

RAY C. STEDMAN

# Adventuring Through the Bible

A Comprehensive Guide to the Entire Bible

*New Enhanced Edition*



## *Adventuring Through the Bible*

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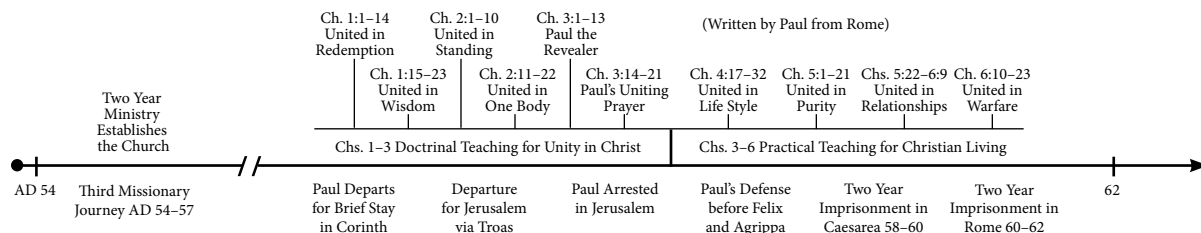
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*The Calling of the Saints*

The epistle to the Ephesians is, in many ways, the crowning glory of the New Testament. It would probably surprise you, however, to learn that this letter probably shouldn't be called "Ephesians." The fact is, we don't really know to whom it was written. The Christians at Ephesus were certainly among the recipients of this letter, but undoubtedly there were others.

In many of the original Greek manuscripts, there is actually a blank where the King James Version and the New International Version insert the words "at Ephesus." That is why the Revised Standard Version does not say, "To the saints at Ephesus," but simply, "To the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus."

In Colossians 4:16, Paul refers to a letter he wrote to the Laodiceans. Since our Bible does not include an epistle to the Laodiceans, many have assumed that this Laodicean letter was lost. Many other Bible scholars, however, feel that the letter to the Laodiceans is actually this very letter, the epistle to the Ephesians.

Ephesus is located not far from Laodicea in Asia Minor (modern Turkey),

and it is possible that Ephesus and Laodicea were two among several cities in the region that this letter was addressed to. This explanation may account for what would otherwise seem to be a lost letter from the apostle Paul to the Laodiceans.

### The Outline of Ephesians

The theme of this epistle is a grand and exalted one, and Paul sets it forth in a way that is unique to this letter among all his letters in the New Testament. It is the theme of the nature of the true church, the body of Christ.

### CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

The goal of this chapter is to gain an overview of Paul's letter to the Ephesians—a letter that pulls back the curtain of reality and shows us the wonders and terrors of what Scripture calls "the heavenly realms." This is the realm of spiritual warfare, in which we carry on our struggle against the rulers, authorities, and powers of this fallen world. Paul's teaching in Ephesians is immensely practical, because the better we understand who we are as God's saints, the more effective we will be as we engage the battle, clad in the full armor of God, wielding the sword of the Spirit. The message of Ephesians is that we are engaged in a cosmic war—and we are on the winning side.

LEFT: Caesarea by the Sea

# THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

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## OUR POSITION AS CHRISTIANS (EPHESIANS 1–3)

INTRODUCTION: WE ARE REDEEMED BY THE SON, SEALED BY THE SPIRIT 1

OUR POSITION BEFORE GOD: ONCE DEAD, NOW ALIVE IN CHRIST 2:1–10

OUR POSITION IN THE CHURCH: JEWS AND GENTILES RECONCILED 2:11–22

THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH REVEALED 3

## OUR LIFESTYLE AS CHRISTIANS (EPHESIANS 4–6)

UNITY IN THE CHURCH 4:1–6

ONE CHURCH, MANY SPIRITUAL GIFTS 4:7–16

PUT OFF THE OLD SELF, PUT ON THE NEW 4:17–29

DO NOT GRIEVE THE HOLY SPIRIT, BUT BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT 4:30–5:21

CHRISTIAN SUBMISSION: HUSBANDS AND WIVES, CHILDREN TO PARENTS 5:22–6:4

SERVICE IN THE WORKPLACE 6:5–9

SPIRITUAL WARFARE: THE ARMOR OF GOD, PRAYING FOR BOLDNESS 6:10–20

CONCLUSION 6:21–24



## You in Christ

As we discussed in chapter 54, “Romans through Philemon: Letters to the Church,” the first four letters of the New Testament—Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians—develop the theme “Christ in you,” teaching what the indwelling life of Christ accomplishes in us. Now, beginning with Ephesians, the overarching theme of Paul’s epistles change from “Christ in you” to “you in Christ.” In Ephesians through Philemon, we discover what it means for us to be in Christ and to share the body life of the church, the body of Christ. Thus, the great theme of this letter concerns the believer in Christ and the believer’s relationship to fellow members of the body.

