

**“DO I
REALLY UNDERSTAND
THE GOSPEL?”**

from the book
of

Ephesians

A few things to note before launching in:

- ◆ The comments in italics below the scriptures are an attempt to capture the meaning of each scripture and provide a running commentary in more contemporary terms.
- ◆ There are summaries on most pages to bring out the message of the book as clearly and concisely as possible.
- ◆ The scriptures are all taken from the Revised English Bible translation, to add a slightly different flavour.

Right from the start, Ephesians describes the gospel and why it's such good news:

Ephesians 1:3 - "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has conferred on us in Christ every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms"

✓ *To understand the gospel is to grasp what God the Father has opened up to us IN CHRIST - AMAZING blessings from HIS world we could NEVER EXPERIENCE NATURALLY -*

Ephesians 1:4 - "Before the foundation of the world he chose us in Christ to be his people, to be without blemish in his sight, to be full of love; and (5) he predestined us to be adopted as his children through Jesus Christ"

✓ *To understand the gospel is to grasp what God planned for humanity from the BEGINNING - ADOPTION into HIS family, free of sin & full of love -*

Ephesians 1:5 - "This was his will and pleasure in order that (6) the glory of his gracious gift, so graciously conferred on us in his Beloved, might redound (or overflow) to his praise"

✓ *To understand the gospel is to grasp what God ALSO had in mind for us in the END - INCREDULOUS PRAISE from us as it dawns on us it's God's ENTIRE plan & GREATEST pleasure to do for us what he does in Christ -*

So, what exactly DOES God do for us in Christ?:

Ephesians 1:7 - "In Christ our release is secured and our sins forgiven through the shedding of his blood"

✓ *Sin held us in a DEATH GRIP we couldn't escape from & a GUILT TRIP we couldn't erase, but God FREED us from BOTH in Christ's death. That's NOT ALL God had in mind for us in Christ, though -*

Ephesians 1:8 - "God has lavished on us all wisdom and insight. (9) He has made known to us his SECRET PURPOSE, in accordance with the plan which he determined beforehand in Christ, to be put into effect (10) when the time was ripe; namely, that the universe, everything in heaven and on earth, might be brought into a UNITY IN CHRIST"

✓ *God ALSO delights in showing us his ULTIMATE SECRET, that ever since Christ's death the ENTIRE UNIVERSE is now being brought to UNITY IN CHRIST. This was his plan from the very beginning but WE are the ones who SEE IT FIRST -*

To understand the gospel is to understand <u>WHAT</u> God planned for humanity & the Universe, and <u>HOW</u> he made it possible.
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CHECKPOINT No.1 - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:

- 1) I understand GOD HAS A PLAN for humanity.
- 2) I understand HOW God made that plan possible - through his Son.
- 3) I understand WHAT God made possible through his Son - spiritual blessings we could never experience naturally; adoption into God's family, free of sin & filled with his love; release from the grip of sin & its accompanying guilt, & special insight into his "secret purpose" for the entire Universe.

God's "secret purpose" begins with US NOW:

Ephesians 1:11 - "In Christ indeed we have been given our share in the heritage, as was decreed in his design whose purpose is everywhere at work; for it his will that we who were the FIRST (12) to set our hope on Christ, should cause his glory to be praised"

✓ *God is fulfilling his secret purpose all over the world, but the FIRST to grasp it, share in its blessings, throw all their hope & trust in Christ, & show the world how AMAZING GOD IS, would be US -*

Ephesians 1:13 - "And in Christ you also - once you had heard the message of the truth, the good news of your SALVATION, and had believed it..."

✓ *Having understood, believed & delighted in the great news that God long ago planned & secured our salvation in Christ - what happens NEXT is -*

Ephesians 1:13 - "...in him were you stamped with the SEAL of the promised HOLY SPIRIT; and that Spirit is a PLEDGE of the inheritance which will be ours when God has redeemed what is his own, to his glory & praise"

✓ *God proves to us we now BELONG TO HIM with his own personal SEAL, the Holy Spirit. The Spirit ALSO acts as God's pledge, or GUARANTEE, that the INHERITANCE he promised BELONGS TO US -*

Ephesians 1:15 - "Because of all this, now that I have heard of your FAITH in the Lord Jesus and the LOVE you bear towards all God's people, (16) I never cease to give thanks for you when I mention you in my prayers"

✓ *The EVIDENCE that God has indeed guaranteed our inheritance is the opening up of his "secret purpose" in OUR lives NOW, in bringing US to "unity in Christ (10)" FIRST. We would experience that unity in 2 great spiritual blessings: A deep love for Christ, entrusting our lives entirely to him, and a deep love for our fellow Christians -*

To understand the gospel is to experience the <u>unfolding of God's secret purpose in my OWN LIFE NOW</u> - the <u>EVIDENCE</u> of which is my faith in Christ & love for my fellow Christians.

CHECKPOINT No.2 - "Do I *really* understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:

1) I understand God is fulfilling his secret purpose in my OWN LIFE NOW -

2) The EVIDENCE of which is:

a) I know my salvation is secure in Christ's death;

b) I know my eternal inheritance is guaranteed by God's pledge, the Holy Spirit;

c) I can see the Holy Spirit at work, in my hope, my trust, my loyalty & love zeroing in on Christ, and in the love & affection I have for my fellow Christians.

✓ *But that's NOT ALL I experience because there are -*

MORE spiritual blessings from the heavenly realms:

Ephesians 1:17 - "I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the all-glorious Father, may confer on you the spiritual gifts of wisdom & vision, with the KNOWLEDGE OF HIM that they bring"

✓ *God also gives us an INTIMATE understanding of HIM -*

Ephesians 1:18 - "I pray that your inward eyes may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the HOPE to which he calls you, how RICH and GLORIOUS is the share he offers you among his people in their inheritance..."

