

God's Dealings with His Children,

Colossians 1: 12-22; Ephesians 1: 3-14.

I should like, beloved in the Lord, to endeavour, as God may enable me, to bring a little before your minds the outline which is given to us in scripture of God's dealings — the revelation of His own glory, and the name of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

With that thought I read the portion out of Colossians, and read it intentionally before reading the portion out of Ephesians. Ephesian truth is much higher than Colossian truth. The truth presented by the apostle was truth that had reached his own soul in a very peculiar way. Man in glory, God-man, called him Saul by name, and revealed Himself to him as One that wanted him — Saul, the persecutor — to become a vessel to carry mercy to earth. The way He was presented to him brought out the union that existed between Him and those Saul was persecuting. "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?"

The Colossians appear to have heard the truth that, Christ was Head of the family of God, of the saints now put together as His bride. They appear to have heard it, but to have let slip the main part — the Headship.

There is no irritability found in the mode he takes up the subject which gives him occasion to bring out the personal glory of the Lord, as he had not done in Ephesians, as connected with creation and providence, as well as with redemption. Very important, whatever part we take. We who know as individuals the love of the Lord Jesus, ought to have distinctly before our minds the unsearchableness of His person, and that His glories are of the highest character possible. He Himself states it, and says, "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son, will reveal him." Any attempt to analyse, and any feeling of our having comprehended, the Son, is all wrong. The Son has presented the Father and the Father's plans, and it is not ours to comprehend Him by whom they have been presented.

In Colossians we find some amazing glories. He speaks of the Image of the invisible God, the First-born of every creature, pre-eminent there, for by Him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by Him, and for Him. John states it also. Not one thing was brought into existence but by Him, the Lord Jesus Christ. That shows the pre-eminence. He that brings anything into existence must be above that thing, and indeed also above all things. He adds that they were created not only by Him, but for Him. All were connected with Him. Creation was by the Son acting. All was connected with the manifestation of His divine glory. Again (ver. 17), "He is before all things." He was before all, as He was the only cause of all, and the cause must have priority and superiority to every effect; and he adds, "by him all things consist," or stand together. He holds everything by the hand of His power. The pillars of the earth rest on that Man who was despised, spit upon, and crucified. The One that with such gentle compassion pleaded with Saul of Tarsus, and knocked long at the hearts of many of us, before any hearing was produced in us, before we opened to Him, a stranger as He then was to us, He was the One who upheld everything. He goes beyond the heavens and the earth, and the fruitful seasons. This pre-eminence was His. Then he goes on to speak of redemption, the peculiar place He would hold to one part of the redeemed, "Head of the body, the church; who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence. For it pleased [the Father] that in him should all fulness dwell; and having made peace by the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven."

He is looking forward to that amazing time when there will be a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness: all brought by Himself under the power of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and in heaven above Himself having the church, the bride; on earth having Israel, the nation under government, and then under blessing; and everything that would not be subject, that preferred the thralldom of Satan to God as the God of government and author of salvation, all sent down to the lake of fire, where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched.

Who, from first to last, is the doer of it all? The Son of God, the Man who loved me, and gave Himself for me — the Man who hung between two malefactors on Calvary. Divine power was His: the name of everyone who should be with Him in glory was given to Him by the Father. What sort of person was that? Oh, beloved friends, the light active in the kingdom of creation was displayed in those six thousand years. What a display of power, of tenderness, to those on earth! What an Almighty power that will bring forth out of the dust all those to whom death has been through Him but sleep, and raise them to heavenly glory, and fill the earth with a new race, equal to Him in the glory above, filling all, and for ever, in the new heavens, and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness! What sort of righteousness? Just that which becomes the presence of God.

These poor Colossians had let slip the Headship; they had thoughts of the kingdom, but could not blend kingdom thoughts with Him aright. They had got no landmarks about their standing there. He throws them on the revelation of the Son in heaven, that they might be brought back to think of Him coming from heaven.

There is a remarkable connection between creation, providence, and government, and salvation and redemption. If the glories are quite incommunicable, creation brought in the platform on which all was to be acted, providence upheld it, and kept all in check. Ay, but if there was a plan about Him described there — things in heaven and things in earth to be reconciled — what a different principle comes out when we get to redemption! Creation brings into existence things which are not; in providence the seasons still go on; sin has come in, man is so wicked; in government God is keeping evil in check. Where in creation, in providence, or in government, where is there one word for the ruined soul — one single thing to give a thought of being in the place of reconciliation? There is no word. Where is it found? In the grand purpose of God about the Man on His right hand. This One was to become the Redeemer, and bring man back to God. To be a Saviour and a Deliverer from the power of Satan, from a world of corruption, and deadly principles working in the heart and mind.

