

Ephesians

Ephesians 1: 1-23; Ephesians 2: 1-22; Ephesians 3: 1-21

Reading with G. Davison

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In our former readings we have considered the main features of the Epistle to the Romans and the Epistle to the Colossians. In the former we saw how God had moved towards us on the basis of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring deliverance to us from the bondage of sin, the world and Satan. We noted among many things that we are not said to be raised in that epistle, the bearing of which is to liberate us from the thralldom into which sin had plunged us, so that being thus liberated we might walk in this world well pleasing to God. In the Epistle to the Colossians resurrection is one of the outstanding features, for we are said in that epistle to be "risen with Christ". Resurrection has a new position in view and, while we are still viewed as on earth, our minds are to be set on the things above where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Thus a new heavenly position is opened out to us and we are exhorted to set our minds upon it. In the Ephesian epistle, into which we are about to look, we are carried one step further, for not only are we, as in Colossians, on earth with our affections set upon heavenly things, but we are also taught that we are raised and seated in the heavenlies. We have, of course, to accept this as Divine teaching and seek to live in the experience of it by the Holy Spirit. In the types Romans answers to the plains of Moab — Israel free from all the entanglements of the wilderness; Colossians is the answer to the crossing of the Jordan — in Gilgal and feeding on the old corn of the land; while Ephesians is the answer to the fruits of the land of Canaan and the conflict with the seven nations who disputed Israel's possession of the inheritance. We hope to see in these readings the answer to those fruits and the need of conflict to hold what God has given us as a heavenly inheritance. The features of His inheritance is necessary if we are to maintain possession of and enjoy what God has given to us in the riches of His grace towards us. In the verses we are considering we shall see the position opened out to us as the fruit of the purpose of God and the work of Christ, and we shall also see that God had in mind before time began that a company should be called and brought into sonship now, and ultimately in glory, who already by the Spirit enjoy the inheritance.

Would it help to say something about the work of Paul while he was in Ephesus, and what he said about that work in Acts 20?

In his last discourse to the Ephesians as he was about to leave them, he reminded them of all that he had taught them. Not only had he spoken to them of the "gospel of the grace of God", he had also taught them the principles of the "kingdom of God", the circle in which the will of God had been established, and had gone on to declare to them "all the counsel of God". The **grace** of God, the **will** of God and the **counsel** of God had been made known to them in his teaching while among them, and we shall see all these features coming to light again in this epistle.

Will you say a word as to why the apostle says these things mostly to the Gentiles?

At this time Paul was in prison and he tells them in Ephesians 3, it was "for you Gentiles". I believe Paul is referring to himself as a vessel, not only to his ministry but to himself as the vessel in whom this ministry had been deposited. It was a necessity that he as a vessel should be in prison, in order that he might see in all its fullness the mystery in its relation to the Gentiles. We note in both the Epistle to the Colossians, and in this one to the Ephesians, that he puts the Gentile before the Jew, showing how definitely he was now formed in the truth of the mystery. How often he had said, "to the Jew first" but now he sees the Jew has no pre-eminence above the Gentile.

Does it enhance the truth of this epistle that what is here is not a conception of time at all and is carried forward to eternity? The statement, "chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world" sets before us the unique position of the Christian's blessing apart from every other blessing, even that of the Jew. Their blessing was "from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25: 34), but our blessing is said to be counselled "before the foundation of the world". Before the foundation of the world the blood of Christ was precious in Divine minds (1 Peter 1: 19, 20); Christ Himself was precious to the Father (John 17: 24); and all that the Godhead purposed for the saints of this dispensation was truly precious (Eph. 1: 4). If we note these things carefully, the truth in this Epistle will become very precious indeed to us.

The very fact that this truth is distinctively Pauline (the vessel to whom was committed "the gospel of the glory") would assure us of this. He was not called to present Christ as the Messiah of Israel, but in relation to this deep secret which was in the heart of God from eternity. If God had selected the Jew in preference to the Gentile when dealing with the things of earth, He is now offering to the Gentile something greater than He ever offered to the Jew.

What is meant by "the faithful in Christ Jesus"?

Two things may be in that statement. First, they had been brought into this circle of favour by faith in Christ Jesus, but they had also made progress in the truth of it. They were a company who had made progress in Pauline ministry, so much so that he had been enabled to open out to them the whole scope of the counsel of God.

Why does he use the expression "God our Father"?

The saints are seen here as in relationship with God as Father, the great privilege of Christianity. Paul, of course, did not bring that to light, it was our Lord Himself on the morning of His resurrection — "I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God". In Christianity every saint of God stands in relationship with God as Father. When God is referred to as "our God" His rights in supremacy are in view, but when He is spoken of as "our Father", it is the place of privilege we are brought into by God that is in view. As another has said, "our Father involves His counsel in relation to His children". In verse 3, the two names are used in relation to Christ. When it is "the God . . . of our Lord Jesus Christ", He is viewed as Man; when it is "the . . . Father of our Lord Jesus Christ", He is viewed as Son.

Are the blessings referred to here greater than those of the New Covenant?

Yes! In the fact that they are heavenly. We must not forget that New Covenant blessings for the Gentiles are outlined in 2 Cor. 3, that is righteousness ministered from glory; but this chapter has in view the vast inheritance into which we have been brought. The New Covenant sets us in right relations with God; this brings us into what is heavenly in Christ. In 1 Cor. 3, Paul speaks of the foundation which is Jesus Christ; here it is more the Head Stone of the corner. I do not doubt that the New Covenant which he outlines in 2 Cor. 3 is the ground of our righteousness, it is called "the ministration of righteousness", but we are reaching up to the heights here and Christ is at the top as well as at the

foundation.

What are these spiritual blessings?

All that we are brought into in association with Christ in glory. One would hesitate to draw up a list but sonship, eternal life and, above all, the gift of the Spirit are some of the outstanding blessings which we have today.

Would it not be the sharing of all the preciousness and joy and glory which stand related to that blessed Man Who is the Centre of this Divine sphere? Whatever He is enjoying as the centre of God's world, is open to you and me to enjoy.

In connection with your suggestion that the gift of the Spirit is the highest of these spiritual blessings, do you consider that to be higher than sonship?

I do! There could not be anything greater than a Divine Person dwelling in our souls.

There could not be the cry of sonship apart from the Spirit, for He gives it to us.

That is why the Spirit is called further down "the earnest of our inheritance" (v. 14).

You would connect the two together I suppose?

We must connect all together, but not one of these spiritual blessings could be known by us apart from the Spirit of God. That is why we put the Spirit first.

Would these spiritual blessings be all that was prepared for us in the counsel of the Godhead?

No doubt! We shall see that all lay in the eternal purpose of God when He made the plan which is now being carried into effect. The Father is the source of all, and they have been brought into effect by the Son and secured in each one of our souls in the power of the Holy Spirit. All this would be the fruit of the love of God to us.

Would not the fact that these things were counselled before time began establish the truth that God is working for His own pleasure?

Would the statement in Luke 15 convey this, "let Us . . . make merry"?

It would! That is why we have brought in here fundamental truths such as, "In Whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins", for apart from this we could not be there. So the wonderful picture of Luke 15 describes the end reached.

In the choice of God that we should be "holy and without blame" we see that the mind of God was active in relation to sin before time began. It was a necessity if He was to carry into effect the plan which was in His mind to have a company before Him accepted in the Beloved without any suspicion of sin attaching to them.

It is wonderful that these three things should be said of us — that we should be "holy and without blame before Him in love" — for these three things mark the blessed God Himself. Holy in His character; blameless in His ways; and love in His nature.

It has been pointed out also that they are said to mark Christ. What God has marked us out for has already come to light in Christ, hence we are "taken into favour in the Beloved" (New Trans.).

That being so, we know from a later chapter that Christ brings us, as the fruit of His present service, into what was in the mind of God in purpose for us (Eph. 5: 27).

Would it be right to say that all that lies in the heavenlies is there for every family besides the church?

Yes! So far as every heavenly family is concerned, though the church will have its own distinctive place there. It is well to keep in mind the breadth of the purpose of God. We have perhaps the tendency to limit the scope of the purpose of God to the church, but it is all things in heaven and all things in earth. Christ is Head over all things. It is all part of the inheritance of God but, as we know, our part is in relation to the "all things . . . in heaven".

Would this be the new heavens and the new earth? Does it go as far as that?

That new order is touched upon in two verses only of this epistle, Eph. 3: 20, 21. It is crystal clear here that the world to come is in view. We do not doubt that what God is effecting today for the delight of His heart will go into the new heaven and the new earth, but all in this chapter looks on to the day of the display of the glory of God in Christ in the world to come, that is the reign of Christ in glory for a thousand years.

In the world to come we have the display of every detail of the purpose of God and every detail of His ways so far as this order is concerned, and it will bring to a close His movements. At the end of the world to come Christ hands back the kingdom and by that time every thought of God will have been secured. Then, what God has secured for the delight of His own heart will be carried over to the new heaven and the new earth. We must keep in mind that the new heaven and the new earth is a completely new beginning so far as creation is concerned, and into it will go all that God has effected here.

I have long thought in readings on this epistle that we have been too much taken up with our blessings and have perhaps failed to see what God has secured for His own heart. To see this would exalt in our eyes the Giver, and enhance the magnitude of what He has brought us into in Christ. The two outstanding things in the epistle are the knowledge of God and the knowledge of Christ. These are the central themes of the two prayers.

In verse 5 we read of the adoption of children as the fruit of predestination. What does adoption mean?

It is really sonship. It has been pointed out that adoption involves a previous history, that is we have been brought from a former condition into this; but the thought of children is related to that of new birth and does not involve a previous history. It is obviously a completely new beginning in life and nature.

Do we attain to this position by growth?

No! We are brought into it by the sovereign working of God.

Does all this proceed from the Father?

It does! So far as predestination is concerned. Hence we are sons of God, and all for the good pleasure of His heart, for it is according to the good pleasure of His will.

What is involved in being "accepted in the Beloved"?

God has marked us out for this place, for predestination has the end in view, and it is for this God has chosen us, and we are brought into it today. In the day of display glory will be brought to God when the greatness of His grace towards us is seen manifestly. He is going to use the saints to display Himself. Observe the character of it for, as we said, adoption involves a previous history; yet here we are accepted — brought into favour — in the Beloved. That is more than being right with God. The precious blood of Christ comes in here to show how He has made us fit for this, but think of being

accepted in the Beloved. Is it not that God wants us to know how much He loves us? That is why He did it.

Does this include only New Testament saints?

It could only be that so far as I see! That all the heavenly company will be brought into blessing with Christ is true, but the church has her unique place as accepted in Him, individually so of course. It could be said only of those who have a direct link with the Beloved. It is the distinctive character of the blessing for the saints today.

Will you say a word as to the distinction between the word "chosen" in verse 4 and "predestination" in verse 5?

They must both run together in this way, they were both there for us before time began; "chosen" carries the idea of selection, and "predestination" what God has selected us for. Selected by God and what He has selected us for; that is really an epitome of this epistle.

Taken into favour in the Beloved would suggest how much God loves us, would it not?

Indeed! For our Lord said so Himself as we read in John 17: 26, "that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them".

We may miss the greatness of this by bringing ourselves into it too much .

Perhaps, but we must remember we **are** brought into it although God has done it for Himself. I am glad we have had that so much in view today.

All this then is the fruit of the effectuation of His eternal purpose.

That term "eternal purpose" is used in Eph. 3: 11. It may help to point out that the term "eternal counsel" is not once mentioned in Scripture, but "eternal purpose" is and that just once in the verse I have quoted. So far as I have found purpose necessitated counsel, and from this springs the ways of God. I have not yet found a Scripture connecting purpose with the ways of God but we have at least two connecting His ways with His counsel. "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2: 23). Again, in the chapter we are reading we have, "according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will". Purpose is the objective which God has before Him; divine Persons took counsel as to how that was to be secured; and the ways of God are bringing it all into effect. When the ways of God reach finality His counsel will all have been carried into effect, and that which He purposed will have been secured, and it is this which will go into the eternal state. I judge that is why we do read of "eternal purpose", for when that which was purposed is secured it will abide eternally, as seen in the end of Ephesians 3. Notice how all three are in verse 11 of our chapter, purpose, working and counsel.

What has come to light on earth are the time ways of God springing out of His counsel and all to secure His eternal purpose.

Say something about "purposed in Himself".

It could not be anywhere else but in Himself. If God has resolved this of Himself and for Himself He will surely effect it Himself. I do not doubt the Son and the Spirit would be involved in it, but certain things are ascribed to each Divine Person for there are certain things which it is said the Father does which are not said of the Son or the Spirit; things which the Son does which are not said of the Father or the Spirit; and things which the Spirit does which are not said of the Father and the Son.

Counsel would always involve more than one Person would it not?

I think so! We may venture to mention another word — "conclave", for we understand the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were in conclave as to how that eternal purpose was to be effected and that the universe was created as the sphere in which it would all be effected.

