

Access to God

Romans 5: 1, 2; Ephesians 2: 18, 3: 1-21

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I want to speak of the blessedness of drawing near to God. You will have noticed that in each of the Scriptures read we have the thought of access to God. We have been engaged in this conference with the highest possible truth in the Christian dispensation and I want to say with emphasis that our being formed by the truth does not in the ultimate depend upon the knowledge of the word of God, important as that is; nor does it depend upon Christian fellowship, important as that is; but if we are to really take in the truth and be formed by it then we must know something of nearness to God. If I were asked for some special word of importance for believers, and especially for young Christians, I would say above all else cultivate personal history with God; nothing can take its place.

There is nothing more blessed than to know God, and what God desires is that we should enjoy His company in intimacy and nearness. On His side everything has been done in order that that might be so. If as Christians we are conscious of distance between ourselves and God, we may be sure that the difficulty lies with us and not with God.

We have all experienced drawing near to God in our need as sinners, but we could not have drawn near to God had He not first moved towards us in grace in the Lord Jesus Christ. God has drawn near to us, and He has spoken to us in wonderful compassion, having in mind that we should reciprocate His love and know the blessedness of drawing near to Him.

Nearness to God is an essential if the secrets of divine counsel which are engaging us in Ephesians, are to be known. There are two outstanding things which eventuate from nearness to God. First, a spirit of absolute simplicity; there is no room for self-esteem, self-aggrandisement, self-seeking, or self-importance in any person who is consciously near to God. In the presence of God we are given to know that pre-eminence belongs to Christ. We may have known this as a text of Scripture, but it becomes spiritual substance as we learn it in reality in the presence of God. We realize that no flesh can glory there! The flesh can glory in every sphere except the presence of God, but it cannot glory there. Thus in the presence of God we learn to be emptied of self-importance, and to appreciate that all greatness and all glory belongs to Christ.

The second thing we learn is that nearness to God is an absolute necessity if we are to understand that which He would communicate to us in the power of the Spirit. In the 11th chapter of Matthew's Gospel we have a profound verse in relation to the knowledge of the Father and the Son, and immediately following that wonderful pronouncement (which is like a scintillating jewel set in the gold of Scripture, shining out in all its preciousness and glory in relation to the Person of the Son as known by the Father and the revelation of the Father by the Son) the Lord Jesus says, "Come unto Me . . . and learn from Me" as the preposition should read (vv. 28, 29). Does not this indicate that the import of that wonderful verse was to be learned in nearness to Christ? And one is conscious as one speaks that there must be nearness to God if we are to get the full benefit of what the Holy Spirit would bring before us in the Ephesian epistle.

Having said that by way of preface I now refer to the three Scriptures which we have read — the

first in the epistle to the Romans. I have purposely referred to Romans because it has always appealed to me as being a necessary preparation for the understanding of the Ephesian epistle. The epistle to the Romans does not develop the truth of the mystery, or the truth as to Christ and the Church, but what it shows is the settling from God's side of every moral question brought in by sin. Now I make the point definitely and earnestly, that there can be no understanding or enjoyment of the deep things of God if there are moral matters outstanding between our hearts and God. God is holy, and if He has been pleased, as I hope we may see as we proceed, to introduce us into the secret of His eternal thoughts, and has given us to enjoy the outpouring of His love in Christ; in doing that He has not surrendered one whit of His holiness. It is essential that the young brethren particularly should consider this important point, indeed both young and old should realize that there must be the complete settling of moral matters if there is to be the enjoyment in nearness of the presence of God, and the understanding of spiritual things.

Hence the epistle to the Romans is of great importance. In the earlier chapters we see how the whole state of man in his degradation is taken up and settled from the divine side. The basis of that transaction is the precious blood of Christ, and in consequence of the value that God sets upon the precious blood, all that history of moral breakdown in which we all have been involved, has been dealt with from the divine side, and there is the possibility of each of us knowing what it is to be in absolute peace with God. There is no need for one to apologise for this simple note; it is dangerous in any company to take too much for granted. It is impossible to understand, or to enjoy Ephesian truth, if we have not settled peace with God. We need to grasp as it were what God has said as to His valuation of the work of Christ; we need to embrace by faith what has been accomplished through His precious death, and to see that everything has been settled, not according to my need or apprehension, but according to God's complete satisfaction and glory, and that involves the valuation that God Himself sets upon the precious blood of Jesus. We are "justified by His blood" (Romans 5: 9); that is the basis of our justification. We are "justified freely by His grace" (Romans 3: 24); that is the way in which God has moved towards us as the Justifier. Liberated we may say in His love by the work of Christ He can now justify us freely by His grace.