When men heard of salvation and redemption, and had the opportunity, they turned their backs on the Redeemer, heaped contumely on the Saviour, and mocked at the thought of One to redeem. One, the only One, in the new heavens and new earth, of whom we can say that He met God's mind all through His course, and never did anything but meet that mind. Not another will have that glory of God; all will be brought there as saved, redeemed, to that new heavens and new earth, as proofs — proofs of what? That He was the One who could reveal the divine glory, that He, having been in the bosom of the Father, knew the divine character, and could bring it to light, and show how the divine glory was displayed that it was God all alone, whose motive was drawn from His own bosom, and acted according to His own character.

Adam could not say he had given God anything; God gave to him, and he was to give back to God. We do not pay God for His care over us. Why is there the mighty hand of God over the nations? They do not believe it, fools that they are. When Shem came out of the ark, it was said God shall shechinah from the tents of Shem. All the earth is regulated in connection with Israel, and people

cannot see it! When Israel failed, God put the sword into the hands of the Gentiles. All was with reference to the Son of His love, the Lord Jesus Christ, as we have in Ephesians the place brought out in detail. He is Head of the body, the church, and the place and the people who get so connected with Him are shown to us in connection with Christ. Not so only, but in connection with His plans as to the inheritance; and, more than that, we find the point of peculiar interest to the child of God where the counsel stops. Not merely can he look back before the world was, but if I look forward to the new heavens and the new earth, the Lord shows me what the counsel was. There was one Man God delighted to honour, and then God. The plan stops at the present time in this portion in Ephesians.

I should like to look at a thought — it may only be a human thought. If you reject it, I am not offended; if it helps you to see the chain from the time light dawned, I am satisfied. If I take my stand as a man, I think I can trace, from creation down, gradual steps from man set in the garden of Eden, down to the lowest order of creation. But from the highest expression of human perfection to the infinite God there is a chasm between the two. The smallest grain of sand carried by the wind had a nearer relation to myself than I have as a creature to the Almighty, infinite God. When I look to the end of what God is doing, I am astounded. There is the fulness of divine glory in a Man, and in all the height of that glory the perfect Man, and a people in heaven. Heaven was not made for man; the earth hath He given to the sons of men. But a people are quickened by the Holy Ghost, not only so but adopted as children, clothed upon with glorious bodies; and from that down the whole is blended together up to God. I began with the end. All the Father is presented in the Son, God in divine glory, the God-man on that throne, and a company prepared as the bride in the glory; and right down from that, step by step, it gives unity in what is before the divine mind.

Oh, what a place the Man that died on Calvary, that was taken down and laid in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea — what a place He had in the mind of God the Father! Just look at these verses, where Paul's heart was bursting: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." No wonder his heart felt warm, and his head full. "All spiritual blessings" — ours through Him, in Him who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He chose us in Christ before the world was. The mind goes back to the place He had in the bosom of the Father. Just one little word in passing. What do you understand by all spiritual blessings? Have you clear thoughts as to them? Could you sit down and write a list of them, just as of your property in this life you could sit down and give a list? Blessings to Israel — what are they in comparison?

In divine things Scripture alone will not do; it is a matter of communion. If I were to say, Do you know what fellowship with the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ is? Well, people who do know would be likely to express in their faces that they do know fellowship. Do you know what this means — what a blessed thing it is for the Father to have such a Son, and for that Son to have such a Father? To say, lying on your bed at night, There they are up there; how blessed God is with such a Son! what a happy person Christ is to have been the Son of such a Father — the Son who has brought forth all the riches of grace, so that even I, poor stupid I, can read them! The heart looks from one to the other, knowing the relationship, and what the relationship involves, and delighting in it. It is a little taste of the new nature.

It is important to have clear notions, not to put in what is not in scripture; but we want to have the heart brought by the Holy Ghost into that fellowship with the Father and the Son. Look at one passage, and see how the Father does delight in Him (John 17: 26): "And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it; that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." How that should be enjoyed by the heart! We ought to have clear thoughts as to these blessings. Turn it over

before the Lord prayerfully. There is an amazing thing traced out here — love entirely irrespective of good, of merits — the love of the Father choosing people to be in the Son when they were not in existence. They went into sin, and He had to bring them back again. They were to be blameless in love and are so at this present time. He has predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ, the One in whom He sets forth the glory of His grace, wherein He has made us accepted in the Beloved. Go through it all quietly, and see the long list of spiritual blessings traced in this epistle: "He hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and intelligence; having made known unto us the mystery of his will." He would have us to know what is coming, to walk as in the light, not in darkness, the understanding not unfruitful, the heart rejoicing in that word — "accepted in the Beloved." He does not rest much in type and shadow on the humiliation side, but gets to where He is sitting as the rock, once smitten on Calvary, whence the water of life is flowing in blessing.

