1. I've been debating for a few days whether to call this lesson "contagious" or "how we grow in God's love". Then I got a cold and figured, "OK, God contagious it is". ☺
   a) First, let explain what I mean by "contagious". God wants the love He shows us to be contagious. It should be a natural desire of Christians to want to spread God's love to others. I know it is strange to compare the idea of a spreading disease to us spreading God's love to others, but both can spread fairly quickly and apparently "naturally".
   i) My point is we don't have to try to spread a disease, it just happens because that disease is "air borne". The same principal applies to God's love. If we have that love within us, and are expressing that love, it just seems to naturally spread.

2. The text in this lesson lays out for us why God bothered to save us. It explains God's love for us, and what we are to do with that love and how we grow in that love. The spread of that love is what God desires for us and it is well, contagious.
   a) The text of this lesson reminds us that God gets all the credit for any and all the good that we do in this life. So why does God want all the credit? The short answer is God does not want to share His glory with anyone, including you and me. God shows us His love just because He wants to. Then He wants us to share that love with others.
   i) In this lesson and in the next one I'm going to expand on that idea of how we receive God's love and how do we pass it on to others.
   b) In this lesson, Paul talks about the separation between Jewish People and all non-Jewish people (called Gentiles) over God. Paul's point is that Jesus bridges that gap so God no longer primarily works through the Jewish nation.
   c) The important point is not to understand that historical division between Jews and non-Jews as much as it is to understand that nothing can separate us from the love of God and nothing can separate us from showing God's love to other people. That is what I mean by the term contagious, which hopefully unlike my cold is going to spread in this lesson.
   d) OK, enough on being contagious for God, ☺ let's start the text.

3. Chapter 1, Verse 15: For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints,
   a) In the last lesson, I stated that Verses 3-14 in the original Greek language was all one sentence. It was as if Paul couldn't contain himself and kept on writing without taking a breadth in that whole passage. My point here is that Paul was just getting warmed up.
   i) Verses 15 through Verses 23 are also one long sentence in the original Greek text.
   ii) My point is that Paul got the idea that we as Christians have this wonderful eternal future and He couldn't contain himself as He was trying to explain it to us.
   b) With that said, let us look at Verse 15, the start of this long sentence. Paul is talking about the church in Ephesus and how this church had faith in Jesus and a love for all the saints.
   i) The historical point is that God called a whole bunch of people living in Ephesus to turn to the true God. Now, it is a good number of years since that church was founded and Paul is commending that church for sticking to what they started.
   ii) Paul is then commending the love this church has for other Christians both near them and far from them. If one needs see whether or not somebody is trusting God for our salvation, we can't read their minds and know what they think of God. However, we can watch their behavior and see how they treat other Christian believers. That is what Paul is commending here in this verse.
   a) Caring for other Christians is one sign to others that a person is truly born again. God may know our minds and know what we think, but it is how we act that is the true sign to others that we are committed to God.
c) So what does that mean practically, to love other Christians? In short, it is about caring about the lives of others and putting the needs of others as priority over one's own needs. Remember that Jesus said people would know we are His followers by our love for one another. (See John 13:34.) Therefore as followers of Jesus we need to obey that command to love their fellow Christians.

i) That means caring about other Christians in our church and our community. It means we take the time to pray for others. It means we take the time to help other believers in need. It means we as Christians understand that other believers also share in the same eternal rewards as we do. Since we will be with them for all of eternity, we care about their lives now and that they grow in their trust in Jesus.

ii) The older I get, the more impressed I am with the type of Christian that really has a heart for other believers. I'm more impressed with them than I am with those who just study their bible heavily and never do much with their faith in Jesus.

d) This does lead us back to this verse. Paul's point here is that he heard that the believers in Ephesus have a great love for God and a great love for their fellow believers. I believe those two ideas go "hand in hand". If one has a heart for God, then it just naturally follows that one has a heart for fellow believers. Making the effort to trust in God should naturally cause us to have a heart and care for other Christians. That's the point here and that is where our faith and trust in God becomes "contagious" to others.