✓ *Our intimate understanding of God fills us with HOPE, as we grasp the ENORMITY of what he's promised us -*

Ephesians 1:19 - "...and how vast are the resources of his POWER open to us who have faith"

✓ *We also grasp how GREAT his POWER is, proving beyond ANY doubt in our minds he can & will do everything he promised -*

Ephesians 1:19 - "His mighty strength was seen at work when (20) he RAISED CHRIST FROM THE DEAD & ENTHRONED him at his right hand in the heavenly realms (21) far ABOVE ALL government & authority, all power & dominion, & any title of sovereignty that commands allegiance, not only in this age but also in the age to come"

✓ *And the PROOF God has that kind of power is the RAISING UP OF CHRIST, because it's "in Christ" (& no one else BUT Christ) that God's "secret purpose" for us & the entire Universe is being fulfilled -*

Ephesians 1:22 - "He put all things in subjection beneath his (Christ's) feet & gave him as head over all things TO THE CHURCH which (23) is his body, the fullness of him who is filling the universe in all its parts"

✓ *God's "secret purpose" is to FILL THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE WITH EVERYTHING THAT CHRIST IS - STARTING with THE CHURCH. WE are the FIRST to experience "the fullness of Christ" - the UNIVERSE is NEXT. God's "secret purpose" is ON THE MOVE - & WE are the PROOF of it! -*

CHECKPOINT No.3 - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:

1) I see the importance of God RAISING CHRIST FROM THE DEAD & placing him in full charge over everything - because it's in & through Christ (& him only) that God's "secret purpose" is being fulfilled.

2) I understand WHAT that "secret purpose" IS - it's Christ filling the Universe with everything HE is - the PROOF of which is what he's doing IN HIS CHURCH RIGHT NOW, because that's where he STARTS, & -

3) I realize I must be PART of that church because the ENORMITY of what God has called me to, & the POWER he has to pull it off, FILLS me with HOPE - hope I NEVER HAD BEFORE - *because* -

We had no idea what God was up to:

Ephesians 2:1 - "You once were dead because of your sins and wickedness; (2) you followed the ways of this present world order, obeying the commander of the spiritual powers of the air, the spirit now at work among God's rebel subjects"

✓ *No wonder God's purpose was "secret" - ANOTHER SPIRIT was controlling our lives, which had us totally MISSING God's purpose for us -*

Ephesians 2:3 - "We too were once of their number: we were ruled by our physical desires, and did what instinct and evil imagination suggested. In our natural condition we lay under the condemnation of God like the rest of mankind"

✓ *Under that spirit power, my life had NO PURPOSE other than thinking & doing whatever felt good. Result? The very OPPOSITE to what GOD wanted for me. Instead of being free of sin & full of love, I was full of sin & couldn't love, and I was STUCK in that empty life like everyone else on the planet -*

Ephesians 2:4 - "But God is rich in mercy, and because of his great love for us, (5) he brought us to life with Christ when we were dead because of our sins; it is by grace you are saved"

✓ *But GOD, in his great love, grace & mercy, came to our rescue. He lifted us OUT of that life to "life with Christ" - entirely by "HIS will & pleasure (1:5)" - because WE couldn't do it -*

Ephesians 2:6 - "And he raised us up in union with Christ Jesus and enthroned us with him in the heavenly realms..."

✓ *God now has us where CHRIST can directly influence our lives, as if we were right there BESIDE him in heaven -*

<p>We can experience the COMPARISON now between life ruled by the spiritual powers of the air & life in the heavenly realms with Christ.</p>
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CHECKPOINT No.4 - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:

1) I can see the horrible state I was in: I was dead because of sin, driven by my own physical desires & ruled by a rebellious spirit power, all of which cut me off from God.

2) I can see what God lifted me into: I was “brought to life” & given union with Christ, so that HE could influence my life instead - *but* -

WHY would God let us make a mess of things & then lift us out of it?:

Ephesians 2:7 - “...so that he might display in the ages to come how immense are the resources of his grace, and how great his kindness to us in Christ Jesus”

✓ *What’s AMAZING about God is the ENORMITY of his grace, his kindness & his love for us (1:5-6) - BUT HOW are we humans going to SEE that? -*

Ephesians 2:8 - “For it is by grace you are saved through faith; it is not your own doing. It is God’s gift, (9) not a reward for work done. There is nothing for anyone to boast of”

✓ *We see God’s amazing grace in HOW HE MADE OUR SALVATION POSSIBLE. It is totally A GIFT. And he made SURE it’s a gift by making us SO helpless WE CANNOT SAVE OURSELVES. All WE can do is make a mess of things & cut ourselves off from God - BUT God PLANNED IT THAT WAY ON PURPOSE so that, from beginning to end, our salvation is entirely HIS doing -*

Ephesians 2:10 - “We are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the life of good deeds which God designed for us”

✓ *We are TOTALLY the work of GOD’s hand, not ours. It was HE who designed us, planned what he did for us & HE who gave us Christ to transform our lives into something wonderful & good. NONE of this could we do ourselves; we were stuck in our helplessness - like being jammed down a well, upside down with our arms pinned back beside us - there was NOTHING WE COULD DO to save ourselves. And God LETS us experience life like that for a while so that, looking back, we would REMEMBER how helpless we were & WHY God MADE us so helpless - so that salvation could be HIS GIFT to us, to give us a firsthand, intimate glimpse into WHAT KIND OF GOD he really is (1:17) -*

To help us see the enormity of his grace, God GIVES us salvation. It’s his gift to us, from beginning to end. And to make absolutely CERTAIN it’s a gift, God makes us utterly unable to save ourselves.

No part of our salvation, therefore, including the life of good deeds we are able to live now, is our doing. Nor is it a reward for something WE do. It is ALL God’s doing - because this is what God is like.

CHECKPOINT No.5 - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:

- 1) I can see why God made us so utterly helpless - to make sure our salvation is HIS doing, not ours. It's a gift from him, not a reward for good works we've done.
- 2) I can see why salvation is a gift - to help us see God (1:17) & his amazing grace, so that we willingly put all our hope & trust in him (1:12,15,18) - & -

The Gentiles in Paul's day are a perfect example of salvation being God's doing:

Ephesians 2:11 - "Remember then your former condition, Gentiles as you are by birth, 'the uncircumcised' as you are called by those who call themselves 'the circumcised' because of a physical rite. (12) You were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the community of Israel, strangers to God's covenants and the promise that goes with them. Yours was a world without hope and without God."