After the salutation in the first two verses of Ephesians, Paul sets the tone for his epistle:

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

It is easy to misunderstand the phrase “the heavenly realms,” which appears several times in this letter. If you interpret this only as a reference to heaven after we die, you’ll miss the main thrust of Paul’s message in



Ephesians. While this phrase does include the fact that we are going to heaven someday, it speaks primarily about the life we are to live right now, here on earth. The heavenly realms are not off in some distant corner of space or on some planet or star. They are simply the realms of invisible reality in which the Christian lives right now, in contact with God and in conflict with the satanic realms in which we are daily engaged.

The heavenly realms are the seat of Christ’s authority and power, as Paul explains in chapter 2:

*And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus (2:6).*

But the heavenly realms also contain the headquarters of the principalities and powers of evil. Paul describes the nature of our conflict with those powers in chapter 6:

*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (6:12).*

So when Paul talks about the heavenly realms, he is not talking about heaven, but about an invisible and very real realm here on earth and throughout the universe. He is talking about a spiritual kingdom that surrounds us and constantly influences and affects us, for good—and for evil.

In this realm, where every one of us lives, the apostle declares that God has already blessed us with every spiritual blessing. That is, He has given us all it takes to live in our present circumstances and relationships. Peter says the same thing in his second letter:

*His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness (2 Peter 1:3).*

This means that when you receive Jesus Christ as Lord, you receive all that God intends to give you. Isn't that remarkable? The weakest believers hold in their hands all that has ever been possessed by the mightiest saints of God. We already have everything, because we have Christ, and in Him is every spiritual blessing and all that pertains to life and godliness.

You and I have what it takes to live life as God intended. When we fail, it's not because we lack anything. It's because *we are not taking hold of and fully using what is already ours.*

## **You Are the Church**

Most of us have a tendency to think of the

church as a place we attend or an organization that is separate from us. But Paul, in this powerful letter to the Ephesians, wants us to understand that we are the church and the church is us.

Every once in a while, when I was in the pastorate, someone would come to me and say, "The church ought to do such-and-such." And I would reply, "Well, you are the church. Why don't you go ahead and do it?" The person would always look at me with a bit of astonishment—then say, "Okay, I will!"

When someone says, "The church ought to be more friendly," I say, "All right, you and I are the church—let's be more friendly." When someone says, "The church needs to do more to reach out to the community," I say, "All right, you and I are the church—let's think of some things we can do to have a more effective ministry in the community."

That thought is always a breakthrough, a revelation—and it changes the way people live their lives as members of the body of Christ. The church is people. Every believer is a member of the body of Christ, the church.

As we go through this letter, I will use the word "church" interchangeably with the word "Christian," because every believer is a microcosm of the whole church. If we understand that God lives within the church, then we must acknowledge that He also lives within each believer. So as we examine Ephesians, we should realize that Paul is not speaking to the church in an institutional sense. He is speaking to each one of us as individual believers.

## **The Church Is the Body**

In Ephesians, Paul uses six metaphors to

explain the nature of the church, the nature of the Christian, in relationship to Jesus Christ. In the first of these metaphors, he refers to the church as a body:

*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 (1:22–23).*

The first chapter of Ephesians is devoted to the wonder and amazement that we as ordinary, flawed, sin-drenched human beings should be called by God, in a most amazing way, to become members of His body. The apostle Paul never got over his amazement that he, a bowlegged, bald-headed, half-blind former persecutor of the church, should become a member of the Lord's own body. He seemed continually astonished by the fact that God had called him before the foundation of the earth, and had blessed and equipped him with everything he needed to serve God.

What is the purpose of the body? Paul says that the body of Christ is to be “the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.” Do you think of yourself that way? Do you dare to think of yourself the way God thinks of you—as a body to be filled with the fullness of God Himself? This is a realization that should transform our lives.

A human body is an expression of the head; when the body performs as it is designed to, it moves, acts, works, and behaves as the head directs. In the same way, the body of Christ is an expression of Christ the Head; when the church (and individual believers) function as they were designed to, they move, act, work, and behave as Christ the Head directs. Every

## WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

The Church Is the Body  
The Church Is a Temple  
The Church Is a Mystery  
The Church Is a New Self  
The Church Is a Bride  
The Church Is a Soldier

body is designed to express and perform the desires of its head.