4. Verse 16: I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

a) If one studies all of Paul's letters, one notice that his prayer life included a lot of time praying for individuals in all the churches he started.

i) I am convinced the reason Paul was popular as he went from town to town is not because he was great looking or a great speaker, but simply because he had a heart for people. Paul wanted all people not only to believe in Jesus but to learn to trust in Him and grow in their faith of Him.

ii) This verse mentions Paul giving thanks to God the Father for the church in Ephesus. The point is not about knowing what Paul did 2,000 years ago. The point is that God wants all of us to have a heart for other believers and at times put the needs of others as priority over our own needs. It is about praying for others, helping others, caring about their lives and asking how we can be of help and service to others. That is living the Christian life in a "nutshell".

b) Let me comment on this verse another way: Do you have trouble remembering names of people? Are there people that you know by face but still forget their names at times? If you said yes, you are normal. One great way to learn names is to ask people their names, write their names down, and then start praying for them by name. Praying for people by name gets us to learn about their lives and helps us remember their names.

i) Learning about others also gets us to care about others and know about their lives. That is one way God gets us involved in the lives of others by praying for them.

5. Verse 17: I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

a) To explain this, one has to understand the principal of how one grows as a Christian. I believe the minute we are first saved, God gives us all the power we need to grow as believers and to learn more about Him. Obviously we don't know all there is to living the Christian life on day one. So, how do we grow in the "Spirit of wisdom and revelation?"

i) In the last verse, I just commented about praying for others. That ties well to this verse. Here in Verse 17, Paul asks that those who read this letter to the Ephesians receive a "Spirit of wisdom and revelation" for the purpose of knowing God better.

ii) That is, if we care about God, we take the time to learn more about Him.

iii) Every time we stop and think about some aspect of how God is working in our life, we are growing in the way Paul is describing in this verse.
b) One way we grow as Christians is to take the time to think about how God is working in our lives. When we do that, we are also doing what Paul is describing here in Verse 17. In other words, we don't require any special power that God has not already given us. That is the point. We simply need to make the effort to contemplate what God can and is doing in our lives and that is what Paul is trying to teach us here in this verse.

i) As we grow in our relationship with God, it is easier in hindsight to see what He has done and is capable of doing. That is another reason why God desires we spend time with other Christians. It is to help one another realize how God is working in our lives and in the lives of others around us.

6. Verse 18: I pray also 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 the saints,

a) Paul's second big run on sentence, continues here in Verse 18. This verse starts off by mentioning "the eyes of our heart". Obviously, our physical heart does not contain actual eyes, so Paul is not being that literal. The question is, what does Paul mean by that?

i) When the bible speaks of our hearts, it is talking about our human nature. The bible never says that God fixes our old hearts, but only that He gives us a new one. (See Ezekiel 36:26 as an example). The point being is that our human nature is corrupted by sin and our human nature without God's help is beyond repair.

ii) When we become born-again, in effect, God performs heart replacement surgery on us. That doesn't mean we no longer sin as most of us are painfully aware of. What it means is that because God "takes up residence inside of us", we are given the ability to do God's will because of who is inside of us (God).

iii) Here is another way to grasp this concept: Before we were saved, did we care about pleasing God? Not really. Now that we are saved, we are interested in pleasing God with our lives. When we are born again, it is God Himself who puts in us that desire to be pleasing to Him. That is the point of this verse.

b) OK, now that we understand that "eyes of our heart" is a colorful way of saying that God has taken up residence inside of us, what does that mean? The rest of Verse 18 gives us the answer. It says that it is God's desire that we know what is the "hope to which he has called us and the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints". Let me explain:

i) The first part says that it is Paul's desire (and God's desire) that we understand the hope to which we have been saved. Yes, that means we are to grasp the idea that God has called us into eternal salvation with Him (before we are born) and there is nothing we can do to earn that salvation, but just accept it as true.

ii) As important as that concept is, that is just the beginning. Growing in God is about taking the time to think about what God can and will do for our lives. It is about the realization that God wants to take over our lives and guide us to what He desires for us. Figuring out what God wants starts by seeking Him through prayer and His word. If we follow what God is teaching us then we are doing what He desires for our lives whether we realize it or not.

iii) We as Christians need to stop and contemplate every now and then that God is working in our lives. If you are taking the time to read this study, that is one way you are doing just that. Every time we stop to read our bible and think about how that is impacting our lives, we are fulfilling this verse because we then learning what God can and does do through the lives of people.