In verse 9 we have mention of the "will", the "good pleasure" and "purpose" of God. Could you say a word about them?

The will and pleasure of God are practically the same, for what could give more pleasure to God than the accomplishment of the details of His own will? And if you add that the will of God and the purpose of God are the same I would quite agree. We may say His will is to accomplish His purpose.

What is meant by the statement of verse 8, "Wherein He hath abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence"?

Of old it was said, "He made known His ways unto Moses, His acts unto the children of Israel" (Ps. 103: 7). The children of Israel saw what God did but Moses knew **why** He did it. Now not only has God brought about today the greatest thoughts of His heart in blessing for men, but He is pleased to tell us about it. Not only has He abounded towards us in blessing, He has abounded towards us in spiritual intelligence, for He desires us to know all about it.

It is very blessed to be brought into the secret of what is for the good pleasure of God. The "good pleasure" and the "purpose" are one, for it says "His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself". It is very blessed that when God makes known the mystery of His will to us He also gives us to see that it is something in which His own affections are delighted. What is involved is the bringing in of Christ. We could not think of the good pleasure of God without bringing Christ into it. The marvel is that God would enlighten us as to what is the secret of His own heart.

Would this wisdom and prudence be in any way connected with Prov. 8?

We do see there that wisdom was the handmaiden of God, that God had every resource to accomplish the desire of His heart, and He brought in the creation to that end. We shall find that one of the requests of the prayer is that He "may give unto you the spirit of wisdom", but it is there for us for God has abounded toward us in it. I may say, "I am only a simple brother and cannot understand these things", but everyone of us can understand these things for God has given to us the resources to enable us to do so. There is not one word in the Bible which we cannot understand for the Spirit Who wrote it all dwells in our hearts. I may have to admit there is very little I **do** understand, but I have the solution of every problem in my heart for the Spirit dwells there. It may be my simplicity is through lack of exercise; it cannot be through lack of supply when I have the Spirit.

What is the difference between these two words, wisdom and prudence?

So far as I know wisdom is resource or ability, but prudence means intelligence. Wisdom would be the ability to understand these things; intelligence that you apprehend them. Without the ability to understand these things we could never have them as light in our souls.

We are apt to limit the workings of the grace of God to satisfy our needs but here it is the unlocking of the secrets of His own heart.

Is that why the thought of glory is brought in?

Yes! It is all for the display of Himself and the delight of His own heart.

We have here the full declaration of the mystery of God; He says as it were, I am telling you of all that

is in My heart. Here it is, in this revelation. He must ever remain beyond the comprehension of the finite mind because He is God. I believe we worship God as beyond us in the greatness of His Person, but He has made known the thoughts of His heart towards us. There is that which cannot come into revelation but He has been pleased to tell us **all** that is in His heart.

The "dispensation" mentioned in verse 10 is really "administration", a word which means "the houselaw", that is, what will be the ruling principle in that day. What will be in operation in that day will be Christ at the head of all things, holding the whole universe for the pleasure of God in the day of His power. In that day, with the saints in glory with Him, praise will be called forth to God as we see how immense is that grace which has given the saints a place in the glory. In view of this we already have the Holy Spirit, the greatest part of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession. That is better rendered "the acquired possession" (New Trans.). On our side we have been brought into this as believing the gospel, but soon it will be manifested to the universe that God had marked us out for this place before time began. That day of display will not be for our glory, but for the praise of His glory Who planned it, and Who will effectuate it all for the delight of His own heart of love.

In this section we have the record of the prayer of the apostle in relation to the truth he had been inspired by the Spirit to bring before the saints. We do well to note this. If he needed to pray for the saints that the truth might find an abiding place in their affections, how much more do we? However clearly the truth may be brought before the saints, only the Holy Spirit can make it good in their hearts, and the apostle was well aware of that. He assured them that he did not cease to pray for them, "do not cease giving thanks for you, making mention (of you) at my prayers (N.T.) We can be sure he did not pray for the saints in a general way only, he was too intelligent in the truth for that. Reference was made earlier in our readings to the Corinthians, and we can understand that when he prayed for them he would ask for something quite distinct from that which he asked for the Ephesians. One has wondered why in our prayer meetings we are not more particular and less general. We do pray for all saints, we pray for the gospel, for the ministry of the truth. Why not name those who may be so ministering? Paul says to them here, "making mention of *you*" at my prayers. Perhaps if we were as much in touch with God as he was, having the interest of the saints as much at heart as he had, we should make specific requests for specific people in relation to the service of Christ and the prosperity of His people.

I notice in this prayer that he goes into the details of the truth he had opened out to them in the earlier part of this chapter. Would that have a specific request in view in reference to the truth of God?

Having ministered to them this particular outline of the truth, what he is praying about is that this truth may find a rightful place in their affections.

The prayer takes up as much space as the teaching which precedes it.

Does he give thanks here for the faith he had seen in them?

He was very thankful for all that he had heard about them, and the progress they were making.

Would you say that Paul was an exponent of his own ministry?

What you mean is that he not only taught these truths to the saints but he was characterized by them himself.

Another thing which marked him was, he had an insight into the spiritual needs of the saints. I like your thought about praying intelligently for the saints, for it is a little difficult to pray for people whom we do not know and of whose real needs we have little knowledge.

This prayer is addressed to the "God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory". Paul did not use these terms without some definite purpose in mind, nor would the Spirit of God inspire him to use them without some definite purpose in view. The apostle is about to describe for us the wonderful victory that God had accomplished through this wonderful Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, hence he goes to the source, to God, addressing Him as the "God of our Lord Jesus Christ".

Does that involve that Christ is viewed as Man here?

It does! He is the One Who came into subject Manhood to give effect to every detail of that eternal purpose.

The Holy Spirit gives us to understand that He is "*our* Lord Jesus Christ" — a very blessed thing. I do not know of any greater blessing than that I should have fellowship with God in relation to His own thoughts of Christ.

The Son in Manhood is so great that He can give effect to every thought of God. The greatness of His Manhood lies in the fact that He is the Son, and He has so wrought that He has given eternal delight to the heart of the Father. It is His Manhood which is stressed here, for in coming into Manhood He has sustained the rights of man, accomplished the will of God and established the pleasure of the Father.

Should the normal development of the believer be on those lines? Growing in the knowledge of what God has wrought for His own glory and at the same time developing in the affections of the Father and the Son.

Yes! The theme of this prayer is, "ye should know". The other side, of which you make mention, is more the burden of the prayer of Eph. 3, what we are as formed in the love of the Christ. God wants us to know the glory of His thoughts in this prayer; that we may be *formed* in relation to them is the theme of the prayer in Eph. 3.

Does the term "Father of glory" suggest that the Father is the originator of this glory?

That appears to be the bearing of it! While we know God as Father and are related to Him as such, if we trace everything back to its source, He is the source of all. There are five similar references to this thought of glory. We read in Acts 7: 2, "The God of glory" appeared to Abraham. Here we have God addressed as "the Father of glory". In 1 Cor. 2: 8 we read that our Lord is "the Lord of glory". Then in Psalm 24: 7, we read of Him again that He is "the King of glory", and lastly in 1 Peter 4: 14 we have "the Spirit of glory" (see footnote in N.T.). While we can see a connection between all five, they are yet distinct.

Not one single ray of real glory ever shone in this scene which did not originate from God, He is the Father of it.

Not only does all true glory come from the Father, Who is the source of it, but in that glory He is supreme for He is also "the God of glory". He has found a blessed Man in Whom all glory can be centred, whether administratively from the heavenly side as the Lord of glory, or on the earthly side as the King of glory.

What is involved in the revelation spoken of here?

It is "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him". This word "wisdom" means resource, and there it would be Divine resource, the ability given to us to understand the mystery. 1 Cor. 2, shows the wisdom of this world to be utterly incapable of understanding the things of God, and the princes of this world unable to recognize the Lord of glory — "but God hath revealed them unto us

by His Spirit". Again the apostle says in that chapter "Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect", referring to those who have ability to solve these problems and to understand the things of God.

In Psalm 29 we read of the God of glory, the only place in the Old Testament where that title is used. It is mentioned in verse 3, and in verse 9 we read, "in His temple doth every one speak of His Glory". A company has been brought into that glory intelligently, able to discern it and respond to it. That is in view here; not only that God is the "God of glory" but, the desire in this prayer is that we should discern Him as such and respond to Him as such.

Who is more capable of giving us the ability to understand these things than the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has operated through Him to bring this to pass. God, Who is the source of glory which will abide when all the passing glory of men has gone for ever. Who is more capable of leading us into the knowledge of these things than the God and Father of it all? We first need "wisdom" which enables us to understand these things; then we need also "revelation" — the unfolding of them. This word "revelation" is the title word of the book of Revelation, and means the "unfolding", or "the drawing aside of the veil". It is one thing to have "the spirit of wisdom", the ability to understand these things, but if God does not graciously reveal His thoughts, the spirit of wisdom would be useless, as there would not be anything for us to understand.

Is the word the same as the one used by the Lord when He said to Peter, "flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven"?

It is! This word "apokalupsis" means "drawing aside the veil". The word wisdom would involve the wonderful resources which stand in relation to His counsel. Revelation would draw aside the curtain that we might not only perceive those resources but be able to avail ourselves of them. That is why the spirit of wisdom comes first. Resources are there, that is why wisdom is personified in Christ, He is the resource of God. We are enabled to see what God is effecting in Him.

The effect of having "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him" is Divine illumination, as the next verse shows. It is not only that we know these truths as in the Word, but to have them as spiritual illuminations in our souls is a far greater thing.

I suppose we can only know God in so far as He has been pleased to reveal Himself in His Son.

Yes! But we not only have the revelation of God in His nature, character and disposition to the sons of men, which all came out in Christ when in the world; but now we have revealed to us the thoughts of His heart in relation to His eternal purpose. This could not be revealed until Christ was in glory and the Spirit in the hearts of the saints. Having received the "spirit of wisdom" our souls are prepared to understand these things, then He unfolds them to those who can understand them, and this leads to spiritual illumination.

Earlier the apostle speaks of God's abounding towards us in all wisdom, but it is the spirit of wisdom in this verse for which he prays. Does this not call for refined thinking in a spiritual way? They are not things which we can enter into in a casual way.

If we are in the state referred to in v. 15, "faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints", we shall not be attempting to take these things up in a casual way; the state referred to would give us refined sensibilities in relation to Divine things.

I judge the reason it is said to be "the *spirit* of wisdom and revelation" is to impress upon us that these things are outside the material sphere.

It is said prophetically in relation to the Lord Himself that He had resting upon Him "the Spirit of wisdom" (Isa. 11: 2).

We need these two things if we are to progress in the "knowledge of Him". It is often asked, Does the end of verse 7 refer to God or to Christ? All that is being effected in this section right down to Eph. 2: 10 is the result of the work of God, hence one is assured it is the knowledge of God which is referred to. In this chapter it is "His will"; "His grace"; "His glory"; "His power" etc.. That is why we judge it is the knowledge of God.

Would this glory be that of which the apostle speaks in 2 Cor. 4, "the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"?

Yes! All that God is pleased to reveal to us is centred in Christ, but here the apostle prays that we may be in the good of it all in our souls.

Do you think we miss a lot because we are not prepared to sacrifice other things to give time to the consideration of these great matters?

We have already said that these things are not gathered in a casual way, and we must be prepared to give ourselves "wholly to them", as Paul said to Timothy, if we desire to understand them more fully.

Would this preparation be the subjective answer to God's abounding towards us?

It would! The word in verse 18 reads in the New Translation, "the eyes of your heart". That would suggest the product of love, for it is a question of our affections.

All that we have here is on the line of giving.

It must be, God has reserved to Himself the more blessed part, for "it is more blessed to give than to receive".

It reminds one of the book of Joshua where God told them that all the land was theirs but only what they set their foot on was their possession. Title and possession, though related, are yet distinct.

I think that is what our brother meant when he spoke of the need of sacrifice if we are to possess these things. There is a statement in Obadiah that the house of Jacob will yet "possess their possessions" (v. 17). Now is the time for us to possess our possessions. It is one thing to have title to all these blessings, quite another to have them as light in our souls. It is interesting to note that the word for "knowledge" in Eph. 1: 17, is not the same word as translated "know" in v. 18. The first one is objective, but the second is subjective. The latter involves its being in one's soul as Divine light. That is possessing your possessions. "That gives us *now*, as heavenly light, what soon shall be our part".

Is it not a matter as to which we value most, spiritual things or the things of time and sense?

The apostle prayed that they may know three things — "the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power". It is not here that we may know Christ, but rather what God has effected through Him. It is this he desired them to know.

What is meant by "the hope of His calling"?

It has been helpfully pointed out that that covers what the apostle had opened out in relation to the calling in vv. 3-7. Then "His inheritance" is covered in vv. 8-14, and the third request about the power of God is covered in this prayer, "the exceeding greatness of His power". While the features of that calling are covered in those verses, I apprehend that the "hope of His calling" is its realization in glory.