Now, it is possible for a body to respond to a stimulus that does not come from the head. For example, if your doctor taps your knee in the right place with a hammer, your leg will kick outward without your head willing it to do so. I sometimes wonder if much of the activity of the church (and the busy-ness of Christians) isn't a lot like that—an involuntary reflex action in which the body acts on its own without direction from the Head.

### The Church Is a Temple

Next, Paul uses the metaphor of a temple to describe the nature of the church:

*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 (2:21–22).*

When all the worthless products of human endeavor have crumbled to dust, when all the institutions and organizations we have built have been long forgotten, the temple that God is now building—His church—will be the



central focus of attention through all eternity. That is what this passage implies.

We are God's building blocks. He is shaping us, edging us, fitting us together, placing us in His design, using us in His plan, positioning us in His temple in places where we can be most effective for His purpose. We are His temple, His house, His dwelling place. Let's make ourselves a welcoming temple where God can enter and say, "This is my home. This is where I am pleased to dwell."

### **The Church Is a Mystery**

Ephesians 3 introduces the third metaphor, where we learn that the church is a mystery, a sacred secret:

*Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms (3:8–10).*

There are wonderful intimations here that God has had a secret plan at work through the centuries—a plan He has never unfolded to anyone. And the instrument by which He is carrying out this plan is the church. Paul is saying that, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God—all the many levels of God's knowledge and all the depths of His limitless wisdom—will now be made known to all principalities and powers that inhabit the heavenly realms.

The purpose of the mystery of the church

is to enlighten and inform the universe—to make known the wisdom of God to the spiritual rulers of those invisible realms.

### **The Church Is a New Self**

In chapter 4, the apostle uses a fourth metaphor:

*Put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness (4:24).*

The church is a new being, a new self with a new nature, because every Christian in the church is a new self. This metaphor is linked with Paul's statement in another letter:

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Cor. 5:17).*

The present creation, which began at the beginning of the heavens and the earth, has long since grown old and is passing away. The world with all its wealth and wisdom belongs to that which is passing. But God is building up a new generation, a new race of beings, a new order of souls or selves, the likes of which the world has never seen before. It is a generation that is even better than Adam, better than the original creation—it is a new creation.

In Romans, we learned that all we lost in Adam has been regained in Christ—and more:

*For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:17).*

Elsewhere in Romans, Paul says that the whole creation “waits in eager anticipation” (literally “is standing on tiptoe”) to see the manifestation of the sons of God, the day of the unveiling of this new creation (see Rom. 8:19).

But remember, this new creation is being made *right now*. You are invited to put on this new self, moment by moment, day by day, in order to meet the pressures and problems of life in the world today. That’s why the church is here. The church is a new self, and the purpose of the new self is to exercise a new ministry. Paul goes on to say in Ephesians 4:

*But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it (4:7).*

This new self in each of us has been given a gift (that’s what the word grace means here)—a gift we never had before we became Christians. Our task is to discover and exercise that gift. When the church falters and loses its direction, it’s because Christians have lost this great truth, and the gifts He has given us lay undiscovered and unused.

The risen Lord has given a gift to you, just as the lord in the parable gave the talents to each of his servants, entrusting them with his property until his return (see Matt. 25). When our Lord comes back, His judgment will be based on what we did with the gift(s) He gave us.

### **The Church Is a Bride**

Ephesians 5 introduces another metaphor to describe the true nature of the church. He tells us that the church is a bride:

*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ*

*loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless (5:25–27).*

Then Paul quotes the words of God in Genesis:

*“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church (5:31–32).*

The church is a bride, and Paul says that Christ is preparing the church as a bride so that He might present her to Himself. Isn’t that what every bridegroom desires—that his bride shall be his alone? During their early time of dating, she may go out with some other fellows, but once they are engaged she has promised to be his. Throughout their engagement, they await the day when that can be fully and finally realized.

At last the wedding day comes. They stand before the altar and promise to love, honor, and cherish one another until death should part them. They then become each other’s—she is his and he is hers, for the enjoyment of each other throughout their lifetime. That is a picture of the Christian (the bride) in relation to Christ (the groom).

Do you ever think of yourself this way? My own devotional life was revolutionized when it dawned on me that the Lord Jesus was looking forward to our time together. If I missed our time together, He was disappointed! I realized that not only was I receiving from Him, but He was receiving

## SPIRITUAL WARFARE: OUR ENEMY IS REAL



I am well aware of the disdain that many people in our society today exhibit toward any serious discussion of the devil and evil spiritual forces. They say, “Are you going to insult our intelligence by talking about a personal devil? That is such a medieval concept—straight out of the superstition of the Dark Ages! Are you seriously suggesting that the devil is at the root of all the world’s problems today?” I have even encountered this attitude within the Christian church.