c) Does this mean I have to spend lots of time every day thinking about what God can and will do for my life? Of course not. At the same time, I find it does help us to grow as a Christian if we in effect stop every now and then and think about what God has been doing in our lives and what He is capable of doing. Thinking about such things not only gets our focus on Him, but it reminds us of how God is actually working in our lives.
d) Let me comment a little more on the phrase "riches of his glorious inheritance":

i) Yes this is about understanding our future is in heaven, but that is only the beginning. As I like to point out every now and then, the bible actually says very little about what life is like in heaven. It is as if God is saying to us, "You just focus on what you (us) are going to do in this life and you let Me (God) worry about what I have planned for you (us) in the next life."

ii) So if the bible does not say a lot about what heaven is like, how should we think about the "riches of his glorious inheritance"? What does that mean practically?

a) This comes back to the idea that God gives us all we need in this life the first moment we accept Jesus. At the same time, in order to grow as a believer, we need to spend time drawing closer to God through prayer, study and through time with other believers.

iii) We as Christians have the power and ability to make a difference for God in our lives. We don't do that by "trying harder", we do that by trusting in God to work through us. That is when we become "contagious" for God.

e) OK John, how does God lead us and how do I know when He is leading me?

i) Part of my daily prayer is to ask God to help me make a difference for Him today. If we are willing to submit to His will, it is amazing the ways God guides our lives.

ii) Whatever project God calls us to do, it will become obvious to us through time. We don't have to force our way to do His will, but just let Him lead us.

iii) I have met wonderful Christians involved in all sorts of interesting ministries. I suspect all of them can say in hindsight that it was God leading them to do that particular "work". I doubt any of them could tell us when they started, that God desired some specific task. Being used by God is usually about "stepping out in faith" and the letting the obvious needs guide us as to what to do next.

iv) There is an illustration I like to use every now and then that fits well here. There was a young Christian man who said that he struggled in his relationship with God and he felt like he was constantly trying to push a car up a hill. Then it occurred to him that "the car I am pushing has a motor." One does not have to "push a car" to live the Christian life, just get in the car and let God drive it. That is living the Christian life: Not trying to force our way to accomplish this goal or that goal, but just trusting God to lead us as He desires.

f) OK I have just spent two pages describing this verse and I admit it is still confusing. My summary point is that God wants and desires to guide our lives. We do that by trusting Him and in effect "following His lead" as opposed to trying to do things on our power.

g) With that said, I can break down and actually move on to Verse 19.

7. Verse 19: and 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,

a) The point here is that God gives us all the power we need to accomplish His will.

b) The example Paul gives to show God's power is by the fact He raised Jesus from the dead. The point is not just that Jesus was raised from the dead as much as it is that we contemplate how much power God has at His disposal.

i) Remember that we are describing what God is capable of doing. If we believe in a God that can do anything and everything, then the act of raising people from the dead is something we should be able to comprehend and accept as a fact.

The underlying point is that if God has the power to raise Jesus from the dead, then God also has the power to work in our lives to make a difference for Him. For us to be used by God, first we accept His desire for us to be used by Him. In other words, we must tell God that we trust in His desire for our lives and let it be our will that we let go of "our will" and trust in what He desires for us.
d) Know that God likes to work based on where we are "at" with Him. God never gives us more than we can handle at any given moment. When we first get saved, God never says, "Here are all the things that are going to happen to you for the rest of your life here on earth". God knows all things but He does not reveal all things to us about our lives, because truthfully we can't handle all that information.

e) What God does do, is give us the power to do His will. The point is that if God is calling you or me to some specific task or be a part of some specific ministry, then we have to trust that God will give us the power to accomplish that task.

i) The number one reason why people don't accomplish goals they desire, is because they are afraid they don't have the ability or power to accomplish that goal. If it is God's goal for us to accomplish a specific task, then we have to accept the idea that He will supply us with all the power and "whatever" we need to accomplish that task. That "power" is the engine motor example I used a page back in this lesson.

ii) That is also Paul's point. If God has the ability or power to raise Jesus from the dead, then that same God has the power to accomplish what is His desire for our lives. We have no reason to fear our future, because God already knows our future and He wants to guide us down that path that He desires for our lives.

f) OK, I just reread these verses, and realized that I explained them to the point we could understand them and apply them to our lives. That is always the goal of any good bible study, to teach us how to apply the text to our lives.