It means that we shall be in association with Christ in the world to come when He administers all for the glory of God.

Do we not enjoy it in anticipation?

Yes! We should gather that we do, seeing the apostle prayed that we might know it now.

Is this in regard to "His inheritance in the saints"?

We have seen that God takes possession of His inheritance through the saints. Here is a company great enough for God to use them to take possession of His inheritance. Seeing then that we form part of that company, the apostle desires that we should know something of the inheritance for we are the ones through whom God will take possession.

What is meant by "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints"?

That statement looks on to the heading up of all things in Christ and the display of the glory in the world to come. It is "His inheritance" and I do not doubt that God will be glorified in every part of it, and He takes possession through the saints.

Would this hope be that to which Peter refers when he says, "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you"?

Peter was looking on to the world to come, and if anyone should ask us why we tread the pilgrim pathway we can tell them of the place to which we are going. Here it is more the present realization of that hope in the enjoyment of our souls. Both of course refer to the same thing, but here we have the hope of being glorified with Christ in sonship already in power in our souls by the Spirit. The word hope does not always look on to the future. We have the word used in Hebrews and that again is distinct from this. "For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope . . . by the which we draw high unto God" (Heb. 7: 19). That hope is now being realized, for we do draw nigh unto God; but here it is in view of being displayed in glory in the world to come, and this involves God's taking possession of the universe through the saints.

It is a wonderful thing that we should be seeking to interest each other in the glory of Christ. We are blessed in Him, but how blessed to have a real interest in His glory, the heading up of all things in Himself, and to view the saints now in relation to that.

We must keep in mind too what God is going to obtain in that day, His inheritance in the saints; and along with that, His pleasure in Christ in Whom all will be headed up. He is going to be glorified in every corner of the universe, when every feature of opposition will be removed and God will be fully glorified.

When the Father has gathered together all things in the Christ, the things in heaven and the things on earth, at the end of the world to come, will the result be that He will see all that He planned in His eternal purpose, handed back to Him in all its glory and perfection by the Son?

The inheritance is connected with this present order and not with the eternal state. Yet we know that what He secures for His pleasure in His people will be carried over to the eternal state.

What I meant was, that when it is handed back, it will be as God saw it in all its beauty in purpose before time began.

I am sure that when Christ does hand all back it will be as perfect as when it came from the hand of the Creator at the outset of creation. We must see that for one thousand years God will be glorified in every detail of this universe, and Christ is the One Who will bring that about.

God is going to be completely justified in His character and in every one of His ways. One has often thought that the world to come is a necessity for the public justification of the character of God and the establishment of His ways. The eternal state is a necessity for the satisfaction of His heart.

A brother now gone home often said of the world to come, "In that day, God will explain Himself". Everyone will see that everything which God has done is right and it will all be manifested in Christ.

What is the bearing of the term "eternal inheritance" in the epistle to the Hebrews?

There is a sense in which "eternal" is used to convey the thought of "as long as time lasts". The word "eternal" is used in that way six times in the Epistle to the Hebrews. They all point to the fact that what Christ has brought in now will never be succeeded by anything else. Peter speaks of the "everlasting kingdom", and there again it means Christ's kingdom will never be succeeded by another, but we know from 1 Cor. 15 that the kingdom will not go on eternally. These things have come into being and are final, they will not be succeeded by other things.

You think then that what is in this chapter does not go beyond the world to come?

The end of the chapter makes that quite clear.

Will the riches of the glory of the inheritance be seen during the reign of Christ?

They will! Now the apostle goes on to request for them a third thing, "the exceeding greatness of His power".

Looking back a moment, do you not think the riches of His glory are something beyond us, something which we cannot explain?

It does not say only "the riches of His glory", but "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints". It is not the Personal glory of God which is in view here, but the glory of His inheritance and this is something we can understand and seek to explain. If it were something beyond us, the apostle would never have prayed that saints might understand it. I apprehend it is the glory that will come into manifestation, and not the glory of Deity which will never come into manifestation.

Now "the greatness of His power" demonstrates the ability which God has to effect it all, and it is of paramount importance to note here that *God begins with Christ in death*. It is a completely new beginning of a completely new order of things which came into being only when Christ was raised from among the dead. These things were in counsel ere time began but were not brought into being till Christ was raised from the dead. Three words are used here to describe this power, each one carrying the thought of strength or might — "His power", and "The *might* of His *strength*" (N.T.); and we note they are all distinct. One may venture a free translation of them — the ability of His all-prevailing strength. The first word is the well-known "dunamis, the word from which we derive our word "dynamic" or "dynamo", and is the word translated in Eph. 3: 20 as "able", and in other places as "ability". God has given a demonstration of His ability to carry out his thoughts and He has demonstrated it by a display of His all-prevailing strength. The word translated "mighty" is from the same root as the word from which the Divine title "Almighty" is taken, it is "kratos". The third one "iskus" is the word commonly translated "strength". The resurrection of Christ was the greatest display of the mighty power of God which has ever been seen in this world.

It says that the power is *towards us*.

Yes! And it is noteworthy that in Eph. 3 it is said to be working "in us" (v. 20). Then in Eph. 6 it works out from us (v. 10). It is available for the saints in order to bring us into line with the thoughts of God

and to maintain us as standing in relation to them. As before stated God is not working on one line with Christ and on another line with us. He desires that we should know Christ as He knows Him, enjoying what He enjoys in Christ, and He is using this same power to bring it all about as light and substance in our souls.

I am reminded of the words of our Lord when He said, "the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light" (Luke 16: 8). In view of this wealth, how little we seem to value it.

One can only speak for oneself in these matters. It is there for all of us and we are wise if we give time to consider it.

Is this power to keep us in the pathway, or to keep us in the enjoyment of this sphere into which we have been called?

This power has already operated towards us as we shall see in Eph. 2. It came into evidence when Christ was raised from among the dead and has had an effect upon every one of our souls, bringing us into line with Christ according to the counsel of God.

When you said this was the greatest display of the power of God ever manifested, had you in mind that it was to give effect to the purpose of God? Others had been raised from the dead.

No doubt! But no one was raised as He was raised to the height of the glory of God.

We may not know much about the power which was manifested in creation and all that lay behind it, but now blessed to know that we have an intimate part in this far greater power, the power of resurrection. It is amazing to think that God has used that great power to get us into this blessedness.

The apostle prayed that the greatness of that power might enter into their hearts, that they might understand the potentiality of the victory of Christ, and the way it would affect the saints now and eternally.

There can be no doubt that the power put forth in raising Christ was much greater than that put forth in raising Lazarus.

Surely! For His descent and His ascent were far greater than anything which had ever happened before. Enoch went up and Elijah went up, but neither went up as this Man went up. They had not been down to where He had been, nor could they possibly go so far up.

In the death of Christ, God has been eternally glorified in His nature and attributes; His love and light are seen there and it is all displayed to us now in the power of resurrection.

I suppose this power is not limited to His resurrection for it goes on to say, "and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places".

It is comprehensive; that is why we spoke of His descent and His ascent, for He went to the bottom in order to overthrow every force of evil. The resurrection proved that the power of God was equal to the need. Having dealt with every evil force, He is raised by this mighty power in order that God may go forward to accomplish His thoughts for His own glory, and for the glory of Christ, thoughts which involve, too, the blessing of all those whom God has associated with Christ.

During the forty days in which Christ walked on this earth between His resurrection and ascension the enemy is completely out of sight. What must Satan have been thinking during those days? The Lord moved on this earth as the unchallenged Victor and He must go to the right hand of God. In that way it does go beyond the resurrection.

Yes! But it began in His resurrection for it says, "when He raised Him from the dead", that is the first thing and that power puts Him far above all. I think when the word "raised" is used for the resurrection of Christ it involves more than His physical resurrection. Resurrection is always a physical matter, but this word raised has to do with position, while it does begin with His physical resurrection. We are said to be raised but we are not yet resurrected. Brought out from among the dead, Christ is raised to this new position in Manhood in order to carry out the counsel of the Godhead according to purpose. To me that is what is involved. Often this word "raised" is used in Scripture when resurrection is not in view at all. We have pointed out in John 5 that the word "the Father *raiseth*" up the dead; is the same word as that used for the impotent man, "rise, take up thy bed". Again it is used in Acts 13, "raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus". Then further down that chapter, "raised again" (vv. 23, 33, 37). The "again" in vv. 33 and 37 ought not to be there, but the word "raised" is used in each verse and it cannot mean resurrection in each case. J.N.D. translates the first one (v.23) as "brought", which no doubt is the meaning of that word. However, I offer this for consideration as I think that while His resurrection is obviously in view, this word "raised" goes as far as setting Him at the right hand of God.

That is the statement of Eph. 2, "raised us up together", and that could hardly be resurrection. It is positional as you say.

Is this the same word as in Col. 3, "If ye then be risen with Christ"?

It is! And there again I think it is positional. It seems to me that in Acts 13, God raised up Jesus a Saviour, and after they had crucified Him, He raised Him up again as Saviour, though obviously the second time it involved His resurrection.

This raising then is not only resurrection from the dead but raising Him to a place of supreme elevation.

That is why we said the whole thing is comprehensive, raising Him from among the dead but also raising Him to the highest place in glory.

He has been put into the highest place of administration and that administration will come out through the church. Is that so?

It is! And that is why it says, "His power to us-ward". The body is His complement, and the power which put Christ there is the power which puts us there, in spirit now and actually with Him in the world to come.

All the glory of this world is corruptible but the glory established in resurrection is beyond corruption. This is what is going to abide.

There is just one thought here which shows the uniqueness of Christ in Manhood. Whilst this power operates towards us in putting us in the heavenlies as it put Him there, it does not say that it puts us at the right hand of God. This is exclusive to Him.

Does it involve that He is Son of Man there?

He is the Son of Man with the widest glory yet to be seen in the kingdom, but here it is more, for His Headship is stated in relation to all things.

Both Headship and Lordship appear to be here in the statements "Hath put all things under His feet" and "gave Him to be the Head over all things".

I was thinking of Stephen when he saw the Son of Man at the right hand of God.

That is quite right but His reign in the kingdom is more in view there. Here His Headship is more in view, controlling and directing it all, while in His place of Lordship He rules over it. He rules over

everything and influences everything for God.

Then we read that all will be brought into effect through "His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all". So we are being taught and formed in view of the place we are destined to fill when as Eve was with Adam, formed to share in his lordship and headship, we shall be with Christ sharing His Lordship and Headship. What a wonderful place the body has in the scheme of God. It is the vessel which Christ will use to fill all things, and the vessel God will use to take possession of all things in the glory of His inheritance in the saints. It well becomes us in the light of this to consider deeply the teaching of these first three chapters of Ephesians where all the light of this is to be found, so that we may be formed in it now in view of the world to come.

Ephesians 2: 1-10.

We noticed in a previous reading that the display of the power of God seen in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is said to be "towards us". We find in the verses now before us how that power has worked to fit us for association with Christ in the glory where He is. We have already pointed out that these verses still bring before us the work of God; it is from verse 11 of this chapter that the work of Christ is in view. We have before us in the section read the power of God put forth to quicken us and to create us anew, and so to bring us into line with the work which has already begun in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from among the dead.

Why do we read that we were quickened, and yet quickening is not used in relation to Christ personally?

Christ did not need to be quickened. This refers to what we were spiritually, we were dead spiritually; He was dead in relation to His body only, He is said thus to be raised; but we who were dead in trespasses and sins needed to be quickened. It is to bring us into association with Him where He is, as it goes on to say "And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus". The "together" here refers to Gentiles and Jews. We must note in this chapter how consistently the apostle puts the Gentiles before the Jews. This is what he had learned in the Roman prison, that the Jew has now no longer any superiority over the Gentile in relation to blessing. We see here again that the word "raised" in connection with our Lord, means more than resurrection; He has been raised to the highest point in glory consequent, of course, upon His resurrection from the dead.

This would be one of the omissions of Scripture which guard the uniqueness of Jesus. Personally, He did not need to be quickened.

There is one place where the word is used of our Lord, and it may we well to mention it. Peter writes, "being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit" (1 Peter 3: 18). J.N.D. renders this rightly "made alive in (the) Spirit". It is obviously His body which is referred to there.

Do you think what is said at the end of Eph. 2 is collective, but what we have in these verses is individual?

It is! We see here how God has wrought in us individually to form us into that body corporately.

At the opening of this chapter man is no longer referred to as under probation, he is dead.

We have seen that God begins with Christ in death, that is so far as effecting His purpose called "the mystery". Now we read that He begins with us in death. Christ coming forth from among the dead is the beginning of a completely new order of things, and God has made a completely new beginning with us so as to bring us into that order. Hence we have the clear statement that all springs from God's own

movements, not from any of our own.

If we put the first verse of this chapter alongside the last verse, we see something of the greatness of God, for only God could produce such results from such material. So far as men are concerned, death is the end of all activities, but it is just there God begins, and from material that was dead He fashions a habitation for Himself. This is a wonderful tribute to the glory of God.