✓ *God made sure the Gentiles had NO connection whatsoever with Christ, Israel, the covenants or the promises, and the MEMORY was still vivid for them of what that life was like. God was a distant entity who had no relevance or impact in their lives, so they had no clear purpose to work toward & no hope for the future -*

Ephesians 2:13 - "Once you were far off, but now in union with Christ Jesus you have been brought near through the shedding of Christ's blood"

✓ *But when God connected them up with Christ, they experienced a completely NEW LIFE: God was now "near" to them. And how did it happen? Not because of anything THEY did; it was purely because of Christ's shed blood -*

Ephesians 2:14 - "For he is himself our peace. Gentiles and Jews, he has made the two one, and in his own body of flesh and blood has broken down the barrier of enmity which separated them; for (15) he annulled the law with its rules and regulations, so as to create out of the two a single NEW HUMANITY in himself, thereby making peace"

✓ *Suddenly, the wall that had separated Jews from Gentiles, collapsed. They were BOTH now experiencing the SAME NEW LIFE that God had made possible by Christ's shed blood. No more distance from God for the Gentiles, and no more rules & rituals for the Jews. Jew & Gentile became a NEW type of people never seen before, who could live totally at peace with each other. And again, it had nothing to do with them, it was purely because of Christ that it happened -*

<p>God's ultimate purpose is to bring the entire Universe into a state of harmony, peace & unity in Christ. He does it by the gift of Christ's shed blood - which not only breaks down the wall between us & God, it also breaks down the walls between us & other people, too.</p>

CHECKPOINT No.6 - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:

1) I understand why God did not give the Gentiles a connection with Christ - to let them experience what life was like without him, first. God was totally irrelevant & they & the Jews hated each other.

2) I understand why God then brought the Gentiles into "union" with Christ - to let them experience the vast difference the shedding of Christ's blood made. God was now "near" to them & they & the Jews became a completely NEW type of person, experiencing a peace in their relationship they'd never known before - *but* -

How does the cross destroy the enmity between people?:

Ephesians 2:16 - "This was his purpose, to reconcile the two in a single body to God through the cross, by which he killed the enmity"

✓ *God's purpose is to bring us all to him, where nothing separates us from him or from each other. He does it through the cross because the cross shows WE ARE ALL LOVED EXACTLY THE SAME BY GOD -*

Ephesians 2:17 - "So he came and proclaimed the good news: peace to you who were far off, and peace to those who were near; for (18) through him we both alike have access to the Father in the one Spirit"

✓ *What brings people together, even hardened enemies like Jews & Gentiles, is realizing WE ALL HAVE EXACTLY THE SAME ACCESS TO GOD, too -*

Ephesians 2:19 - "Thus you are no longer aliens in a foreign land, but fellow-citizens with God's people, members of God's household"

✓ *Through these two things God bonded Jew & Gentile together as ONE BIG FAMILY, a marvellous experience for BOTH peoples, after all those centuries of bitter rivalry & hatred -*

Ephesians 2:20 - "You are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the corner-stone. In him (21) the whole building is bonded together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him (22) you also are being built with all the others into a spiritual dwelling for God"

✓ *This family - God's household, his kingdom & holy Temple, the home where God dwells - had been a long time in the making, but the KEY ELEMENTS, the foundation & the cornerstone, were now in place. The rest of the building could now take shape, where all us Christian "stones" would bond perfectly together -*

<p>Christ's death was meant to shatter the walls between us & God & each other. How? By helping us realize we are all equally & deeply loved by God AND he's given us all exactly the same access to him - so what is there left to separate us anymore?</p>
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CHECKPOINT No.7 - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:

- 1) I understand God's secret purpose is to bring us together as his family, bonded together as perfectly as the stones in the Temple.
- 2) I understand how Jesus's death fits in with that - it removes the barriers that separate us by showing us we're all equally loved by God & we all have equal access to him as our Father - *including Gentiles* -

Through Paul, God opens up his secret purpose to us Gentiles, too:

Ephesians 3:1 - "With this in mind I pray for you, I Paul, who for the sake of the you Gentiles am now the prisoner of Jesus Christ - for surely (2) you have heard of how God's gift of grace to me was designed for your benefit. (3) It was by revelation that his secret purpose was made known to me. I have already written you a brief account of this, and by reading it (4) you can see that I understand the secret purpose of Christ"

✓ *If we really want to understand the gospel, then PAUL IS OUR MAN, because GOD CHOSE HIM JUST FOR US. He not only gave Paul himself an extraordinary understanding of the gospel, he also inspired Paul with an amazing ability to make it COME ALIVE TO OTHERS, too -*

Ephesians 3:5 - "In former generations that secret was not disclosed to mankind; but now by inspiration it has been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets, that (6) through the gospel the Gentiles are joint heirs with the Jews, part of the same body, sharers together in the promise made in Jesus Christ"

✓ *The Gentiles had never even heard of God's secret purpose because up to that point it had only been revealed to Jews. But here was Paul telling GENTILES they were as much a part of God's ultimate plan and promise as the JEWS were -*

Ephesians 3:7 - "Such is the gospel of which I was made a minister by God's unmerited gift, so powerfully at work in me. To me (8), who am less than the least of all God's people, he has granted the privilege of proclaiming to the Gentiles the good news of the unfathomable riches of Christ, and (9) of bringing to light how this hidden purpose was to be put into effect"

✓ *To Paul, it was still a staggering privilege to be given the job of explaining the gospel so powerfully & effectively because, having no great abilities himself, it was obvious GOD WAS DIRECTLY INSPIRING HIM -*

<p>The Gentiles had never understood God's secret purpose, or how God had made it all possible through the incredible things he'd done & promised through Christ, so God recruited Paul to explain it to them - not because of any great ability Paul himself had - but because God was powerfully inspiring him.</p>

CHECKPOINT No.8 - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:

- 1) I understand the VITAL IMPORTANCE of PAUL - that God recruited Paul to open up the gospel to everyone, not just to Jews.
- 2) I understand HOW IMPORTANT PAUL'S WRITINGS ARE - that God gave Paul extraordinary insight into "the unfathomable riches of Christ" - *so that* -