8. Verse 21: 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.

a) While I was talking about you and me in that last verse, Paul is still focusing on God Himself and the fact that Jesus has all power and authority in this life and the next one.

i) That means that the God we believe in can and does lead us down the path He desires for our lives, both in this life and in the one to come.

ii) I find it is much easier to grasp the idea of Jesus sitting in heaven having all power and every possible title of leadership, because we accept the idea of Jesus as God. The hard part isn't thinking about Jesus as having power, the hard part is realizing that God takes that power and uses it through us to make a difference for Him.

iii) The point is not that God has all of this power. The point is that God directs this power through people like you and me to make a difference for Him.

b) So John, is this pep talk you are given trying to get us all excited about working for God? Not exactly. I'm not trying to say that we have the ability to do everything. I am saying that by God working through us, we have the ability to do what is God's desire for us.

i) Suppose we are in a big mess at the present moment and don't know how we are going to get through our situations. That is when we remind ourselves that the God who is all-powerful is in charge of our lives is more than capable of getting us through whatever we are dealing with. I find that when we can't see a solution to our problems that is when God does His best work.

ii) Going back to my illustration of the young man pushing car up a hill, the problem is that man was not trusting in that car engine to work. That engine is a picture of God working in our lives. The point is that God desires to work through our lives at any time to get what He desires to be accomplished. All we have to do is trust in that engine (i.e., God's power to work through us) to work.

c) This does lead me back to the verse. The point is much more than believing Jesus is in heaven "directing traffic" over our lives. It is about trusting that God has and does give us the ability to accomplish whatever is His desire for our lives. We don't have to worry about our future because God already knows how long we will live and what we will accomplish in our lives. Our job is simply to seek Him through our prayer life and through our studies in His word and trust that "His engine" is working in our lives.
9. Verse 22: 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.

a) Well, we made it to the end of Paul's second great run on sentence in Ephesians. Remember that Verses 15-23 are all one continuous thought in the original Greek.

b) The point here is that God the Father placed Jesus to be in charge of all things. Whenever we wonder, "How can God do all of that at the same time?" That is when our picture of God is too small. One of mistakes all Christians make at times is to underestimate what God is capable of doing at any one time in our world and in our own lives.

i) There are times when I wonder how can God hear billions of prayers at once and how can God work in multitudes of lives all that same time? That is when I remind myself that God is outside of time as we know it, and in that sense God has "all the time in the world" to accomplish what He desires. It is not my job to understand that, just to accept it as true.

ii) As I like to say, consider the alternative: Would we rather go through life thinking everything is just a random accident or would we rather go through life realizing that there is a God who is in control of all things? Then remember the proof that the bible came from outside of time as we know it, is that the bible is full of fulfilled predictions that could only come have come true if it were written from outside of time to begin with. That reassures me that the God I worship is real.

c) That in effect, is the point of this verse, that God is real, He is in charge of the world and He is in charge of our lives if we are willing at any moment to submit our lives to Him.

10. Chapter 2, Verse 1: As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in 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.

a) This is a good time to remind all of us that the chapter breaks were added many centuries after the text was written and was not part of the original text.

b) These verses remind us that before we were saved, we were "dead in our sins". That means that even though God knew we were saved before time began, we did not realize or accept that fact about our lives until after we have committed our lives to Him.

i) We are seeing that "double sided coin" where from God's perspective we were always saved, as He knows all things and He cannot learn.

ii) From our perspective, we were not saved until we made that commitment to Him.

iii) That is why I gave a little speech in the last lesson why it is necessary to know that God is outside of time as we know it. At the same time we are "stuck in time" in that we make decisions during our specific given time on earth.

c) There are some who read this lesson who have committed their lives to God as children and cannot remember a time where they were not "dead in their sins". For the rest of us and the majority of us, we have made that commitment at some point in our lives where we have realized how we are living is not pleasing to God.

