

The Epistle to the Ephesians

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THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

1

Introduction

It is a great favour that the blessed God should have revealed Himself in grace to a world of sinners, and yet He has done more, for He has disclosed to believers the secret counsels of His heart of love.

To learn the blessedness of these disclosures we must turn to the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians, for therein we have an inspired unfolding of the counsels of God for the glory of Christ and the blessing of those who are destined to share His glory.

It is of the utmost importance to see that there is the counsel of God's will for believers, as well as the grace of God that brings salvation for all men. Generally we are better acquainted with His saving grace than with the counsels of His heart. The saving grace of God meets our condition as sinners, and of necessity we must begin with that which meets our need; but the counsels of God reveal what God has purposed to bring to pass for the satisfaction of His own heart. The saving grace of God, and the counsels of God, though distinct blessings, cannot be separated, for the grace that saves our souls leads on to the glory that satisfies God's heart.

In the revelation of the counsels of God's heart we discover the true, heavenly character of Christianity. We learn that, though the church is formed on earth, it belongs to heaven and, though

passing through time, it was counselled in eternity and for eternity.

Ephesians 1 unfolds to us the eternal counsels of God for Christ and His church in view of eternity.

Ephesians 2 presents God's ways for the formation of the church in time in view of His counsels for eternity.

Ephesians 3 presents the special service committed to the apostle Paul in connection with making known the truth of the church.

Ephesians 4 to 6 form the practical portion of the Epistle, in which believers, having been instructed in the counsels of God, are exhorted to walk in consistency with these truths as they pass through time. If God has counselled that there shall be, in the saints, the display of His grace throughout eternity, He cannot but desire that in the assembly, while being formed in time, there should be a witness to His grace, love and holiness.

2

God's Purpose in Christ

(Ephesians 1)

In the first chapter of the Epistle there is unfolded to us the revelation of the purpose of God for Christ and His church. In the chapters that follow we shall learn the gracious ways of God in the formation of the church; but there is first disclosed to us the purpose of God in view of eternity, in order that we may intelligently enter into His ways while in time.

After the introductory verses there is first presented to us the calling of God that discloses God's purpose for those who compose the church of God (verses 3 to 7). Secondly, we have the revelation of the will of God for the glory of Christ as the Head of the whole creation, and the blessing of the church in association with Christ (verses 8 to 14). Thirdly, we have the prayer of the apostle that we may realise the greatness of the calling of God, the blessedness of the inheritance, and the mighty power that is fulfilling the purpose of God and bringing believers into the inheritance.

(1) The purpose of God for believers (Vv. 1-7)

(Vv. 1, 2). The apostle is about to unfold the great secrets of the will and purpose of God, and he is therefore careful to remind the saints that he is "an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God." He is not sent by man, as the servant of man, to unfold the will of man. He is divinely equipped, and sent by Jesus Christ, according to the will of God in order to unfold His will.

Moreover, he addresses the Ephesian believers as "the saints ... and faithful in Christ Jesus", implying that in the assembly at Ephesus there was a spiritual condition, characterised by faithfulness to the Lord, which prepared them to receive these profound communications. It is possible for a company of saints to be marked by much zeal and activity, and yet to be lacking in faithfulness to the Lord. Indeed, this was the condition into which this very same assembly fell in after years, so that the Lord has to say to them, in spite of all their zeal and toil, "I have against thee, that thou hast left thy first love ... thou art fallen." At the time the apostle wrote they were still, as a company, marked by faithfulness to the Lord. Moreover, beside a right condition of soul, if we are to profit by the Epistle, we shall need "grace" and "peace" from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, which the

apostle desired for these saints.

(V. 3). After the introductory verses the apostle at once unfolds the blessing of believers according to the purpose of God, and therefore their highest blessings. In this great passage we learn the *source* of all our blessings, their *character*, the *beginning* of our blessings, and the *end* God has in view in so richly blessing us, and above all that the purposes of God are accomplished through Christ.

The source of all our blessing is found in the heart of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God has been perfectly revealed in Christ. In His pathway through this world as Man, He manifested the infinite holiness and power of God and the perfect grace and love of the Father. It is to the heart of God the Father thus revealed that we are privileged to trace all our blessings.