God's secret purpose would come alive LIKE NEVER BEFORE:

Ephesians 3:9 - "It (*God's hidden purpose*) lay concealed for long ages with God the Creator of the universe, (10) in order that now, THROUGH THE CHURCH, the wisdom of God in its infinite variety might be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms"

✓ *Paul was a LANDMARK MOMENT in God's plan. The IMPACT of his writings would be ENORMOUS. Suddenly, God's secret purpose would be seen in a way it had NEVER BEEN SEEN BEFORE - even by angels. And HOW would it be seen? THROUGH THE CHURCH -*

Ephesians 3:11 - "This accords with his age-long purpose, which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, (12) in whom we have freedom of access to God, with the confidence born of trust in him. (13) I beg you, then, not to lose heart over my sufferings for you; indeed, they are your glory"

✓ *Through the church, God would now demonstrate in a very REAL way what he'd planned all along in Christ. How? In THE RELATIONSHIP THE CHURCH WOULD HAVE WITH GOD - first in their trust, then in their confidence as they discover they have FREE ACCESS to God as their Father. And since God had opened up this relationship through PAUL, there was no need for the church to be discouraged by Paul's suffering; everything God was doing through Paul was for their (& our) benefit (3:2) -*

Ephesians 3:14 - "With this in mind, then, I kneel in prayer to the Father, (15) from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name, (16) that out of the treasures of his glory he may grant you inward strength and power through his Spirit, (17) that through faith Christ may dwell in your hearts in love"

✓ *Paul could see for himself what was happening in the church, that the Father was opening up his treasures to bring his family together like never before. He knew he could ask the Father, then, to give the church some real power over sin by his Spirit & to fill them with love through their faith in Christ -*

Because of Paul & the church's response to his teaching, the plan God had made possible through Jesus Christ would be understood like never before - by spirit beings, as well.

CHECKPOINT No.9 - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:

1) I understand that Paul was a landmark in God's plan because God, through Paul, began to reveal his secret purpose in a way it had never been seen before - even by those in the spirit world.

2) I understand how important the church is, because it was through the church that God began to demonstrate his plan in Christ like never before, too - in the entirely new relationship of trust & utter confidence the church would have with God, as we discover, because of Christ, we now have free access to God as our Father.

3) I understand, as Paul did, that the treasures of God are now open to the church, to bring his family together like never before - as his Spirit gives us power over sin & Christ fills us with his love - *so that* -

We experience God like never before:

Ephesians 3:17 - "With deep roots and firm foundations (18) may you, in company with all God's people, be strong to grasp what is the breadth and length and height and depth (19) of Christ's love, and to know it, though it is beyond knowledge. So may you be filled with the very fullness of God"

✓ *From the vast storehouse of God's treasures (16) now comes the GREATEST JEWEL of all. It is each of us individually, & all of us together as the church, realizing the SHOCKING EXTENT of Christ's love for us. THIS is what God now fills us to the brim with, a mind boggling grasp of just HOW MUCH WE'RE LOVED BY CHRIST. And THIS is what ROOTS us into God's family like nothing else, it's seeing that God is love - but a love SO GREAT it extends WAY BEYOND any love WE'VE ever known -*

Ephesians 3:20 - "Now to him who is able through the power which is at work among us to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or conceive, (21) to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus from generation to generation for evermore! Amen"

✓ *Generations of us in the church would experience the power of God giving us FAR MORE than we could even THINK of, let alone ASK for! -*

Ephesians 4:1 - "I implore you then - I, a prisoner for the Lord's sake: as God has called you, live up to your calling"

✓ *This is the life that God opened up to us through Paul, so live it to the full! -*

<p>The jewel of jewels God has given us is the incredible understanding of how much we're loved by Christ. We can now experience to the full what it's like to be loved as one of God's family.</p>

CHECKPOINT No.10 - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:

- 1) I understand Christ loves me - with a love SO great, it reaches far beyond anything I could possibly grasp, or even think to ask for.
- 2) I understand God has called his church to an incredible life, filled to the brim with the fullness of Christ's love, to enable us to experience what it's like being in God's family in the church right now - *so with that in mind* -

Live to the full what God has made possible in the church:

Ephesians 4:2 - "Be humble always and gentle, and patient too, putting up with one another's failings in the spirit of love. (3) Spare no effort to make fast with bonds of peace the unity which the Spirit gives"

✓ *God has given the church the key that UNLOCKS THE SECRET to HOW HIS FAMILY FUNCTIONS. It's all about love, incredible love - which Paul now spells out in practical terms to enable us, through the Spirit's help, to create that love AMONG OURSELVES in the church right now. We can now love each other as God loves us, with the same undying gentleness & patience he has, where it's possible to create a unity & peace in the church SO STRONG it cannot be broken. Paul encourages us to CONCENTRATE our efforts, then, on LIVING TO THE FULL what God has made possible -*

Ephesians 4:4 - "There is one body and one Spirit, just as there is one hope held out in God's call to you; (5) one Lord, one faith, one baptism; (6) one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all"

✓ *God's family, & therefore his church too, is all about unity & peace. What we experience in the church, then, as the Spirit of love inspires, is a tremendous sense of oneness. We find we share the same hopes & same dreams. We operate as one, under Christ, with Christ & with each other, just like a brain & body work perfectly together. We're totally committed to Christ our Lord & to God our Father, knowing our Father is fully involved in everything that's happening in our lives. He's in us, with us & thoroughly in control, bringing his church into his family of love exactly as he planned -*

<p>The secret to how God's family functions is love. God unlocked that secret to his church, by helping us see the immensity of Christ's love for us, and by providing us with his Spirit so we can recreate the love of God's family in the church. What we experience in the church, then, is a wonderful sense of oneness, not only in our relationship with Christ & the Father, but in our relationships with each other, too.</p>

CHECKPOINT No.11 - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:

- 1) I understand the SECRET to how God's family functions - it's all about love.
- 2) I understand the great GIFT God has given us - it's the Spirit of love, that enables us to recreate the love of God's family in the church.
- 3) I understand the marvellous LIFE the Spirit of love creates for us - it's a oneness & closeness with the Father, Christ & each other that forms a bond so strong, it can never be broken - & -