i) As believers, there are always times where we look at some specific aspect of our lives and realize that "this" specific area of our life is not pleasing to God. (Whatever "this" is for you or me.) The easy part is to recognize sin in our lives. The challenge is to turn from it. If it were easy to turn from sin, we would have done so a long time ago. Growing as a believer is includes the idea of trusting God to change us in ways that are pleasing to Him.

a) In other words, even the concept of turning from our sin is up to God working through us and not trying to do it on our own strength.

ii) This gets me back to the idea of understanding the power of God and how we can use that power in our lives. I don't think this verse is just talking about salvation. It is also talking about us growing in God, by learning to trust Him more and more with different aspects of our lives. That is the type of "growth" God desires of us.
d) I want to comment on the phrase "ruler of the kingdom of the air". That is a term that is used for Satan himself. The "kingdom of the air" refers to our world without any trust in God by nonbelievers. It is a way of saying the king of those who don't trust in God is Satan himself whether people want to accept that fact or not.

i) So why use the expression "kingdom of the air"? Why not just say "Satan's world" to describe our world? Why is phrased that particular way? Glad you asked. 😊

a) I suspect one reason Paul picked that phrase is that it shows the ultimate futility of worshipping anything but God. It is kind of like the idea of trying to grasp air in one's hand. The point is, it is a waste of time. To be part of the "kingdom if the air" is in fact to call it an empty kingdom.

ii) I learned something new about that term "kingdom of the air": In Revelation 16:17, God ends the destruction portion of that book by a final angel pouring out his bowl into the air. It never occurred to me until now that this act in Revelation could be talking about the destruction of Satan's rule over the world. (It is just a theory that fits these facts, and should only be taken as such.)

e) The final phrase of Verse 2 says, "the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient." That simply means that the Holy Spirit is working inside of people who at one time in their lives were disobedient to God.

i) One of the great concepts that will be taught in this second chapter is that every thing we do for God is because God Himself is working in us. The point is we can't take credit for anything, even our faith itself is God's "doing".

11. Verse 3: All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

a) One of the main points Paul makes in this second chapter is that without God, we are no better than nonbelievers in any way, shape or form. As the bumper sticker says, we are not superior, just forgiven. The only difference is we accept Jesus' payment for our sins.

i) God created people with a need to worship Him. When one ignores the true God, one fulfills that worship need with something else. It is amazing to watch how people fulfill God's need to worship Him with other things. One way we can be a witness to others is to learn about what they are "into" and then point out how they are going down the wrong path in life. If one discovers where a person spends their free time and spare earnings, one will find what is it they worship.

b) Getting back to the verse, the point is all humans crave different things. God understands that. The Christian is the person who then takes the things that he or she likes (e.g., hobbies) and then says in effect, OK God, I belong to You. Let's talk about "this" aspect of my life that I enjoy doing. How can I use that "thing" for Your kingdom?

i) There is a classical Christian expression that goes, "God does not want to be #1 on a list of 10, God wants to be #1 on a list of 1". That means that God wants to be in charge of every (big aspect of every) aspect of our lives. That doesn't mean we as Christians cannot enjoy other things. It just means that God wants to be part of those other things. If one has a favorite hobby or interest, pray about those things and ask God, "Is this something You want me to do about "x" and is there any change to that hobby or interest You want me to make?"

a) It never ceases to amaze me that when I turn a specific issue or something I enjoy over to God, and let Him work on that part of my life, how much better and even joyful that aspect becomes when He is involved with it.

b) Meanwhile, Paul is still reminding us that before we were saved, we were lead by whatever was our interest at any given moment in time. The lesson to us as believers isn't just to remind us how we once were, but to see areas of our lives that we should still turn over to God so He can be "#1 on a list of 1" in our lives.
12. Verse 4: But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, \(^5\) made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved.

a) The point of this verse and this section of scripture is that we were "dead" towards God in the sense that before we gave our lives to Jesus, we were not saved. The idea of "rich with mercy" is that He called us to salvation (from our perspective) while we were still sinners.

b) Remember that God's standards for salvation is perfection. If we are going to spend eternity with a perfect God, then we have to be perfect ourselves. God laid out in the Old Testament law what is His standard for perfection.