I once spent an evening in Berlin discussing these issues with four or five intelligent churchmen—men who knew the Bible intimately, from cover to cover. Though we never once opened a Bible, we spent the whole evening together discussing various passages. I never referred to a single passage of Scripture that these men were not aware of. In fact, they could quote these passages verbatim. Yet each of these churchmen rejected the idea of a personal devil. At the end of the evening they admitted that, having rejected belief in the existence of the devil, they had no answers to the most puzzling issues of life, such as the obvious prevalence of evil in our world. We had to leave it there.

We have to ask ourselves, if there is no devil, then how do we explain all the evil in the world? When we look at the many attempts down through history to destroy God’s chosen nation, Israel, including the Holocaust . . . how can we say there is no devil? How can we say that a personal, intentional force for evil is not deliberately trying to destroy God’s plan for the world? And when we look at the persecution of the Christian church around the globe . . . how can we say there is no devil?

The devil is real, he is active, he is working day and night, trying to subvert, undo, and defeat God’s plan in human history. The devil is our enemy.

And this is war.

**Ray C. Stedman**

*Spiritual Warfare*

(Discovery House Publishers, 1999)

from me, and He loves and delights in our times of fellowship.

### **The Church Is a Soldier**

The last metaphor of the church that Paul paints for us in Ephesians is the metaphor of a soldier:

*Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the*

*readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (6:13–17).*

What is the purpose of a soldier? He fights battles! And that is what God is doing in and through us right now. He has given us the privilege of serving on the battlefield upon which His great victories are won.

In fact, there is actually a very real sense in

which we *are* the battlefield. That is the essence of the story of Job. Job, a man who dearly loved God, was struck without warning by a series of tragedies. All in one day, he lost everything that mattered to him, everything he prized, even his entire family . . . except his wife. Job didn't understand what was happening, but God had chosen Job to be the battlefield for a conflict with Satan.

God allowed Satan to afflict Job physically, mentally, and materially, because God knew that Job was the perfect battleground upon which to win a mighty victory against the invisible powers of the heavenly realms. Job was a soldier in a vast spiritual war—and so are you and I.

In John's first letter, he writes to his young Christian friends:

*I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one (1 John 2:14).*

In other words, "You have learned how to fight, how to move out as soldiers in a spiritual war, how to throw off the confusing restraints of the world, how not to be conformed to the age in which you live—and in so doing you have overcome Satan and you have glorified God."

I love the story of Daniel who, as a teenager, was a prisoner in a foreign land. He was trapped in a pagan culture and had to fight the battle day by day. He counted solely on God's faithfulness to defend him when everything was against him. The pressures brought upon him were incredible, yet Daniel met the tests again and again. He won the battles, defeated Satan, and gave God the glory. In a tremendous spiritual battle, Daniel was a faithful soldier.

This is the privilege to which God is calling us in this day of unrest and increasing darkness. This is the battle God calls us to as our world slips closer and closer to the mother of all battles, Armageddon. God is calling us to be soldiers, to walk in the steps of those who have won the battle before us. They have shown us how to remain faithful, even unto death. Battered, bruised, and bloodied, they considered it a badge of honor to serve in God's army, to be wounded in service to the King.

This, then, is our sixfold calling. God has equipped us with every spiritual blessing, with every gift we need, so that we might become a body, a temple, a mystery, a new self, a bride, and a soldier for Jesus Christ. That is quite a calling. The ultimate word of encouragement in this letter is found in Ephesians 4:

*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received (4:1).*

Ephesians gives us an exalted picture—a series of pictures, in fact—to reveal to us the grandeur of the church in God's plan and the crucial importance of every believer in God's sight. Never lose sight of what God is doing through you (through the church).

The world cannot see it, because the world is unaware of the heavenly realms. The world has no idea what is taking place through you and me (through the church). But you know what God is doing through you. His power surges through you. His love for the world flows out of you. His courage for the battle emboldens you. So do not lose heart.

There's a war on—and you are on the winning side!