If death shows how far down we were, this shows how far God has raised us up.

We have seen how God has been glorified in the resurrection of Christ, but we see here also how He will be glorified in that which He has done with those who have believed. He has displayed His power in raising Christ, but He has displayed also His grace and kindness in raising us, and it will be to His glory in the ages to come.

Both externally and internally this material was dominated by that which was an offence to God. It is wonderful to think that God can do anything at all with material like this. In the New Translation it reads, "according to the ruler of the authority of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience". What a victory the death of Christ has secured!

It is the working of God here, but of course based upon the death of Christ, the One Who has subdued that force in order that God might free us from its power.

Would not verse 4 assure us that it is all based upon "mercy"?

Surely! And we read that mercy had its origin in the love of God. Moreover, it is characterised by grace — the divine favour into which He has brought us — and it is all summed up in a fourth thing, "His kindness".

Underlying it all is sovereignty.

It is indeed! I am persuaded we need to be well established in the sovereignty of God to understand Christianity. It all sprang from the heart of God as purposed in eternity.

Would not this fourfold ministry of God towards us suggest how great our need was?

We do not have an account of our actions only here, we are left in no doubt about our **state**, that is, not only what we have done but what we were is clearly stated in these verses. "The spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience". Satan acquired his power over men through disobedience, and he holds that power over them today because they are still in a state of disobedience. Once obedience to God is produced in any one of us, the power of Satan over us is broken.

Why does it say in verse 5 that we are quickened together with Christ? You have already said Christ did not need to be quickened.

The word "together" does not mean that we and Christ were quickened together, but that Gentiles and Jews were "quickened together"; not separately, but together, and objectively with Christ. It has in view the formation of the body as we shall see later in the chapter; it is Gentiles and Jews together, not the company together with Christ. The apostle was speaking about the Gentiles when he described their state as "dead in trespasses and sins" and their state of "disobedience", but verse 3 speaks of the Jews. That is why we said earlier that he puts the need of the Gentiles before that of the Jews.

Why do you think that is?

He is being used by the Spirit to show us there is something now which is distinct from Judaism; the gospel is going out to every creature which is under heaven, and the Gentile is as much in view today

as the Jew.

If the Assembly is to be composed of those who were Gentiles and those who were Jews, then it must be shown what such are in their nature. Both are dependent upon the sovereignty of God, and any advantage which the Jew had over the Gentile had disappeared, for in **nature** he is as much in need of mercy as the Gentile. Both are used to form the Assembly and both are subjects of the mercy of God.

Why does he say "we" in verse 3?

"Ye" refers to the Gentiles, "we" to the Jews. What the Gentiles were by **practice** as outlined in verse 2, the Jews were by **nature** as outlined in verse 3. The Jews by practice were not what the Gentiles were, for they were not marked by the abominations of idolatry, apart from some lapses in their history. As called and enlightened by God they were nationally removed from that sort of thing, but what the apostle does say is, "and were by **nature** the children of wrath, even as others" (v. 3).

What is the import of verse 5?

You mean the word "we"? That no doubt refers to both Jew and Gentile; the Gentiles are said to be dead in sins in verse 1, and now the Jew in verse 5, and both are quickened together and brought into association with Christ.

Would not the "us" in verse 4 refer to both Gentile and Jew? Both needed the mercy of God and both have been quickened.

Is the emphasis here on practice or on state?

Both are seen together; dead would be the state, but trespasses and sins would be practice. It was because of what they were that their practice was in opposition to God. Hence in regard to the Jews it is more state than practice that is spoken of. In the first three chapters of Romans the whole human race is found to be guilty before God; that was through sins, but here state is more in view, and the need of new life if they are to be brought into line with Christ. So, whether Gentile or Jew both needed the sovereign mercy of God. Both were children of wrath by nature, though by practice they were different. Paul as a sample of that favoured race could say, "I obtained mercy" (1 Tim. 1: 13).

Would not both of these things be seen in the younger son of Luke 15, "For this my son was dead, and is alive again, he was lost, and is found"?

Yes! And it may help to see what "dead" really means. The father was not saying that his son had been physically dead and buried, but had been dead **to him** all the time he was in the far country. So it was with us, very much alive in this world (as the verse says, "ye walked") but quite dead in relation to God, and without one movement in our souls towards Him.

So this mercy reached us from God because He loved us.

What a movement! What resources! "But God, Who is rich in mercy" It seems to suggest that had God not been "rich in mercy" our case was so desperate that He could not have rescued us, but His resources were equal to the need.

Of old God had said, "I . . . will shew mercy on whom I will show mercy" (Ex. 33: 19). That is sovereignty, and is quoted in Rom. 9 to show that God is still acting in sovereign mercy through the death of Jesus.

Would you open out a little the difference between these phrases, "the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1: 7); "rich in mercy" (Eph. 2: 4), and "the riches of His glory" (Eph. 3: 16)?

For myself, I would arrange them in what I think is a moral order and put "rich in mercy" first. That has in mind the meeting of our need. "The riches of his grace" goes beyond the meeting of our need, and has in view the wonderful place of favour He has brought us into as "accepted in the Beloved". "The riches of His glory" has the display of it all in view, and Paul prays in Ephesians 3 that the saints might "according to the riches of His glory be strengthened" in view of formation for that day of glory. The "riches of His mercy" and the "riches of His grace" will be seen in display in the world to come, and God will be manifestly glorified.

Referring again to Luke 15, it would have been grace had the father made the younger son a servant, but the "riches of grace" were seen in the putting on of the best robe.

Luke, doubtless, was instructed in the Pauline teaching, and his gospel follows very closely on that line. He alone gives us the parable of the two debtors in Luke 7; the parable of the certain Samaritan in Luke 10; and the threefold parable of chapter 15, perhaps the greatest of all the parables. Taken together, these three parables aptly describe for us the ministry of reconciliation, one of the outstanding ministries committed to Paul. In chapter 7, the sins of the woman were remitted; in chapter 10, the man was constitutionally restored, and in chapter 15, the son was positionally reinstated; and we see in this epistle all these things effected in us. Some have helpfully connected chapter 7 with "grace"; chapter 10, with the "riches of His grace"; and, chapter 15 with "the glory of His grace".

It is worth noting on that line that only when we come to Luke's gospel do we have the term "salvation". It is not once mentioned in Matthew nor in Mark, and only once in John. We do not get the full thought of salvation till we reach the Pauline gospel. Salvation in its full sense is taught mainly by Paul, while it does come in as offered to men in the opening chapters of Acts. We do not say it is a term used only by Paul for it is used in many places in the New Testament, but it does seem as though it was given to Paul to show the fullness and greatness of the salvation which has reached us through the Man Christ Jesus.

We see then that we were in a state of death and the first thing we needed was life. Life is characterised by movement, and if we were to have part in this wonderful scheme we must have life to move in relation to it.

At what period in our history did this quickening take place?

We have said much about the sovereignty of God, and I doubt if we could specify a moment when quickening took place in any one of us. Some of us may be able to remember the moment when we became conscious of it, but it was a sovereign movement by God in our souls. It is very much in line with the explanation given by our Lord in John 3 in relation to new birth, "The wind bloweth where it listeth . . . and thou . . . canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit". I do not say that being born again and quickening are the same thing, but both took place in that way. I doubt if any one of us can say just when we were quickened.

The very fact that Nicodemus moved towards the Son of God showed that the Spirit of God was working in him. Nicodemus did not know that, but that was what was happening.

It comes to light as we follow him through John's gospel. In John 7, he makes a stand on what is right, and in John 19 he walked out of the company of the Pharisees forever.

The point here is not when it was done but the fact that it is done.

Did not our Lord say to Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again"?

He did! But it does not follow from that statement that he was not. I think, as our brother has said, he

was born again but did not know it, and our Lord gives the condition a name.

Could it be said that we were quickened when Christ was raised from the dead?

No! We were not in existence when Christ was raised, except as in the foreknowledge of God. The point is that the power which did raise Christ from the dead is the power which has quickened us, that we might live with Him in the scene where He lives to God. So far as that scene is concerned, the power began to operate in raising Christ, and has been operating ever since in order to bring to light, and into line with Him, every one who was marked out to be associated with Him in His place at the right hand of God.

The important thing is to see that if that life is there it will most certainly come to light.

Is this life that of which our Lord spoke in John 10, life more abundantly?

I think life "abundantly" is higher than this in its bearing. I suggest that what is in mind there is eternal life, in which we enjoy fellowship with the Father and with the Son. I am not by any means inferring that we have two kinds of life, but that life is viewed in more than one way. Here it means I have power to live in that circle where Christ lives, and which will soon come into display in the world to come. On the other hand, this life enables me to live in the conscious enjoyment of the circle where the Son lives in the presence of the Father, and that is what is meant by "life . . . more abundantly", that will not come out into display so far as I see it. We could not have one without the other of course, indeed I believe they are two sides of the life which we have.

Is not the evidence of this life seen in verse 10, "good works . . . that we should walk in them"?

This life is peculiar to this dispensation as working out something different from what came out in any other day. Two words in this chapter show that very distinctly — "with Christ".

We know from John 5, that the Father had been quickening dead persons such as Noah, Abraham and David, and that He will yet quicken Israel according to Ezek. 37; but He did not quicken them in relation to the same things nor in relation to that for which He has quickened us. We must note here that quickening has an objective side to it. Each of the men we have mentioned as being quickened was quickened to walk in a certain sphere before God, but the objective side of our quickening is "with Christ"

In referring to the wind blowing where it listeth (John 3), we can be quite sure it is under the power of the predestinating grace of God and moves in relation to it.

I am sure we cannot press that too much, for the basic principle underlying all these verses is the sovereignty of God.

It has been helpfully pointed out that new birth stands in opposition to corruption; quickening stands in opposition to death. One is more nature and the other life. We are not trying to infer that one can be born again without being quickened, we are just attempting to explain what they are as distinct in their bearing.

Would not the distinction between the Gentile and the Jew be lost "in Christ Jesus" (verse 6)?

That is what we had in mind earlier; from the end of verse 3 differentiation between the two ceases, and now it is together "with" and "in" Christ.

What is the difference between these two prepositions, "with" and "in"?

"With" has in view our position and association with Christ, and brings in His complement, His body.

"In" has in view our acceptance and standing, and shows that we are brought into all the blessing which is in Christ in His place in the glory.

We may note, in relation to what was said as to raising being more than resurrection, that we are said to be "raised up together". Is that what you had in mind?

It is! And that is why we ventured to point it out. It could not be said that we have been resurrected, but we have been raised to where He is at the right hand of God. It is clear to me that Christ being raised from among the dead means that in resurrection He has been raised to an entirely new position, and now we have been raised to that same position with the exception that He is the One actually at the right hand of God. We are associated with Him there.

Some of the saints may never experience resurrection but every saint associated with Christ has been raised.

Does salvation mean a change of place?

Rather, I think, a change of condition, but it does mean that those who are saved today are brought into a heavenly position. We are brought into a new place in a new condition suited to it.

We have before stated that "the heavenlies" conveys the thought better than "heavenly places". It is more characteristic.

Where are these heavenlies?

Where Christ is! It is more a question of where these blessings are than what they are.

We read in Hebrews that Christ has gone into heaven itself, and yet again that He has passed through the heavens. What is meant by all these statements?

If you look them up in their settings you will find that they are all contrasting statements. "Into heaven itself" (Heb. 9: 24) stands in contrast to Aaron's entering the holy places made with hands, that is on earth. "Passed through the heavens" (Heb. 4: 14 New Trans.) means that as Aaron passed through the door of the tabernacle, then through the veil into the presence of God, Christ has passed through the heavens themselves and is in the presence of God. "Far above all heavens" (Eph. 4: 10), means that Christ has gone beyond the created sphere right into the presence of God Himself. Contrasted with the depths to which He went, He has ascended to the highest place, beyond the created sphere, in order that He might fill all things.

What is involved in being made to "sit together", or as the New Translation puts it, "made (us) sit down together" (v. 6)? Is it true that we are in the heavenlies today?

It is true! We are not yet there physically, but in the apprehension of our souls by the Spirit. "Sitting" carries the thought that we are now in possession of the place and privilege, and have the present enjoyment of it in our souls. "Sitting together" in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus indicates the solving of all the problems between Jew and Gentile as we read further down.

There could not be any other way for the Gentiles and the Jews to be put together, for had a Jew taken any other way it would have been apostasy from the nation. We shall see in a later Scripture how clearly that difficulty has been solved.

All this is in preparation for the working out of the administration of the mystery which is referred to later. The word translated "dispensation" is a word which means a "house-law". If I come into your house I must conduct myself there according to your ordering of your own house, and we are to see how both Gentiles and Jews are to conduct themselves today as having part in this new order. As a

Gentile I have no right to attempt to tell a Jew he ought to order his life according to my thoughts, nor must a Jew come to me and tell me that I must order my life according to his. "In Christ Jesus" Gentile idolatry and Jewish laws have all passed away, and we both are brought into a new order with entirely new conditions, to which we both have to bow, as verse 10 says, "that we should walk in them".