It's all happening to us because of Christ:

Ephesians 4:7 - "But each of us has been given a special gift, a particular share in the bounty of Christ. (8) That is why scripture says: He ascended into the heights; he took captives into captivity; he gave gifts to men. (9) Now the word 'ascended' implies that he also descended to the lowest level, down to the very earth. (10) He who descended is none other than he who ascended far above the heavens, so that he might fill the universe"

✓ *Paul quotes Psalm 68:18 here because it describes Christ like a conquering king, returning from a campaign with a trail of prisoners - but instead of RECEIVING gifts from an adoring public, he GIVES gifts to them! This is WHY he "ascended" to the heights, after being "descended" here on earth, so that he could fill the WHOLE UNIVERSE with a "share of his bounty" and with "special gifts" - STARTING with US in the church -*

Ephesians 4:11 - "And it is he who has given some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, (12) to equip God's people for work in his service, for the building up of the body of Christ"

✓ *It is CHRIST, then, who provides the church with gifted people to build us up & be effective in his service -*

Ephesians 4:13 - "Until we all attain to the unity inherent in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God - to mature manhood, measured by nothing less than the full stature of Christ"

✓ *It is GOD's aim to bring the entire universe to a state of peace and harmony by filling it with everything that Christ is, beginning with us in the church (1:22-23). It is CHRIST's aim right now, therefore, to FILL THE CHURCH WITH HIMSELF, growing us all up together until we're AS MUCH LIKE HIM as possible - which WE HELP ALONG by KNOWING that's what he's doing & TRUSTING HIM to do it -*

Christ is now filling the church with himself, by providing us with special gifts & gifted people to enable us to become just like him.

CHECKPOINT No.12 - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:

- 1) I understand why Christ rose like a conquering king from this earth - to begin the process of filling the ENTIRE UNIVERSE with himself, starting with his church.
- 2) I understand how he fills his church with himself - by providing us with special gifts & gifted people to help us grow to be just like him.
- 3) I understand how we help that process along - by TUNING IN to what Christ is doing & TRUSTING him to do it - so -

Stay on track and don't be distracted:

Ephesians 4:14 - "We are no longer to be children, tossed about by the waves and whirled around by every fresh gust of teaching, dupes of cunning rogues and their deceitful schemes. (15) Rather we are to maintain the truth in a spirit of love; so shall we fully grow up into Christ"

✓ *Christ will FULLY grow us up if we, for our part, STICK TO THE PATH HE'S GOT US ON, of growing in love until we're just like him. That's the track we're on now, & we're not children anymore; children wander off the track, easily distracted by anything that looks interesting, but OUR eyes are focussed on one thing & one thing alone, that -*

Ephesians 4:16 - "He is the head, and on him the whole body depends. Bonded and held together by every constituent joint, the whole frame grows through the proper functioning of each part, and builds itself up in love"

✓ *Christ is our head & we are his body. We are, therefore, entirely dependent on him because a body can't accomplish anything without a head. Chop a person's head off & he ceases to function. But a body that has all its various parts working together in total harmony with the brain, works wonderfully. SO DO WE as CHRIST's body, when every member of the church is working together in total harmony with ITS head, Jesus Christ. And Jesus made it clear where he's "headed." He's filling his church with himself, bonding us together in love. It's our job, then, as Christ's body, to follow Christ our Head by BUILDING on that spirit of love he gave us. How? By depending entirely on HIM to lead & guide us, NOT on some "cunning rogue" (14) with HIS twisted ideas of what the church should be doing, instead -*

<p>Now that we're in the church, we all have a clear path to follow - to build on the spirit of love Christ gave us, depending entirely on him to guide us along that path, just as our human bodies depend on our heads to guide us - & to never be distracted off that path.</p>
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CHECKPOINT No.13 - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:

- 1) I understand Christ has given his church a clear path to follow, & we should never allow others to distract us from it.
- 2) I understand what that path is - to build on the Spirit of love Christ gave us so that his entire church grows & matures into everything he is.
- 3) I understand we are utterly DEPENDENT ON HIM to do that growing & maturing in us because he is our Head & we are his body, & a body cannot function properly without a head - so -

This is our purpose now, to follow Christ:

Ephesians 4:17 - "Here then is my word to you, and I urge it on you in the Lord's name: give up living as pagans do with their futile notions. (18) Their minds are closed, they are alienated from the life that is in God, because ignorance prevails among them and their hearts have grown hard as stone. (19) Dead to all feeling, they have abandoned themselves to vice, and there is no indecency that they do not practise. (20) But that is not how you learned Christ"

✓ *When we "learned Christ" - discovered he's our Head & we are his body, & that God's purpose now is to fill the church with everything Christ is as the starting point for filling the entire universe eventually - it's in the hope that WE FIT IN WITH THAT PURPOSE & PUT OUR OLD LIVES BEHIND US. That old life was useless anyway. It wasn't going anywhere. All it did was make us selfish & cold-hearted. We had NO IDEA that life was all about filling the universe with love, BUT WE DO NOW! -*

Ephesians 4:21 - "For were you not told about him, were you not as Christians taught the truth as it is in Jesus? (22) Renouncing your former way of life, you must lay aside the old human nature which, deluded by its desires, is in process of decay: (23) you must be renewed in mind and spirit, (24) and put on the new nature created in God's likeness, which shows itself in the upright and devout life called for by the truth"

✓ *Because of Christ, we can live a totally new life of love, as he gradually instills HIS nature into us. We know from past experience that our OWN HUMAN NATURE WON'T DO THAT FOR US, it's too easily distracted by selfish desires. We need CHRIST's nature for our lives to change, because change they must -*

<p>As Christians we learned the truth about Christ, that he is our head & we are his body, & the purpose of us being part of his body is to be renewed in his mind & spirit. We have the grand opportunity, then, to put our old useless life & selfish human nature completely behind us & live a useful, good life full of love instead.</p>
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CHECKPOINT No.14 - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:

- 1) I understand the truth about human nature - that it's a futile, delusional, decaying, selfish, crude & cold-hearted mess.
- 2) I understand the truth about Christ - that he's shaping us into "God's likeness" by filling us with his nature, instead.
- 3) I understand the truth about my life now - that I must put my old life ruled by human nature behind me & be "renewed in the mind & spirit" of Christ's nature instead - *the RESULT being* -

Obvious & noticeable changes in our lives begin to happen:

Ephesians 4:25 - "Then have done with falsehood and speak the truth to each other, for we belong to one another as parts of one body. (26) If you are angry, do not be led into sin; do not let sunset find you nursing your anger; (27) and give no foothold to the devil. (28) The thief must give up stealing, and work hard with his hands to earn an honest living, so that he may have something to share with the needy. (29) Let no offensive talk pass your lips, only what is good and helpful to the occasion, so that it brings a blessing to those who hear it"

✓ *Our lives begin to change in very real ways, that go RIGHT TO THE ROOTS of those typical, nasty habits of our human nature. How can we, for instance, tell lies about each other or to each other, or hold grudges & refuse to forgive? Isn't that opening up the church to the devil's nature? And how could we ever steal again when Christ's nature in us creates the desire to give, not take? And how could we hurt & offend our fellow Christians when it's Christ's nature to find just the right words for the occasion, to help & encourage? -*

Ephesians 4:30 - "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, for that Spirit is the seal with which you were marked for the day of final liberation. (31) Have done with all spite and bad temper, with rage, insults, and slander, with evil of any kind. (32) Be generous to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you"

✓ *God gave us the Holy Spirit to free us from all the junk in our nature, so it grieves the Spirit to see us being spiteful, moody, hot-tempered & putting our fellow Christians down. Christ wasn't like that to us. He forgave us, so that we can be as generous & soft-hearted as him -*

When the Holy Spirit goes to work on us, dramatic changes happen. In very real, obvious & wonderful ways our nature is replaced by Christ's nature. Out go nasty habits like lying, holding grudges, being spiteful and refusing to forgive, and in come those lovely habits of Jesus Christ like generosity, forgiveness & compassion.

CHECKPOINT No.15 - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:

- 1) I understand the truth about the Holy Spirit - that the Spirit was given to me to change my nature into Christ's nature.
- 2) I understand how that's being done - the Spirit goes right to the roots of those typical, nasty, devilish habits of human nature & frees us from every one of them.
- 3) I understand we can grieve the Spirit - by grimly hanging onto our old attitudes & not taking on Christ's nature instead.
- 4) I understand it's Christ's nature to be forgiving, generous & tender-hearted - he's that way to us, so that's how we are toward each other - *in summary, then* -

BE LIKE CHRIST, that's our goal:

Ephesians 5:1 - "In a word, as God's dear children, you must BE LIKE HIM.

(2) LIVE IN LOVE AS CHRIST LOVED YOU and gave himself up on your behalf, an offering and sacrifice whose fragrance is pleasing to God"

✓ *In simple summary, LIVE AS CHRIST LIVED, always in love & always in service to others, knowing that God LOVED Jesus for being that way -*

Ephesians 5:3 - "Fornication and indecency of any kind, or ruthless greed, must not be so much as mentioned among you, as befits the people of God. (4) No coarse, stupid, or flippant talk: these things are out of place; you should rather be thanking God. (5) For be very sure of this: no one given to fornication or vice, or the greed which makes an idol of gain, has any share in the kingdom of Christ or of God"

✓ *Thanks to God, we CAN now live as Christ lived, so live like God's people, taking NO pleasure anymore in wrong sexual thoughts, ripping others off to make a profit or making stupid, hurtful, sarcastic comments. That kind of junk & those kind of people have no place in God's Kingdom -*

Ephesians 5:6 - "Let no one deceive you with shallow arguments; it is for these things that divine retribution falls on God's rebel subjects. (7) Have nothing to do with them. (8) Though you once were darkness, now as Christians you are light. Prove yourselves at home in the light, (9) for where light is, there is a harvest of goodness, righteousness, and truth"

✓ *Don't let anybody give us excuse to go BACK to what we were before because God's not putting up with that nonsense forever. Instead, be comfortable being Christians, knowing LIGHT creates a HARVEST of goodness -*

<p>We can live the same beautiful way Christ lived, & like sunlight create a harvest of good wherever we go, so don't let anyone drag us back to the useless, shallow, ugly life we lived before.</p>

CHECKPOINT No.16 - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:

- 1) I understand God deeply appreciates us living & loving as Christ lived & loved.
- 2) I understand we live & love like Christ by:
 - a) taking no pleasure anymore in the rotten attitudes of human nature, & by -
 - b) resisting anybody who tries to sneak us back into immorality, greed & hurtful talk, recognizing there's no place in God's Kingdom for such attitudes & God isn't going to tolerate them forever, & by -
 - c) leaving darkness & rebellion against God behind us & becoming comfortable living in the light instead, knowing that light produces a wonderful harvest of good things in its wake - so -

Be a light in this world, knowing the effect it has:

Ephesians 5:10 - "Learn to judge for yourselves what is pleasing to the Lord; (11) take no part in the barren deeds of darkness, but show them up for what they are. (12) It would be shameful even to mention what is done in secret. (13) But everything is shown up by being exposed to the light, and whatever is exposed to the light itself becomes light"

✓ *When we learn & do what pleases God in this world we shine a bright light in the darkness. Our INFLUENCE on others, therefore, can be enormous (verse 9). People see a difference, an alternative. They see themselves as they really are, consumed by the awful attitudes of human nature & because of us wish to change -*

Ephesians 5:14 - "That is why it is said: 'Awake, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine upon you.' (15) Take great care, then, how you behave: act sensibly, not like simpletons. (16) Use the present opportunity to the full, for these are evil days. (17) Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. (18) Do not give way to drunkenness and the ruin that goes with it, but let the Holy Spirit fill you: (19) speak to one another in psalms, hymns and songs; sing and make music from your heart to the Lord; (20) and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ give thanks every day for everything to our God and Father"

✓ *Wake up each day realizing Christ is SHINING his light on us & FILLING us with his Spirit so that people SEE a clear & marvellous difference in us. It's an amazing opportunity he's given us, to understand & do his will in order to bring light to our horribly messed up world. So, thank God every day for it & hit each day with joy, knowing God is changing the whole world - beginning with us!* -