i) There is an old Christian joke that says there are two ways to get into heaven: One way is to never sin once in one's life and then we can tell Jesus to move over. ☺ The other way is to ask a perfect God to perfectly forgive us of our sins. Then, from God's eternal perspective He can and does see us as eternally forgiven.

ii) My point as it relates to this verse is that every aspect of our salvation and faith in God is due to His grace. We were not saved because we realized one day that we needed God in our lives. It was God Himself who put that desire within us to seek Him in the first place. The point is also that we have grown in our relationship with God only by Him working through our lives.

c) So if we don't credit for anything, what does that mean? It means we can't look at our lives as being something special as if God picked us because we were "something special".

i) It means on those tough days when we don't feel grateful for anything, we can always pause, realize that God has done everything to draw us to Him and He has done everything that is eternally good in our lives and give Him the credit for it.

d) One can take that concept one step further. We can do anything God wants us to do not because we have the ability to do such things, but because God wants to work in our lives to make a difference for Him. Don't let anyone ever tell you that you can't do "this or that" for God. If God put a desire in our heart to do something for Him, never let people (no matter who they are) say you cannot do that task (assuming it is God's will).

i) Further, anything God calls us to do, He not only gives us the ability to do it, but He provides the resources to do it as well. That is another way you can tell if "something" is of God or not. If the resources become available for us to complete that task, then we can tell that God is leading us down that specific path in life.

ii) Meanwhile, I left Paul discussing our salvation. ☺

13. Verse 6: And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, \(^7\) in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

a) The first thing to notice about Verse 6 is that it is written in "past tense". It says that God raised us up (i.e., He has done this) with Christ and seated us (past tense) with Him.

b) What this verse is saying is that it has already been decided that as believers in Jesus, we will be seated with Him. Ok, assuming there are millions or billions of true believers, how do we all sit with Jesus?

i) Personally, I've never had a problem with that. I believe that in heaven we exist in more than three dimensions (i.e., height, width and length), in that we will all be individuals but somehow we also can occupy the same space at the same time.

ii) The key point is that there is a heaven, and in that heaven God the Father is somehow sitting there, and God the Son is seated next to Him. We as Christians get the privilege of sitting next to God as well.

iii) This gives us another reason to show gratitude to God. If we can't think of another reason to praise God, then at the least we can thank Him for this future, wonderful destiny that we get as believers in Him in heaven. Being grateful makes us joyful.

a) People want to be around other happy people and if we have a grateful attitude, that is an attraction to others around us.
iv) The next thing to consider is if this wonderful future is a "done deal", why do we worry about things in this lifetime? When life is at its worst, we should remind oneself that despite everything that is happening, we are saved and we have this wonderful eternal destiny being close to God the Father and God the Son.

v) A God that has this wonderful plan for our eternal future is also the same God who is watching over every aspect of our lives here and now. Yes we still have to go through this life and yes we should live our lives for God's glory, but it also a matter of trusting that He is watching us and knows the outcome of all things.

c) This leads me to Verse 7. This is the one verse that is difficult to comment on because the details are not given. The verse says in effect is the purpose of God saving us is so that in the future (after all believers are in heaven) He can show us how much love He has for us.

i) Do I know what we do all day in heaven? No idea. All I do know is that God who loves me unconditionally and can't love me anymore than He does now, wants to spend eternity with me wants to show me how much He loves me (us).

ii) I suspect heaven won't ever be boring. Whatever God has planned for us, will keep us eternally active and sharing with that love for all of eternity.

iii) So if God does not give us the details of what He has planned for us in the next life, why tell us that now? For starters, it is to remind us of just how much God loves us. The other idea is for us not to worry about our present life because a God that loves us that much is also going to watch over us now. The realization of that fact is what our growth in His love is all about.