Would you tell us what is meant by "the ages to come" (verse 7)? Do you limit that to the thousand years or does it go on for ever? To me the term seems to go beyond the thousand years; do you think it is limited to that?

I do! According to J.N.D. the only word he could find in this epistle where the day of God (or the eternal state, as we call it in contrast to time) is referred to, is at the end of Eph. 3: 21, where he translates it "unto all generations of the age of ages". The ages to come means, I think, the age in which will be secured all that came into being for God in the ages of time. We saw in chapter 1 that the "fulness of times" means a gathering together of many things in the working of God, and this word "ages" has the same force, so far as I see.

Do you think that what God has wrought in the space of two thousand years He is going to display in the space of one thousand years?

In so far as heavenly things are concerned, yes! But we must not forget that He will head up all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are upon earth. The display is the day of the kingdom reign of Christ, when as Head, Lord and King He will influence and control all things for the pleasure of God and fill everything with the glory of God. We rather think in the eternal day it will not be what God will display of Himself and His ways with men, but as the fruit of His ways and His counsel springing out of His purpose He will have secured that which He set His heart upon, and we shall be there to enjoy God Himself throughout His eternal day.

To whom will this display be given in the world to come?

Men on earth, and principalities and powers in heaven, all created and intelligent beings!

It may help to say that whilst administration and display characterise the world to come, the day of God is marked by dwelling, satisfaction, and contemplation.

We must remember that in the day of God all things will be new. Persons brought to God now will be there, carried over into the day of God, but all else will be new.

Just a word on these other verses, "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God". These verses assure us again that man in himself is absolutely hopeless, and if we have been brought into blessing, it is all of God. Even the faith to believe was given to us of God; not of works, not even a work of faith put to our account; if we have evidenced faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, God gave us the faith to do so.

Do the works of verse 10 flow out as the result of that?

Yes! "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God had before ordained that we should walk in them". We have earlier said that God uses the power which He employed to raise Christ from among the dead, to quicken us and to created us anew; that we who once walked according to the course of this world, dominated by Satan and thus disobedient, should now in obedience to His will produce good works and thus show the magnitude of His workmanship in every one of us.

What are these good works?

Works of which God is the source and which are for His glory. These works could not possibly be those of Gentile darkness, nor are they the dead works of Judaism; they are the reproduction of Christ in our lives, the manifestation of the new life we have as the result of quickening. The exhortations which come before us in the last three chapters would give us an outline of what these works are. It is striking to read that not only were we foreordained in Christ Jesus, but the works which are the fruit of that new life were also foreordained that we should walk in them. As we do so it will become abundantly evident that God has used His power to begin a new work in us, and thus we shall be living witnesses to the wonderful place of favour God has brought us into, in that already Christ is manifested in us in testimony.

Ephesians 2: 11-22.

In the opening of this epistle we have been engaged with the statements concerning the purpose of God, His election and predestination in Christ before time began. In giving effect to His purpose we have seen that He begins with Christ in death; raising Him out from among the dead and setting Him in the highest place in glory. In the beginning of this chapter we saw that the power which God used to raise Christ out from among the dead is the power that has operated towards us, quickening and creating us in Christ Jesus. Hence in regard to the truth of the mystery, Christ Himself being raised and glorified, the company which is called "the body", His complement, has also been brought into being and is now associated with Him as the body of which He is the Head. We have noted that up to verse 11 of this chapter all is the fruit of the working of God Himself. In the section which is now before us we have the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, so that on our side we may be fitted for the work which God is effecting. We shall see that the two main features of the work of Christ, redemption and reconciliation, are the fruit of the death of Christ. Everything presented to us in this epistle has its origin in the death and resurrection of Christ, not in His life. We are not including purpose, but the elements of that purpose all coming into being when Christ was raised. So far as I can see there does not appear to be any reference to the life of Christ in the whole of this epistle, all comes to light in His resurrection, and His place at the right hand of God in glory.

I suppose reconciliation, as presented in Col. 1, is somewhat wider, but here it seems to be brought in only in relation to those who are members of the body. Would that have the mystery in view?

It would! At the beginning of this chapter we are said to be dead in trespasses and sins, necessitating the quickening power of God, and we now learn from these verses that while God does move sovereignly in quickening, He does it righteously. This necessitated the death of Christ; the blood of Christ alone enabled God to so move in righteousness.

We not only have this work described as necessary for the blessing of man but to enable God to effect His purpose.

That is the point we ought to note in this passage; the condition seen in chapter 1, that we should be holy and without blame, is effectuated as the fruit of the work of Christ.

Why does the apostle go back to the Gentiles here when, as we saw in the previous verses, he had already outlined the need of both Jew and Gentile?

He was writing to Gentiles and so once again he puts them first. The verses higher up show what God has done with both Jew and Gentile sovereignly, while these verses now go on to show how the work has been effected through redemption. It bears out what we have said, God working sovereignly but all based upon the redemptive work of Christ. It will be an added feature of God's glory in the world to

come. It is important to see that God will not work sovereignly unless He can do so righteously. He describes their condition again to show the absolute necessity of the blood of Christ.

Their condition mentioned here is, "without Christ . . . without God", and if they were to be brought nigh dispensationally, the death of Christ was an absolute necessity. It was one thing for it to be in the mind of God, but here we see the work by which it has been accomplished.

When the circumcision had its standing before God, that is the circumcision made with hands, the Gentiles were right outside the circle of divine blessing which had been established in Israel.

Although the children of Israel had this particular advantage of the atheistic Gentiles, for that is how they are represented here, yet they themselves were very limited in their access to God. Now, through this special work, they have access to God in a much fuller way than ever before. Even for Israel it was a new and living way, as we are told in Hebrews 10.

The apostle is indicating the state in which these Gentiles were, outside the polity of Israel, that is what the word "commonwealth" means. It may have seemed in that day that God was very arbitrary in His dealing, but now He shows that something very far better is in mind, and in this better thing He does not give the Jew any priority over the Gentile.

We read higher up that the Jew by nature was subject to wrath even as the Gentile, though ceremonially the Jew was near and the Gentile far off. J.N.D., in one of his notes says the word translated "without" in verse 12, is one of the strongest negatives which could be used. It means "wholly apart from". Two places where this word is used will show its bearing. In Romans 3: 21 we read, "But now the righteousness of God **without** the law is manifested". The law has absolutely nothing to do with the righteousness by faith. The other place I refer to is in Hebrews 9: 28, "and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time **without** sin unto salvation". His coming again has nothing whatever to do with sin. So here with the Gentiles, they had no part in the blessing of Israel whatsoever.

It is not only what the Gentile was morally, but what he was positionally which is in view here; yet both Jew and Gentile need the same work if they have to do with God in Christianity.

Would this not emphasize the great grace which had been shown to the Gentiles, who had no claim to blessing at all?

It would! The Gentiles are not brought into blessing by becoming Jewish proselytes, this wonderful blessing of both Jew and Gentile can only be effected "in Christ Jesus". "In Christ Jesus" is as far from the Jewish position as from the Gentile in all his low moral condition.

Why does the apostle use these two terms "in Christ Jesus" and "the blood of Christ"?

"In Christ Jesus" is a Pauline term used by him when speaking of Christ in glory. When we have the single title "Christ" it is, as we know "the Anointed", and I think embraces His Headship. It is the blood of the Christ here, the Anointed of God Who has shed His blood for us, but we are taken into favour "in Christ Jesus", the One Who is glorified. It is not only the blood of Jesus but as the Anointed of God He takes both Jew and Gentile up together and forms them into one body. As the Anointed of God He came with His hands filled with blessing for men, as we may see in Luke 4 and, while He was rejected, He comes forth in resurrection and as made Lord and Christ He still has blessing in His hands for the sons of men.

It is well to emphasize the new position. Gentiles are not brought into the blessings of Israel, but both Jew and Gentile are brought into an entirely new position. "Brought nigh" is something far in advance of anything offered to Israel. We must hold to the fact that "in Christ Jesus" is positional. The Jew

needed precisely the same gospel as the Gentile if he was to be brought nigh. That is what is in view in verse 14, "For He is our peace". This is peace between Jew and Gentile, where all racial and religious distinctions have vanished, for "in Christ Jesus" all that has been abolished. The wonderful thing now is, "Who hath made both one". The question is asked in Romans 3: 1, "What advantage then hath the Jew?" and the next verse answers, "Much every way"; but any advantage which the Jew had, positionally, is completely abolished "in Christ Jesus". The very best that God had for men in the Old Testament was ministered to the Jew, but He has now something far better and brings in the Gentile to share in it. As Gentiles they never knew the grace of Jehovah as their God, but now they know the "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". If this teaching had been apprehended what a lot of error would have been saved in Christendom, for the great sin of Christendom has been first to ignore the teaching of the Spirit, and then to attempt to show that Christianity has sprung from Judaism, whereas it is something entirely new.

If this access is to the Father, as we read in verse 18, then it must be far beyond anything the Jew had enjoyed previously, and it must involve this new position, for whatever advantages the Jews had they never had access to the Father.

Then do we not have the saints prepared to withstand the attack against Christianity which Satan would use, for no sooner had God introduced this new order than Satan used the old order to attack Christianity? So here we have a complete answer to all Satan's attacks.

If God is to be known in regard to that which He has unfolded here, then He must be known in the intimacy of love as Father. It has been rightly said that the access here is commensurate with the revelation. The revelation of God as Father introduced an entirely new way of access, and that way of access involved an entirely new position.

Why does it say in verse 15 "in His flesh"?

That refers to His death! It means that He came into Manhood, but came into it that He might die. He did not, we may say could not, effect this in His life, but He has effected it in His death. Not only has He removed the barrier between Jew and Gentile, He has annulled death and brought something entirely new into being in His resurrection. Both Jew and Gentile needed reconciling and He has reconciled both in one body unto God. The barrier between Jew and Gentile is removed, and the barrier between them both and God is also removed, for in reconciliation He has brought both to God. He not only removes the barrier but removes the cause of it, for "in Christ Jesus" there is now no room for enmity. All that was ended in the death of Christ on the cross.

Reconciliation in this passage refers more to our state than to our guilt. In that state of enmity of heart we could never have known what it was to be brought nigh to God. It involves the removal of all moral distance between our souls and God. Afar off speaks of distance, but we who once were so are now brought nigh.

We have life in contrast to death as the result of God's working, and nearness in contrast to distance through the work of Christ.

Is reconciliation linked with new creation?

We saw clearly in a former reading that reconciliation subserves new creation. God reconciles us, not to put us back into any former standing, but to bring us into something entirely new.

Why does the annulling of the enmity stand related to His death, and reconciliation stand related to His cross?

I have thought that when the cross of Christ is so named it signifies the end of all that is offensive in the sight of God; when it says "He died for us" His love is in view; when we read of the shedding of His blood, it is redemption effected both for us and for God. In the cross we have the ending, for the pleasure and glory of God, of the evil state that is in man.

Is the enmity here between Jew and Gentile?

It is! But the state in us which caused it has been slain in His cross.

Would there be a distinction between "He is our peace" and the statement now "making peace"?

The verses are still dealing with that which subsisted between Jew and Gentile. Had our national status been continued we might have been at variance for ever, but when a Jew accepts Christ and a Gentile accepts Christ, He becomes our peace. The result is that we are formed into the new man where that which caused the enmity cannot come. He made, or formed in Himself, "one new man".

Is the new man what we are by new birth?

No! It is an abstract term standing here in contrast to both Jew and Gentile; it is a completely new order of man taking character from Christ. Into this "new man" every Christian has been brought, that which caused the enmity has gone, and we are found together in a new company where each one takes character from Christ. We are, of course, formed into this individually, but all who are thus formed are part of this "one new man". We read in Ephesians 4 that every one of us has put on this new man, but here I think it refers to the whole company as being so characterized. It is practical in chapter 4 but characteristic here.

Is this word "new" the word used for something which has not been seen before?

It is! What is stressed here is that it is something of an entirely new character. The cross put an end to all national distinctions and not one of them has been revived in the resurrection of Christ. Something entirely new is brought into being and has in view the working out of the mystery in practice. Now on the basis of this, Christ is preaching peace to both Gentile and Jew. Those who were afar off were Gentiles, and those who were near were Jews. This appears to be a quotation from Isaiah 57: 19, "Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the LORD". While we would not search in the Old Testament for the mystery, we have verses such as this where we can now see that God had this blessing in mind. Notice how He puts the Gentile before the Jew even in Isaiah. We might have pointed out that all down this chapter in Ephesians the Gentile is mentioned before the Jew. How the great apostle had moved into the truth of this as the vessel used of God to make it known to us. At the outset of his service the order is "to the Jew first and also to the Gentile" but here, in the Roman prison, where he is being used by the Spirit to explain the truth of the mystery, he no longer puts the Jew first. It may be, as we have already mentioned, to guard against any thought of introducing Judaism into this great truth of the mystery.

