations to give in to the flesh and follow the ways of this dark world.

However, if we can take hold of our new identity in Christ, we can stand against the pressures of this world and break through old destructive habits and lifestyles. And with God's help we will take hold of the new things that God has set before us.

Question time:

Session 1 – part 2:

In this part, we will see how Paul encourages the believers to lay hold on all that is theirs in Christ Jesus.

2.1 Everyone blessed by God in every way:

Paul is quick to point out in his letter that these Gentiles are no longer victims or being treated as 'second-class' – they have not been excluded from anything.

³ *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has **blessed us** in the heavenly realms with **every spiritual blessing** in Christ."* (Eph. 1:3)

(A "spiritual blessing," in this context, refers to a blessing that has come from, through or by the Holy Spirit. We understand from this expression that the blessings God has secured for us, through the death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus, are revealed and released into us by the Holy Spirit. This blessing is for **every believer**.)

From verse 4-13, Paul begins to spell out exactly how they and we have been blessed:

- V4 - From the very beginning God **chose you out** to be set apart for Him – (made holy);
- V5 - More than that – it was **always his plan** that we should **be adopted as his children**. The words used here in the Greek refer to a Roman-style adoption, which meant those adopted enjoyed the status of a natural-born child. The adopted children became **equal members of the family** and had **equal rights to the father's inheritance**. This, God did out of his love for us, because none of us deserved any part of it. Don't ever feel you are second-class believers – you have been brought into God's family with no holds barred;
- V7 - You have been **redeemed by the blood of Jesus**, which means you have been **released from being a slave under Satan's power**. Christ Jesus has paid the price for your release from Satan's kingdom and captivity and **forgiven you all the sins committed** whilst you were his slave;
- V9-10 - These things have not been kept hidden from us, God has now revealed his plans to us by the Holy Spirit. In Christ, we are part of God's great plan to bring restoration and healing to his world, ravaged by the devil's schemes – and he has revealed his plans to us;
- V13-14 - Even more, God has given each of us His Spirit to mark us out as His purchased possession and to guarantee that we shall receive our final redemption and full inheritance.

Paul's intention in these opening statements is to leave the Gentile believers, and us, in no doubt that they are **not 'excluded' or 'second-class,'** this is **a lie and deception of Satan** and the powers. He then tells them he's praying that they will take hold of the reality and full revelation of all that Jesus has secured for them – verses 15-23.

2.2 Freed from the powers of darkness through the cross:

In Paul's prayer, he speaks of Christ's victory over the spirit powers of darkness (19b-23). God has done two marvellous things:

- He has *raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,*" (Eph. 1:20)

And He has

- *"placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church ... "far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked (referring to names in magic), not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ... (Eph. 1:22 & 21)*

At God's right hand, our Lord receives authority over his enemies, they are "under his feet."

Two Scriptures are helpful:

"The Lord says to my lord:

"Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."

² *The Lord will extend your mighty sceptre (your rule) from Zion, saying,*

"Rule in the midst of your enemies!" (Ps. 110:1-2)

These verses, originally written by David, are applied to Jesus by Peter (Acts 2:32-36), speaking of victory over his enemies and receiving authority to rule in the midst of them. This victory is set out in Paul's letter to the Colossian Church, saying that Christ Jesus, through his death on the cross has:

"disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." (Col 2:15)

Jesus has removed the weapons of the enemy, they are no longer able to hold power over us, nor condemn us through our sin and disobedience; these sins have been forgiven. So, we are free!!

2.3 Called to live a new life:

Being set free is glorious, but this is only the first part of God's plan. As we have already seen, Christ's purpose was to create a new humanity. (The Message Bible speaks of – "a new kind of human being") including both Jew and Gentile:

"His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two (Jew and Gentile), thus making peace,¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility." (Eph. 2:15-16)

Through this new humanity, God is bringing about a restoration of his original intention, that his people should be well blessed and a blessing to the nations. Believers in Jesus are this new humanity - the body of Christ – a community that knows God through the presence and power of His Spirit. We see from this Scripture, that in the new humanity a healing and restoration of relationships is to take place. Where division had existed, under the influence of evil powers, there was to be unity and peace; these are the evidences of God's restoration plan at work.