14. Verse 8: For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 

a) These two verses are essentially saying that all (notice the all) good things that we do for God is 100% based on Him working through our lives. Even the faith we have in Him comes from God Himself. The point is eternally, we don’t get credit for anything.

i) When we get to heaven, we can't brag about our faith in Him, because it was God Himself who gave us that faith to begin with.

ii) When we get to heaven, we can't brag about all the good things we have done, because it is God Himself who did all of those things through us.

b) So if we don’t get credit for anything, why "work for God" in this lifetime?

i) For starters, it is what He calls us to do as believers.

ii) Next, it is for us to appreciate God "all the more" for how He works in our lives. God created us with the need to love. That includes the idea of loving God back and loving others as well. We still do things for God because it is God Himself that put that desire in us. While we show gratitude to God for what He is doing in our lives, at the same time He does expect us to fulfill what He called us to do.

iii) Yes I do believe there are rewards in heaven for the good that we do. However, if God gets all the credit, I believe we show that love back to Him in effect by giving Him back those rewards. In Revelation 4:4 and 4:10, there is a picture of 24 elders in heaven receiving crowns for their good works, and then they give those crowns back to God. I believe that is a picture of us. We as believers are receiving our rewards (again, called crowns in Revelation) and then us giving those rewards back to God as we realize it was God who worked through us to do those works.

iv) Bottom line: I believe God is not impressed with people who just say, "I trust in God" and never do anything about that statement. Proving we believe in God is when our actions follow our words. Yes God gets the credit, but it is our trust in God's ability to work through us that gets us to work for Him in the first place. That is what Verse 10 states as well as this paragraph.
Verse 11: Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)-- 12 remember 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. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

a) To explain these verses, I need to explain a little about life in 1st Century Israel. At that time, many religious Jewish people believed that the only way to be saved was to be Jewish. Many Jews believed that the purpose of non-Jews (again called Gentiles) was to "fuel the fire of hell". Other Jews believed that some good gentiles could be saved, but they could never have the eternal status of a Jewish believer.
   i) The point is there was a perceived "class difference" between Jews and non-Jews.
   ii) Belief in Jesus took away that separation between Jewish belief in God and any and all gentiles that believed in God.

b) With that little speech out of my system, let me tell us how these verses are relevant to us.
   i) First let me quote what Paul wrote in Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (NIV). I am quoting that verse from Galatians as that is the same principal that Paul is teaching here in Ephesians.
   ii) The point is, among those who believe in Jesus, there is no separation, by race, religious background, skin color or even sex. We are all "one" in Jesus.
   iii) Let me explain this principal another way: Look around your church. You may have nothing in common with people in that church except our trust in Jesus. We are going to spend eternity with those in our church, so we may as well get used to those people as we will spend forever with them.
      a) Stop and consider people from different races or backgrounds. We will spend eternity getting close to them as well. I have come to accept the idea that if I don't have a love for people of other races, backgrounds or anything else, then I don't have God's love flowing through me. Having a heart for God's people is includes the idea about loving people of completely different backgrounds than my own.

c) Getting back to the verses, they are saying that gentiles at one time were not permitted to share in the blessings of God unless one became a Jewish. Now, through our faith in Jesus, that requirement is no longer needed. So does that mean the Old Testament is not relevant to our lives?
   i) I have to be careful how I answer that question. As Christians, Jesus has paid our price for our sins, so we are not under the requirements of the Old Testament laws. There is no law in the Old Testament that we are required to obey in order to be saved. For example, I believe Christians should be "givers" but at the same time we are not required to "tithe" (give 10% of our earnings) as that principal is never given to Christians in the New Testament.
   ii) Of course, there are lots of things we can learn from the Old Testament, which is why I enjoy teaching it verse by verse. Just because we are not "under the law" does not mean we can't learn what God desires of us as believers.
   iii) The big difference for Christians is between the words "requires" and "desires": Christians are not required to live under Jewish laws and customs. At the same time, God desires that we love Him and respond to His love. Because of that desire to love God, we just should want to please Him and the whole bible is full of stories and examples of how to, or not to please God with our lives. The New Testament is our guide on how we are to be obedient to Him.
d) This actually leads me back to my lesson theme about growing in our trust in God's grace.
   i) We may realize that the good we do is 100% God working through us, but it up to us to actually do that work. The Christian life is about moving "forward" and trusting that God is working through us. That includes being loving to people we normally may not care for. It is about putting the needs of others as priority over our own needs. It is about asking others how we can be of help to them or praying for them. It is about getting involved in God's plan for salvation.
   ii) If one is not sure what He wants of you, start by just doing something and then letting Him lead you and me down the path that He desires for our lives.