We read in verse 15 that He has made us one new man in Himself, while in verse 16 we read that He has reconciled us both to God, Would "in Himself" involve the new conditions of which we have been speaking?

It would! While in reconciliation we are brought to God, we are brought to God in Him. This, as we saw in a former reading, means "new creation". Only as we are "in Christ" can we be holy and without blame, and Christ has made us this so that God can go on working out that which is for the delight of His heart of love.

Will you please say a little more about reconciliation?

Reconciliation stands in contrast to enmity. The necessity of reconciliation springs from the fact that something is existing between two persons which keeps them at a distance from one another or, as here, at enmity with one another. The cause of this estrangement must be removed if reconciliation is to take place. We know the error of saying or singing, "our God is reconciled, His pardoning voice I hear". We needed to be reconciled, not God, for all the enmity was on our side. Christ has effected this reconciliation, having completely removed the enmity. In Luke 15 when the younger son is restored to happy relationship with his father, we have about the best picture of reconciliation in the Scripture. It has been helpfully pointed out that of the two debtors in Luke 7, offences are in view; in Luke 10 the state which caused the offences is more in view; both are seen together in chapter 15 in regard to the younger son. We read, "For this my son was dead, and is alive again", which answers to chapter 10; "he was lost and is found", answers to chapter 7. We have the component parts of reconciliation seen in the forgiveness of sins, the removal of our evil state, and the new position seen in the younger son as he is fitted for the presence of the father and the father is rejoicing over him.

In line with our reading today, the elder brother also needed that reconciliation.

He did! For he was as far away from the father as the younger son. He may not have gone so far on his feet, but he was as far away in his heart.

In the Old Testament days the access was limited as we clearly see in the tabernacle system, but there is no limit to this access today and it is to God as Father, far greater than any approach to Jehovah.

Does the thought of sonship underlie this thought of access?

It would do! For we are told it is by one Spirit, and that to the Father. The great point to notice here is that we are not only brought into a place of privilege but we are brought to God Himself. God is known to us as Father, and in the blessedness of that relationship and in the intimacy of affection, worship, I doubt not, is in view. The assembly is the worshipping company and the Spirit is the power.

Why does it say it is "by one Spirit"?

To show the unity of it. It is to guard against the thought that the Jew may have a right of access which a Gentile does not have, but both have access by the same power, "one Spirit".

This access is so immensely blessed that it engages the whole Godhead; we have each Person mentioned in this verse.

If each Divine Person is concerned in this access, it is that our sense of intimacy might be in relation to Them all, and that is seen in the following verses. We are said to compose the household of God, an holy temple in the Lord, and a habitation of God through the Spirit. In this chapter we have the work of God outlined from verse 1 to verse 10, the work of Christ from verse 11 to verse 17, and the work of the Spirit from verse 18 to the end. All the Persons of the Godhead are seen in unity working for the delight of Their own heart. It is the Spirit Who brings us into the realization and the enjoyment of it all, and one feels it is all for the pleasure of the Godhead more than for our blessing. How wonderful that it is so.

I have been interested of late in three thoughts which seem to be in line with what you have just said. It is recorded for us that God is love and I have related that to the household of God -all His care, and solicitude, and affection. It is also recorded that God is light, and I have related that to the temple — the shrine of Divine light. Again it is recorded that God is Spirit, and that I have related to the habitation of God in the Spirit. What is revealed of God is to be known and responded to and enjoyed as the result of this access. That is why it was said earlier that the approach is commensurate with the

revelation. God in earlier days made Himself known as the Almighty and as Jehovah, but to us He has made Himself known as Father; hence the access to Him is in the light of that revelation. Now that we know God as Father there is no limit, for the Father is the very source of all.

We are no longer "strangers and foreigners". The meaning of the word "strangers" is, "we were not born there"; the meaning of "foreigners" is, "we do not live there". This has to do with the commonwealth of Israel mentioned in verse 12, for as Gentiles we were not born into it, and never belonged to it. Now, however, we do belong to this greater sphere of blessing.

Will you please say more about the household of God?

In regard to the statements, "household" and "habitation", they are both said to be "of God", suggesting that there are congenial conditions in which God can dwell.

It is striking that the only other place where this word occurs is in Revelation 18: 2, "Babylon . . . the habitation of devils". In Ephesians we see the conditions in which God can dwell, and in Babylon there are conditions in which devils can dwell.

Why is the temple said to be "in the Lord" and the house "in the Spirit" (N.T.)?

The temple looks on to the day of display in the kingdom when Christ comes forth vested with universal supremacy. The temple will diffuse the light in the world to come, but before that day dawns the saints already form that dwelling place "in the Spirit". You remember the city takes a temple character, "And I saw no temple therein; for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it" (Rev. 21: 22). While not needing a temple, the city itself is of temple character for the diffusion of the light. In the meanwhile, God dwells in the company "in the Spirit".

In regard to the habitation we may see a picture of it in the construction of the tabernacle. When Moses had ordered all according to the pattern shown him in the mount, the cloud of glory filled the house. This happened again with the temple of Solomon, and it will happen again with the temple of Ezekiel.

This habitation has come about as the fruit of the working of each Divine Person, as we have had before us in this chapter. It is all of God, hence the right conditions are there in which God can dwell.

We have the authority of the Lord connected with this. We may speak of temple light but it is in the Lord. We shall know nothing of this intimacy unless we are walking subject to His authority. It is so easy to slip into a sort of hyper-spirituality without recognising that spiritual things in their holiness can only be received and enjoyed and practised as our hearts are held in subjection to Christ as Lord. It is in the Lord we are fitly framed together.

Ephesians 3: 1-13.

It may be well to state that this chapter is a parenthesis in which the truth of the mystery is opened out in detail. We have considered the work of the Godhead in chapter two, where we saw how each Divine Person operated to produce a company composed of both Gentiles and Jews, which company today forms the habitation of God in the Spirit. It is obvious that chapter four morally follows, with the exhortation to walk worthy of this calling, but in between we have this great chapter which shows that not only is the habitation of God formed altogether as the result of these divine workings, but also that the Gentiles are now a "joint-body" (New Trans.) with the Jews, but in entirely new conditions. Another point of importance is the precedence Paul gives to the Gentiles in this epistle. You will remember that in Acts 20 when speaking to these Ephesian saints he says, "Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks", but now from the Roman prison he describes himself as "the prisoner of Jesus

Christ for you Gentiles". We have before noted how in this epistle he consistently puts the Gentiles before the Jews, and it would seem that as a vessel he was now fully formed in the truth of the mystery, and hence used by the Spirit to communicate this great truth to the saints.

It seems that from the moment the Jews closed the temple doors to Paul, God closed the door to the Jews.

The use of this word "nations" — as it is in the New Translation — shows that this precious truth is for all the Gentiles.

Yes! For we note when the word "nation" is used in relation to the Jews it is in the singular. When in the plural, as here, it means the Gentiles. So he goes on to speak of the administration — as the word "dispensation" ought to be rendered — and emphasizes, "towards you".

In the first chapter we read that this truth of the mystery was counselled by God; in chapter two, that it was brought into effect by the working of the Godhead; and now the administration of it, as outlined in chapter three, is given to the apostle to pass on to us. Had these Ephesian saints enquired as to how Paul had received this truth, he would have said that it was a distinct revelation from God.

Would he have this given to him while in the deserts of Arabia?

Well! he tells us in the epistle to the Galatians that God revealed His Son in him. Who can tell how much God had made known to him earlier, when for three days he was blind? He may have seen much of a spiritual nature when he could not see things of a material nature. Have we not noticed that, taking the full scope of the particular ministry committed to him, it consisted of four divine revelations? He may not have received them all together; indeed we know he did not. He obviously received the truth of the gospel first, which as we have remarked, was the revelation of the Son of God in him; this he clearly states to the Galatians. Then he seems to have received the truth of the coming of the Lord for His saints, just when it was needed for the sorrowing Thessalonians. Also he received from the Lord the truth relating to the supper, which comes to light when he is writing his first letter to the Corinthians. Nor can we doubt that he had the truth of the mystery when speaking to the Ephesians in Acts 20, he said "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God".

We may wonder what he did receive during those three days. The result is soon seen for we read, "And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God" (Acts 9: 20). He learned that God had reached finality in the Son, for in Him is the accomplishment of all God's purpose.

Is the revelation mentioned here greater than the thought of the habitation in the previous chapter?

It is all part of the mystery. In chapter two, he has outlined what is fundamentally necessary if the mystery is to be brought into being, but in this chapter he is showing that this work was done in order to form this "joint-body". In chapter two we see the work needed to bring it into being, but chapter three is to enable us to work it out in practice, hence we read here of "the fellowship of the mystery". The word "fellowship" is really "administration".

We saw in chapter one that it was all in the mind of God before time began; in chapter two, that the gospel was used to bring it all about; and in this chapter we read why the gospel was announced to us — to effect the mystery.

If, as we read in verse five, this revelation was given to all the apostles, why is it that Paul is chosen so uniquely to be the one to bring this administration to the saints?

Because he was particularly the minister to the uncircumcision. It is Paul who tells us here that Peter

and the others had the revelation of the mystery, but he alone had the administration of it as the minister to the Gentiles. He was specially called to carry this truth to the Gentiles.

Would it be that this truth lay so near to his heart, that he can speak of "my intelligence" (v. 4 N.T.)? One would not say a derogatory word about the other apostles and prophets, but it does seem that this matter lay so near to the heart of Paul that his intelligence of it outstripped that of all the others.

It is obvious that while Peter was the first to have the truth of the assembly given to him when he confessed the Lord as "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16: 16), he did not have the light of the assembly as it was given to the apostle Paul. Both had this truth by revelation, for the Lord said that to Peter, but we have to see that while the mystery was made known to all the apostles and prophets, Paul was the only one who received it by a direct revelation from Christ in glory. This revelation was not something which might have been gleaned from places like the prophecy of Isaiah, it came directly from Christ in glory and the truth of it has been administered and brought into action. The administration means it is in function today.

While this wonderful truth was revealed to Paul as a vessel, it is yet something which we can take in, for by the Spirit we can understand these things.

That would take us back to chapter two, where we saw how, as vessels, we were prepared to be brought into and to take in this truth. We could hardly expect Peter to say that the Gentiles should be "fellow-heirs, and of the same body", but Paul now gives us this truth in its completeness and fullness.

This matter of revelation has not continued beyond Paul. If the truth of the mystery is out, as it certainly is here, then no other revelation is needed in relation to it. If therefore any pretend to have received a fresh revelation, they are not moving within the orbit of Scripture.

It is interesting to see that in order to have this truth given free from all other encumbrances, the apostle is apprehended in the very centre of Judaism and transferred to the centre of the Gentile world, so that in the Roman prison he writes freely of this wonderful truth. It took some time to draw him away in heart from the Jewish synagogue, but we see him in this epistle right outside of that system and we see him as the vessel giving us in such fullness the truth of the gospel of the glory. We know he had already been teaching this truth, but now he is used by the Spirit to pass it on in all its fullness in writing.

What is the mystery?

"That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel" (v. 6). The Gentiles did not come into this under Jewish control or by Jewish teaching, they stand in an equal status with them, not of course in Judaism but in Christianity. That is why we read in chapter two of the middle wall of partition being broken down and both being reconciled in one body. All that the Jews were nationally has gone in the cross of Christ, and this new body comprising both Gentiles and Jews, apart altogether from Judaism, has been formed.

All this has been brought about through the Gospel, the glad tidings, which God is using to establish every thought of His heart. We are born again by the Gospel, quickened by it, reconciled by it, and we receive the mystery, too, through the Gospel.

To what does this promise in verse 6 refer? Has it any connection with the promises in the Old Testament?

I do not think it refers to anything which God had promised to Israel, but it is that which is in promise today, and is held out to men in the Gospel. The promise lies in the same sphere in which the mystery

lies, in Christ Jesus. That would exclude all Old Testament promises, except in so far as they may have looked on to a time of blessing by God.

We must remember that Paul received his Gospel from heaven, and it is effecting everything for God. At the end of the epistle to the Romans we read of Paul's particular ministry in these terms, "my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery" (Rom. 16: 25). We are in the habit of preaching the gospel according to the need of men, but there is such a thing as presenting the gospel according to the revelation of the mystery. When facing a company with some unconverted present, do we look at them according to their needs, or as potential material in relation to the mystery?

We have only to follow the record of Paul's preachings to learn how he spoke to each company according to their need, and no doubt he had preached in an advanced way to these Ephesians.

What is meant by the term mystery?

That which was hid in God. It is something which can only be known when God graciously reveals it and gives certain ones power to understand it. We read in 1 Cor. 2: 9, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him". We have the whole scope of natural intelligence here, and it has been pointed out that man acquires his knowledge in three ways, either observation — the eye; or inculcation — the ear; or intuition — the heart. When it comes to the things of God these human abilities are of no use whatsoever, but God has given to us of His Spirit, and this is the power by which we can understand divine secrets, and the mystery of the Gospel is perhaps the greatest of them all.