<p>Christ's light shining on us pierces through the darkness, exposing the awful attitudes of human nature so that people see themselves as they really are & desire to change. Realize, therefore, that we can have enormous influence on others, so thank God & hit each day with joy!</p>
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CHECKPOINT No.17 - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:

- 1) I understand we are the only light there is in this ugly, messed-up world.
- 2) I understand Christ's light shining on us creates a clear contrast that people notice & are drawn to.
- 3) I understand people may change because of us, so hit each day with expectation & joy, knowing God meant us to be an influence for good - *in things like* -

Marriage:

Ephesians 5:21 - "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ"

Marriage is a perfect illustration of all that Paul has talked about so far in Ephesians. First of all, Paul talks about God's plan through Christ - to bring the whole universe into the fullness of his love one day (Chapter 1). Then he talks about God's plan through the church - to create this NEW body of human beings never seen before who are at peace with God & each other (Chapters 2 & 3). And then he talks about God's plan through individual Christians - to show the contrast between this world's ugly attitudes & the beautiful attitudes of Christ & God's kingdom (Chapters 4 & 5). Christian marriage fits the bill on all counts! When Christ fills a husband & wife with his love, they become the perfect example of this "NEW" human being Christ is creating. They are deeply respectful ("subject") to each other. They are at peace & in total harmony. They are one. They become shining lights & living proof in a dark world of the beautiful attitudes & wonderful relationships Christ makes possible with both him & each other - demonstrated, for instance, by the relationship a wife has with her husband -

Ephesians 5:22 - "Wives, be subject to your husbands as though in the Lord; (23) for the man is the head of the woman, just as Christ is the head of the church. Christ is indeed the saviour of that body; (24) but just as the church is subject to Christ, so must women be subject to their husbands in everything"

✓ *A wife follows her husband's lead as if he was Christ, to illustrate what the church can look to Christ for. He is our "saviour," & when a wife looks to her husband to be that way to her, she perfectly demonstrates the total trust we can have in CHRIST's leadership to take care of us "in everything," too (4:16) -*

When Christ fills a husband & wife with his love, they become the perfect picture of the peace, oneness, affection & mutual respect for both him & each other that he's bringing to the entire Universe one day. The relationship a wife has with her husband, for instance, pictures the relationship we can all have with Christ, of total trust in his leadership to take care of our every need.

CHECKPOINT No.18 - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:

- 1) I see what Christ has in mind for the whole Universe one day by the love he creates in marriage.
- 2) I see, for instance, that when husband & wife are living together in peace, harmony, mutual respect & deep affection, that's a perfect picture of the love Christ will give us all for each other.
- 3) I can also see that when a wife trusts in her husband's leadership to take care of her every need, she wonderfully demonstrates the relationship we can all have with Christ - of total trust in HIS leadership to take care of us in everything, as well.
- & we learn something from husbands, too -

A husband's love for his wife pictures Christ's love for his church:

Ephesians 5:25 - "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for it, (26) to consecrate and cleanse it by water and word, (27) so that he might present the church to himself all glorious, with no stain or wrinkle or anything of the sort, but holy and without blemish. (28) In the same way men ought to love their wives, as they love their own bodies. In loving his wife a man loves himself. (29) For no one ever hated his own body; on the contrary, he keeps it nourished and warm, and that is how Christ treats the church, (30) because it is his body, of which we are living parts"

✓ *A husband loves his wife as if he was Christ loving his church, to illustrate the kind of love CHRIST has. Christ loves his church so much it's as if she was part of his own body, & when a husband treats his wife that way he perfectly demonstrates the total & complete love CHRIST has for us -*

Ephesians 5:31 - "'This is why (in the words of scripture) a man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' (32) There is hidden here a great truth, which I take to refer to Christ and to the church. (33) But it applies also to each one of you: the husband must love his wife as his very self, and the wife must show reverence for her husband"

✓ *Marriage opens up a great secret: It pictures the marvellous relationship between Christ & his church. Christ loves his church just like a husband loves his wife, & the church follows Christ's lead in everything just like a wife follows & trusts her husband. Husband & wife, therefore, when living their parts well, are a perfect picture of the love CHRIST has for us & the trust we can have IN HIM -*

Marriage perfectly pictures the marvellous relationship between Christ & his church. A husband, for instance, who loves his wife so much it's as if she was part of his own body, becomes the perfect picture of the love CHRIST has for us.
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CHECKPOINT No.19 - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if: I see how the relationship between husband & wife beautifully demonstrates the love & trust between Christ & his church. For instance:

a) When a husband loves his wife like she was part of his own body, he becomes a wonderful demonstration of the complete & total LOVE Christ has for his church, & -

b) When a wife trusts her husband to take care of her every need, she becomes a wonderful demonstration of the complete & total TRUST the church has (or can have) in Christ - & -

ALL our relationships take on deeper meaning now that CHRIST is involved :

Ephesians 6:1 - “Children, obey your parents, for it is only right that you should. (2) ‘Honour your father and your mother’ is the first commandment to carry a promise with it: (3) that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth. (4) Fathers, do not goad your children to resentment, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord”

✓ *Fathers & their children can both demonstrate the wonderful difference CHRIST makes. Children, for instance, follow their parents lead & instructions because they see CHRIST setting it up that way for their benefit, and Dads teach & lead their children according to Christ’s instructions because they know CHRIST’s way works. It keeps their children responsive & happy, not angry & resentful. And what a wonderful picture they BOTH then become of how relationships flourish when CHRIST is involved -*

Ephesians 6:5 - “Slaves, give single-minded obedience to your earthly masters with fear and trembling, as if to Christ. (6) Do it not merely to catch their eye or curry favour with them, but as slaves of Christ do the will of God wholeheartedly. (7) Give cheerful service, as slaves of the Lord rather than of men. (8) You know that whatever good anyone may do, slave or free, will be repaid by the Lord. (9) Masters, treat your slaves in the same spirit: give up using threats, and remember that you both have the same Master in heaven; there is no favouritism with him”