But we are also "justified by faith" (Romans 5: 1). The testimony given by God in His word in relation to the work of Christ is to be taken hold of in faith; we believe what God has said. In the gospel God declares His complete satisfaction in the work of Jesus, we accept it by faith, and we have peace with God. The past is all cleared in the death of Christ. The future is bright, for a justified person can "rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5: 2).

Later in the chapter we find that a reconciled person rejoices in God Himself, but as justified we can rejoice in hope of the glory of God, for when the glory shines upon us it can only reveal the work of God. We are absolutely cleared of every stain of sin, and there is nothing left which would hinder us from being in absolute peace with God. And then if the past is all clear, and the future is all bright, the present is most blessed, we stand in the favour of God; "we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand". We stand in the enjoyment of the free movements of God's love in Christ, the power of which the Spirit is here to make good in our souls.

Now the ground is cleared for us to move on to what we have brought before us in the Ephesian epistle where we see how God has acted in order to bring into evidence His own eternal purpose of love, and the blessings we are brought into have in view our enjoyment of and response to these great thoughts of God.

In our second Scripture we have the wonderful statement, that we "have access by one Spirit unto

the Father." We have access to the Father and we are made fellow citizens of the household of God. It is a blessed thing surely to have conscious access to the grace of God but it is a most wonderful thing to have access to where God dwells, and to know Him in the intimacy of "Father." We so easily take these names upon our lips without due consideration of the import of them. How easy it is to speak to Him and say "Father!" How "many thousands in Christendom take those words upon their lips — "Our Father!" Do we really know the blessedness of having access to God, and know Him in all the intimacy of the love that He has towards us as Father? The actual verses are a reference to the way in which the middle wall of partition has been broken down between Jew and Gentile, and both have been brought into this one way of access to God by the Spirit. The whole Godhead is engaged in that verse. There are many verses in Scripture in which we get the complete Godhead, and here we have the Godhead concerned in this wonderful matter of our knowing what it is to be in the enjoyment of the intimacy of the Father's presence. If divine Persons are so interested in this matter, ought not we to be responsive to their interest? Ought we to allow these things to be mere texts of Scripture? Ought we to allow them to be a kind of special vocabulary and conversation, or are we desirous of knowing the reality of enjoying access to God as Father? In the 20th chapter of John, when the Lord Jesus was about to leave this world, where He had been rejected, He said: "I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (v. 17), and the Ephesian epistle seems in very large measure to be in accord with that utterance, for in the prayers of the apostle we have "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (3: 14), and "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1: 17).

I am confining my remarks to knowing Him as Father, as in union with Christ, in that eternal love in which the Son ever dwells, and which is available to us now, as we have access into His presence. It is something that Moses knew nothing about, great saint of God as he was it is something that Abraham did not know; it is something that the prophets of the Old Testament did not know; it is that which has been reserved for this dispensation, that we should have access to the very presence of God Himself as Father, and to know Him in that relationship. What does it mean to know God as Father? In Matthew's Gospel we read: "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of." (6: 8.) It is said in that gospel that "the very hairs of your head are all numbered" (10: 30). Then also, not a sparrow falls to the ground without His knowledge; and all that we need is under the bounteous hand of the Father. But that is but one way in which we can know the Father.

God is said in Scripture to be the Father of compassions (2 Cor. 1: 3 N. Trans.); every ray of true love and sympathy found its origin in the eternal heart of God. It is the province of the very babes of Christianity to know the Father. John says of the babes that they "have known the Father," and in knowing the Father they have been brought to the source of love itself. Love had its origin in the bosom of the Father; what a blessed thing that is! We may have to deplore the absence of love in some circles ("the love of many shall wax cold") but as having access to the Father, we have been brought to the warmth and joy of divine love for our present enjoyment.

He is said to be the Father of glory. Are we seeking glory in this world? There is a glory in this world. When the devil tempted the Lord, he showed to Him not only the kingdoms of the world, but their glory. There is a glory in connection with this world, but it is a passing one and it is a challenging one; it is a glory that challenges the glory of God, for the god of this world is the enemy of God. Every true ray of glory comes from God the Father, lighting up our affections with the splendour of a glory that will never be tarnished, a glory that is eternal and which we are going to share in the company of Jesus throughout an eternal day. It is to be known now as we have access to the Father, the source of all.