In verse 7 the apostle tells us he was the minister of this by "the effectual working of His power". He did not have the truth of this mystery merely as a scholar to store it up in his heart. It was something which was to be known by the saints and he had been formed as a vessel to minister it.

I suppose this is the effectual working of the power of God.

It is! and by it He has formed a vessel, competent and willing to suffer in view of the ministry being carried out. He speaks of his gift as "the gift of grace" but that gift can only come into display by the power of God.

Is this the same power by which Christ was raised from the dead?

It is! For all that is being effected today is by the power of God.

It is important to see that while we are entirely dependent upon God for grace in gift, that gift cannot come into operation to the glory of God apart from His own power.

It is well worth noting that while the apostle is speaking in this epistle of the great ministry given to him and his exercise of it, he yet regards himself as "less than the least of all saints". He says that anything which has been effected by him in his ministry was effected by the working of the power of God.

Would this gift of grace be something which was given specially to Paul?

It was a special gift to him in view of this ministry. There are two parables which have the thought of gift in view; the parable of the pounds in Luke 19, and the parable of the talents in Matt. 25. In the first all receive alike, but in Matt. there are five talents, two or one. That is what we have here. All have gift in some measure, but here are special gifts for special occasions. Paul had the special work of administering the mystery and had a special gift to do so, but the vessel was reduced in order that the ministry might be enhanced in the minds of the saints.

In Ephesians 4 we have those two things brought before us, "but unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (v. 7). and again, "And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers" (v. 11).

The two things are distinguished. Obviously a special gift is in mind here, though he does call it "the gift of grace", for he acknowledges it to be of the free favour of God.

Did God reserve this truth till this time so that the Gentiles would come into blessing?

It was reserved until the moment that Christ was risen and in glory, and the Spirit of God was operating in this world. Had Christ sent out this truth by the apostles while He was on the mount of Olives, everything effected would have been in relation to the mount of Olives, but this truth is not only dependent upon His being raised, it depended also upon His being in the glory. So He said to them, "tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24: 49). What was to be effected stood in relation to Christ in glory.

You have emphasized the mystery of the gospel. Does that involve the church?

It certainly does! For here the church is spoken of in these terms, "fellow-heirs, and of the same body". The reason we are emphasizing "the mystery of the gospel" is that there are other mysteries. We read in Matt. 13 of the mysteries of the kingdom for instance, but that is not what we have here. It may give some fundamental features of it, but this mystery is that which was given particularly to the apostle Paul.

You would not say that the gospel is a mystery?

No! the mystery is that which is embedded in the gospel. So he tells us here, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (v. 8). The gospel is being used to bring this body into being. Whatever advantages the Jew may have had, he did not know of the unsearchable riches of the Christ.

Why did Paul speak of himself as "less than the least of all saints", yet in another place say, "I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles" (2 Cor. 11: 5)?

In Corinthians he is comparing himself with other apostles, but here he has the glory of Christ in view and he makes nothing of himself. Again, when he is comparing himself with his contemporaries in Judaism he says, "And profited in the Jews' religion above many mine equals" (Gal. 1: 14). In Judaism he was at the top, in Christianity he goes right to the bottom.

There are three statements in which he speaks of himself. Chief of sinners; not meet to be called an apostle; and, less than the least of all saints. He himself said all these things of himself, and it seems that the further he progressed in these glorious things the less he thought of himself. I do not know of anything more calculated to humble us than an apprehension of the glory of Christ.

He had told these Ephesian elders that he served the Lord in all humility of mind and with many tears. That is the attitude of a man who laboured in presenting the truth of the unsearchable riches of the Christ.

I suppose the meaning of "the unsearchable riches of Christ" is that they are inexhaustible and so beyond the finite mind to encompass. Now he goes on to say that he desired that all may see, or as it is better rendered, "to enlighten all (with the knowledge of) what is the administration of the mystery" (New Trans.).

What is involved in the term, "the unsearchable riches of Christ"?

That there are sufficient resources in the Christ to bring this all about. Here it involves that there are sufficient resources to bring the idolatrous Gentiles and the believing Jews into a place of blessing, the standard of which is Christ in glory. Think of riches of grace like that! When we read of the riches of mercy, the need of man is in view. When we read of the riches of grace, the glory of God is in view, and is seen in the place of favour to which He has brought the saints, after meeting their need in the riches of His mercy.

Do not the unsearchable riches of the Christ involve the necessary resources to carry into fruition the whole purpose of God?

God is quite capable of doing this, and Christ is His resource. Hence, it is Christ Who is preached in the gospel for He is able to bring all into divine favour, that is all who believe on Him. So we go on to the administration of the mystery. Without being pedantic about these words we may point out again that this word rendered "administration" or "fellowship" means — "the houselaw". This is the truth which governs in the divine circle today, and as men are enlightened according to it, they are able to move in relation to the mystery in a practical way. If then God was working in Paul to bring the truth of it to the saints, now, in the light of it, we work it out in practice. Again he tells us it was "hidden throughout the ages in God, Who has created all things" (New Trans.). If I were asked as to why God created the universe, I should point to this verse as the answer.

Say a little more about the houselaw.

We are not governed in our walk today by the law of Sinai or by any of its ceremonies, but by the truth which comes to us in the mystery.

Say a little more about why God created the universe.

Well, we read about the houselaw of the mystery which was hid in God Who created all things (there is doubt about the words "by Christ Jesus" in verse 9). So we read of God Who created the universe having this thought in His heart and it was to effect the mystery that He created the universe.

You mean that this creation is like a platform upon which God is working all this out!

That appears to be the meaning of verse 9.

God had an eternal purpose in mind and in the creation of the universe He prepared the platform upon which He is working it out. This carries us back to Genesis 1. Here we learn that He prepared this platform for the working out of all His ways and has brought into the time scene the Second Man in Whom that purpose was established. The work of Christ upon the cross has given God a righteous foundation to go forward with His purpose, and now with Christ in glory, God is securing in Christ the men who were in mind in that purpose. Very shortly He will display Christ Who has fully vindicated Him in every detail of that purpose; then, according to the words of Peter, He will dissolve the platform (that is the heavens and the earth), because He has secured all for which He created it. He will bring in a new heaven and new earth as the eternal home of that which He has secured for the delight of His own heart.

So that if the would come, and also eternity, are still in prospect what we have today is, "To the intent that *now* unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God" (v.10). Angels can see in the church today the wonderful resources of God. They are finding out in this way what was in the mind of God and why the universe was created. It has come to light in the Assembly.

If we have what is provisional in verse 9 — this creation — we have that which is eternal in verse 11

— the end for which they were created. "According to (the) purpose of the ages" or, as rendered in the authorised version, "eternal purpose". Angels are learning that while the Assembly is the last vessel which God brings into being, it was the first thing He had in His mind. It is "according to the eternal purpose", not according to His dispensational ways. So that no matter what has come in through sin, God has not been thwarted in His eternal purpose.

The angels are learning of the infinite resources of God, and that in spite of all that has happened in this world, He has produced a vessel in which every thought of His heart has been secured. I do not doubt that all that is learnt of the wisdom of God will be learnt through the Assembly, for it is the vessel which is used for the display of Christ both today and in the world to come.

Would these principalities and powers include the fallen angels?

I do not think so! It would be the beings who have ever moved for the accomplishment of the will of God.

We pass from the vessel through whom this truth was given to the vessel which is the subject of that truth. It is Paul the vessel in verses 7, 8, 9 but it is the vessel formed by that truth in verse 10. As the fruit of this work the truth of what the church really is has been brought out so that it may be worked out by those who compose it.

The saints therefore are to know how to conduct themselves in the light of this truth. We do not have the Gentiles attempting to introduce the myths of idolatrous worship, nor do we have the Jews attempting to introduce the ceremonial law; in the church all are to be governed by the truth of this mystery, moving together in the same circle, possessing the same blessings and enjoying a liberty in approaching God which was never known before. It is this note he seems to end with so far as this unfolding is concerned. "In Whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him". Such a thing was not known to the Jews, much less to the Gentiles, but it is the privilege of all who have part in this joint-body. We know that both heathen myths and Jewish ordinances have been introduced by some, so that the truth of the mystery has been entirely lost to them. Let us see to it that we keep clear of every element that would rob us of this truth, and continue not only in the light of this wonderful truth but in the practice of it. It is in function today.

Ephesians 3: 14-21

We come now to the prayer of the apostle in relation to the great truth of the mystery which he had been unfolding. Having communicated to the saints this truth, as the vessel who had been called and enlightened and commissioned to minister it, he now turns to prayer in order that a right state may be given them of God to understand it. Once more we note that while a vessel may minister truth in all its clarity and in the power of the Holy Spirit, only the Holy Spirit can make it good in the hearts of the saints of God. Hence this second prayer in the epistle. In the first prayer we see Christ as Man in Whom the power of God was evidenced in view of securing the inheritance, but here Christ is before us as Son. The first prayer is objective and is to God, but this prayer is subjective and is to the Father. The first has in view that we may know all that is secured in Christ in glory, but this prayer is that Christ may dwell in our hearts. That is why we suggest that the first prayer is objective and that this one is subjective.

Would not the thought of the Father suggest the source? The power for truth to be effected in the hearts of the saints is love, and so the apostle turns to the One Who is the source of this love.

We see that every family is linked with the Father, whether the whole heavenly company comprised of

Old Testament as well as New Testament saints, or the Jews and Gentiles on earth who are blessed in the world to come. All stand in relation to the Father as the fruit of counsel. The Father is the source of all and He has named every family according to the place He has declared it is to fill. Who is more able to enlighten us as to the place of these various families than the Father Himself Who has named them?

The spheres here do not go beyond the scope of revelation.

It would be useless for the apostle to pray for anything outside the scope of revelation.

To what is the apostle referring in verse 13 when he speaks of "my tribulations"?

He is referring to what he says in the first verse where he speaks of being "the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles". His being in prison was not hindering the work, hence he says, "which is your glory".

In Philippians the apostle said it was for the furtherance of the gospel; here it was for their glory, that the Gentiles might have passed on to them the full truth of the mystery. Both the gospel and the mystery are furthered by prison circumstances.

While every family will not be brought into the same place of blessing, every family will take character from the Father.

They must do, and that is what I apprehend is conveyed in the Father's naming of them. We perhaps give names haphazardly, but in Scripture names are given in relation to circumstances.

The assembly must have its own distinctive place in the world to come.

Yes! And that is why it is "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". No other family can have the distinctive knowledge of the Father as enjoyed by the Christian company today, and which was given to us in John 20, "My Father and your Father". God does take the name of Father in the kingdom, as we read in the gospel by Matthew, but it does not there reach to the height of the revelation which is given to us by the Son.

That would save us from the error of the universal Fatherhood of God.

Now that the Assembly is secured, all that was lost in former dispensations will be recovered for the glory of God and He will be magnified in them all. The last great family having been secured, all will be established in the world to come, and I do not doubt will be regulated according to the place of the Assembly which is "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all".

Would there be a link with John 14?

I think so! For our Lord said, "In my Father's house are many abodes" (N.T.).

When our Lord said, "I go to prepare a place for you" He had in mind a special place for man in the presence of the Father, a place which was not manifested until Christ in Manhood opened it out by going there.

The apostle therefore prays to the Father Who, as the Source, could alone give to us the ability to understand this wide scope of things.

The Spirit is said here to be the Spirit of the Father.

This is the only place in which the Spirit is so called. It is the Father to whom the apostle prayed and it is His Spirit we need in order to be strengthened in the inner man.

Why is it put in that way?

As we said earlier, Who is more able to instruct us in these details of counsel regarding the mystery than the Father, Who is the source of all? He gives us of His Spirit that we may enter into the knowledge of it.

We need the Spirit in this way, for it is not only that we may know certain things but, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith". Who is more able to prepare my heart for that than the Father Who gives me His Spirit to this end? Only of a believer can the term "inner man" be used. It is not only necessary to have an "inner man" but also to be strengthened by the Spirit in it. Thus enabled, we know these things and hold them in our souls. Christ dwells there.

We know that the Son ever dwells in the bosom of the Father and if I have the Spirit of the Father strengthening me, Christ now dwells in my heart. There is the full enjoyment of the Father's love; here in my full enjoyment of His love. What an intimate connection.

It is a marvellous thing that the One Who dwells in the heart of the Father is now to dwell in our hearts. I have long thought that is what underlies this statement, "His Spirit" — the Spirit of the Father. It seems to suggest that the Father desires that the Son should be as dear to my heart as He is to His own. The innermost feelings of the Father have been satisfied by the Son's dwelling there, and our affections are to be satisfied by the same blessed Person dwelling in our hearts.

Would there be a distinction between this and what is said in Colossians, "Christ in you the hope of glory"?

There it seems to be the glory of the mystery that Gentiles should be brought into such blessing, but here it is that the love of that circle, not only the glory of it, might fill our hearts. It is more the intimate side of it here.