2.4 We must be a Spirit-empowered community:

Embracing this restoration work is no simple task, without help, all believers would continue to live in the old ways of the world. No, the church of Jesus is called to live as Jesus lived, not giving way to the temptations and deceptions of Satan, but standing against him, upholding the righteous ways of God. This is what Paul means when he talks of "standing firm" against the schemes of the enemy and against the day of temptation in Chapter six. Not being victims, but moving in the authority we have in Christ.

None of us could live this new life without the aid of the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Jesus. And this seems to have been part of the problem for the Gentiles in Ephesus, they had not fully understood or engaged with their new authority, empowered by the Holy Spirit. I believe this is why Paul writes to them saying, my prayer for you is this:

"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people,¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms," (Eph. 1:18-20).

When Jesus triumphed over his enemies, he did not gain victory in the way the world gains victory, by force, domination and oppression. He triumphed by the way of the cross, which the world saw as 'weakness and foolishness' and so the world did not understand it. In the life of Jesus, the way of the world is turned upside-down. His victory did not come by might or power, but by the Spirit of God.

Christ Jesus – victorious through the Spirit:

What Paul does not say, but assumes we will appreciate is this; Jesus triumphed over and defeated all the powers of darkness arrayed against him through the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Luke records the beginning of his temptations in the wilderness and intends us to realise that it is by the Spirit that Jesus resisted temptation, not only then, but throughout his life. Satan was attempting to draw Jesus into

disobedience and sin, just as he had with Adam and Eve. He presented Jesus with lies, deception, injustice and pain; as Isaiah prophesied:

*He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. (Isa. 53:3)*

*He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth. (Isa. 53:7)*

He tasted the opposition and rejection of the Jews, he knew the aggressive powers of darkness, as the Gentiles had done, but resisted and through death defeated them on the cross. Hebrews reminds us:

"we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin." (Heb. 4:15)

Jesus walked in the righteousness of God, and ruled in the midst of his enemies, but only by the enabling power of the Spirit. By the Spirit, he defeated the powers and disarmed them (Col 2:15).

A new life by the Spirit:

But Paul reminds us in (Eph. 1v19) that we have this **same power of the Holy Spirit** who enables us, to stand against the lies and deceptions of these conquered foes. We are called to be imitators of Jesus, as the body of Christ in the world. We are to be God's new humanity, bringing hope and transformation in the world, moving confidently in our new identity and empowered in our new authority.

Without the Holy Spirit's guidance and power, we would not be able to live this new life, that's why Paul calls the gift of the Holy Spirit a great blessing.

I cannot over-emphasise the inner transformation that this new life in Jesus brings, we must open our hearts and minds to take on this upside-down wisdom of God. It is a total laying down of our self (our old ways of thinking, '**our old humanity**') and putting on the new self (**our new humanity**) of Christ by His Spirit (Eph. 4:22-24).

In Corinthians Chapter 2-3, Paul speaks of the contrast between the old humanity of this world and the new humanity/people that we have become in Christ and makes it very plain that we can only succeed through the working of the Holy Spirit. Read these verses and be refreshed: READ: 1 Cor. 2:1 - 3:3.

The end - Let us pray:

Children of God – This is Our Commission:

Remember that this letter was written to a church, therefore, although these instructions are to be followed by each of us individually, they are also to be applied to the whole church.

We are called to be God's 'new humanity' – God's 'new people' in Christ Jesus, rescued from the powers of darkness to live as his 'children of light.' Empowered by the Spirit of the Lord within us, we desire, seek after and give ourselves to find out what pleases the Lord, that we might walk in His light.

Verses to meditate on:

We are rescued from the dominion of darkness – and brought into the kingdom of light - (Col 1:9-14):

⁹... "we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, ¹⁰so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹being strengthened with all power (by the Spirit), according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, ¹²and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. ¹³For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness – (Eph. 4:8-14)

⁸"... you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ⁹(for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)¹⁰ and find out what pleases the Lord. ¹¹Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹²It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. ¹³But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. ¹⁴This is why it is said:

*"Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you."*

Live as children of the light - (1 Thess. 5:5-9):

⁵You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. ⁶So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. ⁷For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. ⁸But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. ⁹For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Live as children of the light - (Eph. 4:15-20):

¹⁵Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. ¹⁸Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Talk with the Lord, take up your new authority and be an overcomer:

"Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. ²⁰ Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

²¹ To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. ²² Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (Rev 3:19-22)