16. Verse 14: For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.
   a) Paul is continuing to use the example of "Jews versus Gentiles" to show how God has taken what was two separate "entities" and united them as believers in Jesus. Paul used the biggest division he could imagine in order to explain the fact that Jesus death and resurrection fulfilled all of the Old Testament requirements for salvation.
      i) Paul's point is that in 1st Century Israel, there could not be any peace between Jews and Gentiles as Jews believed salvation only came through their traditions.
      ii) Even today, the Middle East will never have peace until Jesus returns to rule over that land and the rest of the world.
   b) This actually leads me back to my quote of Galatians 3:28. The point for you and me is that all Christians who trust in Jesus have full "standing" before Him, regardless of one's race, background, sex or history prior to being saved.
   c) The relatively easy part is to look at some other group of people and think, "All those people have to do to get along is unite under our common trust in Jesus ". That hard part is getting along with that person we know is saved, but they get on our nerves.
      i) God wants us to love the "unlovable". It is about seeing the people we don't normally care for and letting the love of God work through us to show love to them despite how they might treat us.
      ii) Let me state the obvious: If someone is trying to physically hurt us, God does not expect us to "sit there and take it", so we should escape if we can. I'm not talking about those types of situations. I'm talking about people who we struggle to get along with who we know are believers.
      iii) The easy part is showing love to those who love us. The hard part is depending upon God's strength is to show love to those to those we may not normally care about. It is about having God's love for all believers including ones that we would probably not help, if it were not for God's love working through us. That too, is a great example of growing in our faith and growing in our trust in God. When we get to a point where we can show love to people who haven't shown any love to us, is a sign that one is trusting in Jesus for all aspects of our lives.

17. Verse 17: He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.
   a) The "He" at the start of this verse is Jesus. The point is God is interested in reaching all people through the Gospel message. Within a century of the cross, the message of Jesus was being spread on three continents. The fact that we can have peace with the God of the Universe was a unique message to that world at that time. It is still amazing to think about the rapid growth of Christianity from its obscure beginning to being a dominant religion all over the world in a relatively short time span.
b) Notice that all three members of the "trinity" are mentioned in this one verse. The point is we need all three in our lives in order to have that peace with God. Later in the book of Ephesians Paul expands on the idea of how the "trinity" works inside of us, so I'll save that thought for a future lesson.

18. Verse 19: Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

a) One has to understand how difficult it was for somebody living many miles away from Israel to think that they could be united with the God's of the Israelites for eternity.
   i) If you were living in Ephesus at this time, you would believe there are many gods and that gods were local deities. Now here comes Paul preaching that there is only one God based on the God of the nation of Israel and that this God rules over the whole world. By believing in the Son of God, we can have peace with all people, especially those who trust in that God.

b) You and I as Christians may take for granted the fact that He exists and rules over the world. That single God concept was very foreign to those cultures that Paul preached in. This is why Paul preaches so hard to explain that there is no division between Jews and Gentiles and that we can all have peace through our trust in God.

19. OK John, I already believe that one God that rules over the universe and I believe that Jesus is God and Jesus died for my sins. If that is the case, what am I to take away from this lesson?

a) As I have been stating through this lesson, it is about our growth and our trust in God. Yes God gets all the credit for our faith and our good works for Him, but at the same time God wants us to go out and do make a difference for Him. For example, Christians should show love to people we would not normally care for or even like. It is about doing things to make a difference for people. That shows others the love of God is "contagious". (There's that word again.) The way we share Jesus with others is that they see the love that we have for other believers and others would naturally want to share in that love. As I have been saying through this lesson, that love we have for God and that love for that God put in is for other people is contagious. God calls on us to make a difference for others so that the love He has for us can also be shared with other people as well.

b) God does not love us any less if God also loves other people. The question for us is, "What are we doing with that love God has for us? Are we sharing that love with others? Are we living a life to make a difference for God? Are we letting the love of God flow through us to make a difference for Him in our lives?" Those are the great questions and answers that God desires of us. With that said, let us close in prayer for these things.

20. Father, help us to understand the great love You have for us and grow in that love. Help us to make a difference for You in this world. Help us to grow in the grace that You have shown to us and share that grace and love with the world around us. We especially need help with people who we have difficulty with. Guide us and lead us to see others as "needing You" and not people who are problems in our lives. Help us in every way to make a difference for You in our lives. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.