## **EPHESIANS**

### **THE CALLING OF THE SAINTS**

1. What are some of the metaphors Paul uses in Ephesians to describe the church?
2. If you are the body and Christ is the head, who should be in charge? Who is actually in charge of your thoughts and behavior most of the time? What steps could you take to more consciously place yourself under the control of Christ the Head?
3. Read Ephesians 2:1–10. What have we been saved from? What have we been saved for? What does Paul mean when he says that we have been raised up and are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms? Is he talking about going to heaven in the future, or is he talking about something that is happening right now?
4. Read Ephesians 3:1–13. How did Paul become a “prisoner” of Jesus Christ and a “servant of this gospel”? Why did God choose Paul?
5. Read Ephesians 4:20–5:2. Paul tells us that we are to put off the old self, which is corrupted by deceitful desires, and put on the new self, which is created to be righteous and holy by God. List the specific actions and sins God wants you to “put out” of your life. Then list the things God wants to be “put in” their place. (Notice that with every sin or bad habit God wants us to put off and with every virtue He wants us to put on, Paul gives us a reason why we should make this change.)
6. Read Ephesians 6:10–24. Why is the Christian life often described as “warfare”? Why is conflict an inevitable part of the Christian life? Does the Christian life seem like a struggle for you? Why or why not?



### ***Personal Application:***

7. Does it ever occur to you, when you're in conflict with another person (a friend, family member, coworker, fellow Christian, neighbor, or boss) that your struggle is not so much with "flesh and blood," but rather that there are spiritual forces behind your struggle? Do you sometimes sense that spiritual forces are stirring up conflict in your life to hinder your prayers? To hinder your witness? To block your relationship with God? To rob you of your Christian joy?

8. Describe in personal, practical, and everyday terms what it means for you to put on the following:

- *the full armor of God*
- *the belt of truth*
- *the breastplate of righteousness*
- *shoes of the readiness of the gospel of peace*
- *the shield of faith*
- *the helmet of salvation*
- *the sword of the Spirit*

How do you transform these metaphors into living realities in your life on a daily basis? What steps can you take this week to strengthen and harden your spiritual armor?

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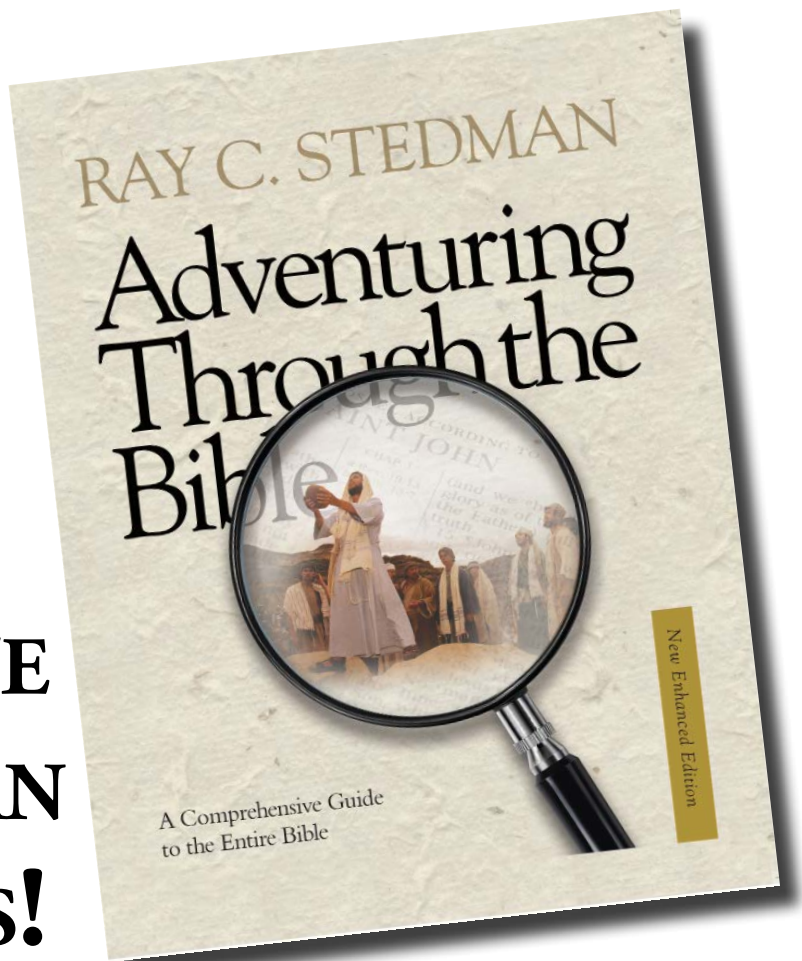
PLEASE NOTE: For in-depth explorations of the epistle of Ephesians, read:

*Body Life: The Book That Inspired a Return to the Church's Real Meaning and Mission* by Ray C. Stedman (Discovery House Publishers, 1995).

*Our Riches in Christ: Discovering the Believer's Inheritance in Ephesians* by Ray C. Stedman (Discovery House Publishers, 1998).

*Spiritual Warfare: Winning the Daily Battle with Satan* by Ray C. Stedman (Discovery House Publishers, 1999).

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