Can you define the "inner man" for us?

It is what is called in the next chapter "the new man". It is the new creation work of which we read in Ephesians 2, "created in Christ Jesus" (v. 10). God has formed within us a new moral being termed in Ephesians 4, "the new man", and called here "the inner man". My natural intellect is connected with the "outward man" (2 Cor. 4: 16), for intellect is connected with the bodily condition. We have a new moral being formed in our souls, called here the "inner man", and that is where this work is going on.

Would that new moral being be connected with the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Spirit?

It no doubt refers to the same thing, a capacity to take in and hold these divine things which have been given to us.

We may use a term from Peter in this connection, "that ye may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2: 2). This is growth in the divine nature. One may have a great knowledge of Scripture and yet have a very feeble knowledge of God. I am persuaded the two things are not the same. We cannot do without the knowledge of Scripture, otherwise we should be very unintelligent, but if it does not deepen within us the knowledge of God we are going to miss the kernel of it.

How we should value the presence of the Spirit in our hearts! With all these various descriptions we have of the functions of the Spirit, how we should take care that we do not grieve the Spirit and hinder His work in our souls.

It is a danger to have a knowledge of Scripture without a corresponding knowledge of God. It is not here, rooted and grounded in the Scriptures, but "rooted and grounded in love". We value being rooted and grounded in the Scriptures hence our presence at these meetings, but let us be sure beloved that it is

rightly affecting us in our affections and not our minds only. One is very conscious of the danger of acquiring a knowledge of Scripture and of constantly moving there without a corresponding knowledge of God. It is this which keeps us rightly balanced, formed by the truth, not merely instructed by it.

As the Father gives us strength, Christ becomes to us of paramount importance — Who He is; what He has done; where He is; His love; His interests, and thus He dwells in our hearts by faith.

The One Who is the centre of every thought of God is to be the centre of our moral beings. That is a necessity if we are to look out in understanding upon the "breadth, and length, and depth, and height". For this we must have Christ in the centre of our hearts and look out from that centre.

If we attempt to work from the perimeter to the centre we shall never grasp the truth, but if the centre is in our hearts by faith it is wonderful how all opens out to us.

We ought to note it is put in the way of exhortation, "That Christ *may* dwell". It depends upon where our true interests really lie. If Christ is everything to me, His interests, His glory, I shall have the privilege of living in this wonderful circle of divine life and light and love.

I am glad you bring the personal side into this for it does involve that each one of us should have personal affection for Christ.

It has been said that Christianity is a faith system.

Yes! And I have to lay hold of Christ by faith and give Him that central place in my heart. I may give something else that place and if I do I need not be surprised if I am unable to appreciate this wonderful circle wherein I might be illuminated.

Man works all by three dimensions, but here we have four dimensions. We are thus in the sphere of divine working.

It is of interest in that connection to point out that when the earthly city is mentioned in Zechariah we have mention only of the breadth and length (Zech. 2: 2). When we read of the heavenly city being measured it is the length, and the breadth and the height of it (Rev. 21: 16). Height is added there because of its heavenly character as taking precedence over earthly Jerusalem. Here a fourth measure is added, breadth, length, depth and height. The full scope of the revelation is in view. I understand that length and breadth and height are used in the Holy City because what is being displayed there is displayed in such a way that beings on earth can understand it, but with depth added I gather there is something here which only the heavenly saints will understand.

We should not have had height without the depth, as the next chapter shows. It is to be noted that depth comes before height. "He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth" (Eph. 4: 9).

"That breadth, and length, and depth, and height" of what?

It does not say, leaving it in the realm of its own peculiar vastness. We cannot go one step beyond what is revealed. We may put a limitation to it if we attempt to define it. In such a sphere of things we need the love of Christ to sustain us.

What do we understand by being "rooted and grounded"?

It is the sphere in which we grow and in which we are established.

We can understand height being added when the heavenly city is in view, for display is the thought there; here where the depth is included we have something which surpasses display, for it tells of the love of Christ which passes knowledge.

I am assured that of all the spheres brought to our notice in Scripture, this is the greatest.

In view of that, what a wonderful thing it is that we are able to apprehend it. It is infinite, beyond all human measurement, and yet we are granted a power in the Spirit of the Father by which we are able to fully apprehend this wonderful unfolding of the thoughts of God.

Is this the sphere which lies beyond what will be displayed?

Yes! That is why I said it is greater than the city. Much of it will be displayed in the city, but it seems to suggest here that there is something beyond what will be displayed, and as suggested earlier, speaks of the great place of privilege which belongs to the Assembly as associated with Christ in glory.

We know that while the Son, coming into this world, showed forth the Father in testimony yet He had a place with the Father which did not come into display. Does it not seem here that while the Assembly is the vessel through which all that is displayed of Christ will shine out, yet she has a place with Him as the object of His affection which does not come into display? This is more clearly seen where the eternal state is brought before us, "a bride adorned for her Husband".

We noted in chapter 1 that three words are used to describe the power of God when He raised Christ from among the dead and these three words are used again here, verses 16 and 18. The words are "strengthened", "might" and "able". Venturing a free translation of verse 16, we might suggest "enabled by His super-abounding power to be strong enough to apprehend". In chapter 1 this power is towards us, but here, as we read in verse 20, it is "in us". All the power put forth by the Father in chapter 1 is working in us now, in order that we might apprehend all that He has effected in raising Christ from among the dead and placing Him at His own right hand in glory.

Can we comprehend the love of Christ?

No! It does not say that. What it does say is "to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge". Literally it means, "to know the surpassing-knowledge love of Christ". While the love in its entirety passes knowledge, we can know that love. God Himself is infinite but we know Him. This love is infinite, but we know it, not in all its entirety, but we can know that which in its fullness surpasses knowledge.

As to these measurements, I think we may trace them all in this epistle. The BREADTH: may be seen in Eph. 1: 10, "things . . . in heaven . . . and . . . on earth". The LENGTH: is in Eph. 3: 11, "the eternal purpose". It was counselled in eternity and it will extend to eternity; beginning before time began and extending right through the times ways of God and reaching the coming eternity, as we speak. The DEPTH: is seen in Eph. 4: 9, "descended first into the lower parts of the earth"; the depths into which Christ has been to accomplish all, and where His love shines out in its fullness.

The HEIGHT is also seen in that verse, "He ascended", and we are told it is in view of His filling all things. In His DESCENT into death He has dealt with every opposing foe, wrought the reconciliation of all things, then has ascended in view of filling all things, when He fills this universe with the glory of God in the world to come.

We note, in relation to what you have pointed out as to these measures, it is added "and to know" (as though that was something additional) "the love of Christ". What would those measures mean to me if I had not the knowledge of the love of Christ which fills it all? God is going to fill the whole sphere with the One in Whom His love is centred.

There are two infinitudes here. The infinitude of this vast circle, the limits of which we cannot reach, and the love of the Christ which in its fullness is beyond us. This circle extends into eternity, but we

have Christ at the centre and yet His love is infinite. We are touching the infinitude of God here, and we can only worship before Him. If we cannot apprehend it all, we have the ability to apprehend something of the blessedness of it, and as we do so it fills our hearts with worship.

Would it not come to us as it did to the apostle that our entering into this is in the spirit of prayer?

We must all agree with that.

What is involved in the expression "filled with all the fullness of God"?

I take that to be the scope of this divine revelation. I am persuaded that the Assembly is being formed as a vessel which is competent to take in, hold and ultimately display the glory of this in the world to come, and after that to give an eternal response to God in the new heaven and the new earth. It is really, "filled to all the fullness of God".

It has often been said that the response will be equal to the revelation. No other verses in Scripture equal these verses in opening out the revelation of the counsel of God, and the Assembly is to be filled to all the fullness of God so that as a vessel she might be competent not only to apprehend these things, but to respond to them intelligently for the satisfaction of the heart of God.

In the epistle to the Colossians it is said twice of the Son that the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him; was in Him when in this world, is in Him in the glory. That is in relation to Him Personally and assures us of His Godhead glory, His deity. That cannot be displayed, for deity is beyond creature knowledge and subsists in light unapproachable. What is in mind here comes out into display, for it is not the fullness of deity, but the fullness of the revelation which God has given of Himself, and which will be displayed in the Assembly. The apostle prays that this may be formed now in the hearts of the saints in view of the day of display.

God is forming a vessel fully competent to display Him in the world to come.

It is the complement of Him Who filleth all in all, for we view the Assembly here in its completeness, although we are exhorted to expand in the knowledge of it. No one individual could possibly contain all this fullness, but in the aggregate when all the work of God in the saints is complete, a vessel will be formed competent to display this fullness.

Would this apprehension include all that Christ will yet be?

I would link the fullness mentioned here with Eph. 4: 13, "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ".

Is that future?

In its completion, yes! But what we have to learn is that a ministry is going on in order to produce it in our hearts today.

If Christ is dwelling in our hearts by faith we have the light of all that is going to come out in that blessed Person. There is not a single thing which God will bring into display but what we have the light of in Christ.

In spite of all the failure which has come into the church in testimony, what is of God and will be displayed is being formed in the hearts of the saints today.

"The Spirit and the bride say, Come".

The bride will be ready. Ephesians 5 assures us that it will be so as the result of the ministry of our

Lord to our hearts by the Spirit. She will be ready and fitted for the place, first as the wife, "His wife hath made herself ready", that is on the ground of responsibility. Then she will be invested with the glory spoken of here in order to display the fullness of God, fruit of the work of God in our souls, and she will be displayed as "the bride, the Lamb's wife".

If we really follow out the exercise of this we shall see that we are related to One Who can do "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think". That is according to the power which is now "in us". While much of this is connected with the future, the power to apprehend it is *now* with us.

Do you think a moment will be reached before the Lord comes when all this will be reached and the bride able to say, Come?

I know of no Scripture which suggests that formation will go on after the Lord has come. I think it will all be ready when He presents it to Himself. She will be ready for display. He will see to that.

The washing of water by the Word, to which you are referring, is not so much the removal of defilement but the maintenance of what is due to God in the Church without any defect. The service of Christ is maintaining the church in relation to God's original thoughts. What God counselled the church should be as brought out in Ephesians 1, is seen effected by the work of Christ in Ephesians 5.

You mean so far as we view the church abstractly as the fruit of the work of God there never was any spot in us.

How wonderful that in spite of all that marks the saints in their passage through this world, at the end the church will be free of all spots, wrinkles, sins and blemishes; spotless, ageless, sinless and blameless. She will be complete, competent for the display in the world to come, to delight the heart of Christ eternally, and also to give glory to God throughout that eternal day.

Would it be right to say that the spots and wrinkles are not connected with the "inner man"?

I am sure that is right! They represent the failures we are prone to in spite of the inner man, but what is in our souls as the fruit of the work of God cannot be affected by these things.

Would it be right to say that already glory to God has begun in the Assembly, will be seen in display in the world to come, and then go right through into eternity?

That is what this verse means, I think! It is "unto all generations of the ages of ages" (New Trans.). This would include the present time too. It is the Assembly "in Christ Jesus", and as such there must be glory at all times. We are so apt to think of ourselves in relation to the breakdown, but we have the privilege of taking account of ourselves in relation to these magnificent thoughts of God about us. If we viewed ourselves more in this connection, there would be glory to God now.

We are "His workmanship".

Being occupied with the positive side of the truth is a great preservative today. Why be unduly concerned with what the world is doing, or the failure in the professing church? We should be concerned regarding some of the things we read of in Christendom, but do not let us be unduly occupied with them. I have found that those who drop out of serving God, and are not only discouraged themselves but would discourage others, are generally found occupied with the failures of the saints of God. We have heard before that people occupied with failure turn out to be failures. Let us keep these great and glorious thoughts before us.

It was later said to these Ephesian saints that they had left their first love. Failure had come in.

Yes! But as you have already reminded us at the end of the book of Revelation the position had been

recovered, for "the Spirit and the bride say, Come". As a local company they had allowed other things to displace Christ in their hearts, but we are assured His work went on in them nevertheless. We have been reminded of two things, revelation and response. The world to come will be the display of the revelation, but I rather think the eternal state will be more characterized by response.

It would appear that the world to come will be the day in which the ways of God will be seen to be vindicated, but the eternal state will be for the satisfaction of His heart of love.

Would the statement in Ephesians 1, "the glory of His inheritance in the saints", be involved in this?

It would! But that is connected with this present universe and will come out in the kingdom; after the kingdom has run its course and the new heaven and new earth are brought in, the Assembly will be there on the heavenly side to give glory to God eternally.

You connect the inheritance with the world to come?

I do! For it says, "things . . . which are in heaven, and which are on earth".

So while we read so much of what our portion is, it is good to see that God the Father will have something for His own heart as the fruit of this work.

Yes! And we may add, the Spirit will have some fruit for His work, and so will our Lord Jesus Christ. All this is seen in the description of eternal conditions in the opening verses of Rev. 21.