✓ *Respecting one’s employer as if he was Christ makes an employee a great person to work with. He’s cheerful, hard-working & utterly trustworthy, and if his employer doesn’t appreciate it, Christ certainly does. If the employer, however, treats his employees as his equals, because he acknowledges that’s exactly what they are in Christ’s sight, it transforms him into a great person to work for, too -*

Fathers, children, employers & employees can all demonstrate the huge difference Christ makes. How? In their relationships with each other, & <u>how their relationships flourish when Christ is included.</u>
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CHECKPOINT No.20 - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if: I see how it's in our RELATIONSHIPS with each other that we can so effectively demonstrate the difference Christ makes. For instance:

a) Children are so much happier & less resentful when they have a Dad who teaches them & treats them Christ's way, & -

b) Employers & employees create a much more pleasant working environment when they both view each other through Christ's eyes - *but, take note* -

We are up against opposition in high places:

Ephesians 6:10 - "Finally, find your strength in the Lord, in his mighty power. (11) Put on the full armour provided by God, so that you may be able to stand firm against the stratagems of the devil. (12) For our struggle is not against human foes, but against cosmic powers, against the authorities and potentates of this dark age, against the superhuman forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (13) Therefore, take up the whole armour of God; then you will be able to withstand them on the evil day and, after doing your utmost, to stand your ground"

✓ *The devil & his cohorts don't want us demonstrating the difference Christ makes, because we show up how obviously wrong & lacking their devilish ways are. But God has called us to demonstrate the beauty of his way & to stand absolutely firm in doing so, no matter how great the influence of the devil becomes in our world. It's a constant battle against superhuman powers, so bear in mind we'll need strength beyond our own to resist the devil & stand our ground -*

Ephesians 6:14 - "Stand fast, I say. Fasten on the belt of truth; for a breastplate put on integrity; (15) let the shoes on your feet be the gospel of peace, to give you a firm footing; (16) and, with all these, take up the great shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the burning arrows of the evil one. (17) Accept salvation as your helmet, and the sword which the Spirit gives you, the word of God"

✓ *God equips us for battle, with armour & weapons for both defence & attack, so that we can stand our ground. With his strength we can always stick to the truth, always act with honesty & integrity, always be a peacemaker & always trust God & his way as being the best. The devil will dig at us, get us in a rage, tempt us to weaken, but Christ is always with us as our daily Saviour, & we have a powerful weapon for keeping us on the straight & narrow in the study of his word -*

<p>To live & demonstrate God's way is tough because we're up against evil beings doing everything in their power to stop us. God, however, provides us with the power & the means to stand firm at all times.</p>

CHECKPOINT No.21 - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:

1) I understand we're up against a rain of "burning arrows" from the devil & his cohorts, who use every strategy they can think of to stop us demonstrating the beauty of Christ's way compared to theirs.

2) I also understand God provides armour & weapons to fend off the devil's attacks, so that no matter how evil our world gets we continue to be honest, peace-minded, faithful, trusting servants of Jesus Christ, demonstrating for all to see the marvellous difference he & his way make in a human life - so -

Tap into God's power:

Ephesians 6:18 - "Constantly ask God's help in prayer, and pray always in the power of the Spirit. To this end keep watch and persevere, always interceding for God's people. (19) Pray also for me, that I may be granted the right words when I speak, and may boldly and freely make known the hidden purpose of the gospel, (20) for which I am an ambassador - in chains. Pray that I may speak of it boldly, as is my duty"

✓ *Believe, then, that we have Spirit power far greater than the devil's just a prayer away. It's there instantly & constantly to help us defend ourselves against the devil's trickery. We can also go boldly on the attack, too, taking the battle to the devil, knowing God will give us the right words to explain the gospel, the opportunities to express it & the strength to live it. So, don't give up; this is what God called us for, & through us he will do it -*

Ephesians 6:21 - "You will want to know how I am and what I am doing; Tychicus will give you all the news. He is our dear brother and trustworthy helper in the Lord's work. (22) I am sending him to you on purpose to let you have news of us and to put fresh heart into you. (23) Peace be to the community and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (24) God's grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with undying love"

✓ *There'll be plenty of evidence that God is with us, first of all in the peace & love we have for each other in the church, & secondly in the impact the gospel is having through our words & actions on others. This is what "puts fresh heart" into us, that what Paul said Christ would do through his church really is happening. God is bringing us all into his family, first us & then the Universe, & we can see it happening as we become family & God brings others into the family, too -*

<p>We have proof God's power is with us, not only in the peaceful, loving community of Christians we're a part of, but also in how the gospel continues to have its impact in the devil's world. We truly are bringing light into the darkness. God's plan through Christ is happening!</p>

CONCLUSION -

Do I *really* understand the Gospel?

Yes I do, if:

I understand God has a plan:

It's to bring the entire Universe into the family of God, where the loving spirit of Jesus Christ fills everything.

I understand how that plan has been made possible:

It is purely by Christ's sacrifice, not by any effort of our own, that God's plan is being fulfilled. Because of his sacrifice, a new humanity is created, where what separates & divides us comes tumbling down as we realize we're all in the same boat - equally loved by God & we all have equal access to him.

I understand how that plan is unfolding:

It begins with us in the church. We are the first to be transformed by the Spirit from our old selfish, devil-controlled nature into the loving nature of Jesus Christ. The Spirit gives us the same oneness & love for each other that the God family experiences, even among traditional enemies, like the Jews & Gentiles in the early church.

I understand how we demonstrate his plan through our relationships now:

It's through our loving relationships, like marriage, that we demonstrate the difference Christ's nature makes. We shine a bright light in the darkness & a very clear comparison between the devil's world & God's, which in turn act as a powerful influence in drawing people to Christ.

I understand we are up against heavy opposition in high places:

The devil & his cohorts use every strategy they can think of to make us ineffective & weak, but we have Spirit power far greater. We can see that Spirit power at work, not only in the love & peace we experience among ourselves in the church, but also in the gospel continuing to have its impact in both word & deed on others.

I understand we have God's mercy & power with us always:

We are in the heavenly realms with him. We're part of the family already. He's given us an undying love for him. He is our head & we are his body. He has us right there beside him & part of him so that he can love us, guide us & influence us always.