In verse 19 there is a subdivision. The working of His mighty power toward us is according to the power which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead. The Lord had gone under death for our sakes, and the mighty power of God came out this way. He took life again. He had power to take it again. He is the Resurrection and the Life. Ah! there is no resurrection like His. Not only has He power to search the dust of the earth, and to raise all that sleep in Him, but He took life Himself. The whole plan comes out. He passed through the toil of redemption, and said, "It is finished," that at His name every knee should bow. He is made head over all to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. It is of vital importance to you, if you are Christians, His being there, and to know the glory that is put upon Him, and your connection with Him. Oh, what a truth it is! The very Man that looked to Israel to be thirty-four or thirty-five years of age, that very Man that Peter bandied words with and gainsaid, that Man is sitting on the throne of God at this present time. Well, you may say, I do not believe it, never heard of it; but when you did not believe it, He was there. Well, how blessed! I know He is there. Perhaps this was my last thought of Him at night. When I am asleep, it is just as true. If I should follow Him through death and give up my spirit to-night, He is there, a living Person, watching the progress of death, and enabling me to make death an act, and give up my life. He is there! He is on the throne!

Then there is the exceeding greatness of His mighty power to us-ward who believe. Has He brought you in any way by that power? Brought you where? Into a circle in which you never were in nature, where all things of nature are spread about, and you have living connection with the Person that is there, to whom all belongs. How came you to have those thoughts you have about God? How came you to know that a Man has been there for eighteen hundred years and more? How came you to know it, and to say, No wonder? Surely He is in His right place there now. He came forth out of the divine glory, and has returned there. How came you to know it, and to know that He has union of life with you down here, through the mighty power that raised Him, and brought you into fellowship with Him?

There are two things in connection with this, the two, great questions of the day: first, as to the church; second, as to the testimony of God going forth. One of the questions of the day is the church, where infidelity does not rule to the humiliation of those that do. When God has written a book which is the greatest wonder, the man who does not believe it is blind and besotted and a fool. He cannot see anything in it! Yet compare the internal evidence with any other book in the world.

You think it strange that I look on that as the word of God. When, where, was such a God ever pictured as when man turned his back on Him? He sent His Son to take the penalty due to the sinner. It puts me down, as it exalts God, and you want to persuade me that the volumes of false religions are on a par with it! . . . He has brought us out of the pit, and given us life and capacity to understand the things of God.

Is it that the roll of the chart has got the cord fastened that you cannot unroll it farther? We have to wait in patience with Him, not only for Him. He is waiting. — For what? He has a church here. What church? One which is created by God in Christ Jesus. Had it no works? None whatever. If it is the church, it is created unto good works, and these, mark, God has before ordained that we should walk in them. Are there no works to which you are created? Is there no Abba's love to be waited on — no Christ to mind? The One that is watching you, you watch. The One who died for you, who lives for you — have you not got to live for Him? In great things? No, in little details. To eat to Him, to drink to Him, to sleep and wake, to Him. How that ennobles the whole course of a Christian! When I go to rest, will the eye of Christ be on me? In the morning, when I start up, is it with Christ — to live to Christ? How can I? You are one spirit with Him.

I hear a good deal about testimony. I am uncommonly thankful when the gospel sounds out; God knows how I pray that it may sound out in a way it has not sounded yet; but what I desire is testimony of life. We want living to Christ — this will make the heart yearn for the sinner that does not know Christ. As time goes on, we shall find that what strikes the consciences and minds of men most is life, divine life, led by a man consistently. Let me put that into form. One might have said to Timothy or Titus, or any companion of Paul, I heard a letter read from Paul; he said, To me to live is Christ. Does he really mean it? Ah, they might say, we wish you know him: the life always goes beyond the description of it: he looked like it, acted it, did not need to say it; he was living to Christ, having all his springs in Him, in all circumstances; and Timothy would say, If you only knew him, you would not ask if he meant it: his conduct goes beyond it.

I am not prepared to say that all my life is Christ. People often say thus. In Paul, what was practically true went beyond the expression. There is a man who is one spirit with the Lord — a life that takes advantage of circumstances, yet above them.