He is also the Father of lights. James tells us that "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from

above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." (1: 17). So many things change in this world. Thank God there is one sphere in which there is no change, no variableness, no shadow of turning; all is glory, all is light, ineffable light, no shadow there at all. It is unchanging, eternal, and it is available to us now as we have access to the Father, "The Father of lights."

One further thought: He is the Father of spirits. Sometimes we may forget that we have spirits. How often we say "body, soul and spirit;" the Scripture says "spirit, soul and body" (1 Thess. 5: 23). We are so apt to think more of our bodies than of our spirits, but God is concerned with our spirits. He is not unmindful of the needs of our bodies as we have already seen from Matthew's Gospel, but He is dealing also with our spirits. As the Father of spirits He would by His word purify our inward motives in order that our spirits might be more responsive to the Holy Spirit, that divine Person here — so sensitive, so sensible too, of all that is necessary in each one of us, if we are to enjoy the things of God. The holy, sensitive Spirit of God indwells us, and yet oftentimes, through the allowance of the flesh, through the allowance of that which is contrary to the will of God, we grieve the Spirit, and are not able to enter into the deep things of God. Knowing the blessedness of "access to the Father," let us seek to be found "in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live." (Heb. 12: 9.)

In the last Scripture we read we have the thought of access into the secrets of God. "According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him" (Eph. 3: 11, 12). These eternal secrets were hidden in Old Testament days. (The prophets mentioned in the 3rd chapter of Ephesians are New Testament prophets). This is something that was hidden in God, something not previously revealed, but which waited for the dispensation in which we live. Think of the dignity of that; think of God keeping this secret. It is not something that He thought of in this dispensation; it was in the mind and heart of God before the foundation of the world. He made much known to the saints in other dispensations; He made known His Name with its attendant glory; He made known His will; He gave to them many promises, and the light of the coming kingdom; but there was one wonderful secret that God kept, and He kept it for the day in which we are found. Paul says "that I should preach among the Gentiles (that is ourselves) the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery . . . hid in God" (v. 8, 9). The unsearchable riches of Christ, something beyond human ken, something that we are absolutely dependent upon the Holy Spirit to lead us into. God has been pleased to open His storehouse, He has made known the wonderful secrets of His heart, and He gives us to see that they are all centred in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is "to head up all things in the Christ" (Eph. 1: 10, N.Trans.).

What a profitable occupation it would be for the young men and women to study the Scriptures and to search out how often the thought of "all things" stands related to Christ, and then seek help to make it a very personal matter! The woman in the fourth chapter of John, said, "I know that Messias cometh which is called Christ: when He is come, He will tell us all things" (v. 25). But there came a moment, the Lord having dealt with her moral condition, when she said "come, see a Man, which told me all things . . . is not this the Christ?" (v. 29). And it is a wonderful thing, beloved brethren, when we get into the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Revealer of secrets, for He will not only reveal to us the secrets of our own hearts, but as the One to Whom the Father has already committed "all things" (John 3: 35), He will bring us into the enjoyment of the secrets of God! The Lord Jesus Christ came into this scene freighted with the knowledge of them; He came to earth to make them known, "that we might share His joys."

How blessedly He walked here! "He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye

through His poverty might be rich." He trod that lonely pathway. He was bereft of everything. His precious body alone was left to Him, and He gave that for us, in order that the love of God might be known and that we might have present access into the secrets of divine love.

How wonderful it is to get over to God's side of matters! How much Christ means to us! Our forgiveness, our justification, our peace with God, our reconciliation, our being conformed to His image in the coming day, all these show how essential Christ is to us; but how absolutely essential Christ is to God! Everything for the glory of God depends upon Him. There could be no making known of the secrets of the heart of God were it not for the Incarnation, for in Him in holy manhood have been made known to us the secrets of the heart of God. God has in mind that we should be brought into the enjoyment of all that He has determined to do for His own glory in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. I trust that God may help us to understand these things a little: His favour as our present standing; the knowledge of Himself as Father, and the consequent enjoyment of all that belongs to the household of God; all the secrets of God resident in that Christ.

The Lord graciously give these things a larger place, in the power of the Spirit, in our hearts, and may we not only appreciate what God has shown to us for His own glory in Christ, but be found intelligently responding to it. The burden of the apostle's prayers in this epistle is that the saints may not only see these things objectively as presented to us in Christ, but that they might be formed in us for the praise of God.