Then we are instructed as to the character of our blessings. The Father has “blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ.” The little word “all” tells us of the fulness of our blessings. Not a single blessing that Christ, as a Man, enjoyed has been kept back. We are blessed with “*all*” spiritual blessings. However much the profession of Christianity may confer outward benefits upon men, it ever remains true that Christian blessings are spiritual and not material, as with the nation of Israel. Our blessings are none the less real because they have a spiritual character. Sonship, acceptance, forgiveness — some of the blessings brought before us in this Scripture — are spiritual blessings beyond the reach of this world’s wealth, but secured through Christ to the simplest believer in Him.

Further, the proper sphere of our blessings is not earth but heaven. We are blessed “in heavenly places”. On earth we may have little; in heaven we are richly blessed. All these spiritual and heavenly blessings are in connection with Christ, not in any wise because of our connection with Adam. They are “in Christ”. The blessings of the Jew were temporal, on earth, and in the line of Abraham: Christian blessings are spiritual, heavenly, and in Christ. Unlike earthly blessings they do not depend upon health, or riches, or position, or education, or nationality. They are outside the whole range of things earthly, and will remain in all their fulness when the life in time is finished and our path on earth is closed.

(V. 4). Then we learn not only the source and character of our blessings as coming from the heart of our God and Father, but we find that they had their beginning “before the foundation of the world”. Then it was in the far distant eternity, that we were chosen in Christ. This involves a sovereign choice entirely independent of all that we are in connection with Adam and his world, and which nothing that transpires in time can alter.

Moreover, we are permitted to see not only the beginning of our blessings before the foundation of the world, but also the great end that God has in view when the world shall have passed away. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world that in the ages to come we may be “before Him” for the satisfaction of His heart — “that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.” If it is God’s purpose to have a people before Him for all eternity, they must be in a condition that is absolutely suited to Him; and to be suited to Him they must be like Him. Only that which is like God can suit God. Hence God will have us “holy and without blame” and “in love”. This is really what God is, and what was perfectly expressed in Christ as Man. He was holy in character, irreproachable in conduct, and in nature love. God, too, will have us before Him in a character that is perfectly holy, in conduct to which no blame can be attached, and with a nature that is love and can respond to love — the love of God. God is love, and love cannot be content without a response in the objects of love. God will surround Himself with those who, like Christ as Man, perfectly respond to His love, so that He can delight in us and we can delight in Him.

As faith receives these great truths, and looks on to the glorious end, it delights in all that has been revealed of the heart of God and of the efficacy of the work of Christ. Such is the Father's love, and such the virtue of Christ's work, that for all eternity we shall be before the Father's face holy and blameless, and therefore in the full unhindered enjoyment of divine love.

As we are thus permitted to look into eternity and see the vast vista of blessing that lies before us, this passing world, which so often appears to us so great and important, becomes very insignificant, while Christianity, seen in its true character according to God, becomes exceedingly great and blessed.

(V. 5). There are, moreover, special blessings to which believers are predestinated. Predestination always seems to have in view these special blessings. According to sovereign choice believers, in common with angels, will be before God holy and without blame. But, in addition to these blessings, believers have been predestinated to the special place of sonship. We are set in the same place of relationship with the Father as Christ is as Man, so that He can say, "My Father, and your Father". Angels are servants before Him; we are sons "to Himself".

This special place of relationship is "according to the good pleasure of His will". Thus the blessing of verse 5 surpasses the blessing of verse 4. There it was sovereign choice that by grace makes us suited to Himself: here it is God's good pleasure that predestinates believers to the relationship of sons.

(V. 6). The way God has acted in predestinating us to this great place of blessing will resound "to the praise of the glory of His grace." The riches of God's grace set us before Himself in suitability to Himself; the glory of His grace brings us into relationship with Himself, having taken us into favour in the Beloved. If we are accepted in the Beloved, we are accepted as the Beloved, with all the delight with which He has been received into glory.

(V. 7). The preceding verses have presented the purpose of God for believers; in this verse we are reminded of the way God has taken in order that we may partake of these blessings. We have been redeemed through Christ's blood, and our sins forgiven according to the riches of His grace. The riches of His grace meets all our need as sinners; the glory of His grace meets the good pleasure of God to bless us as saints. A rich man could bless a beggar out of the abundance of his riches, and this would be great grace, but if the rich man went further, and brought the poor man into his house and gave him the place of a son, it would not only be grace to the poor man, but to the honour and glory of the rich man. The riches of grace met the prodigal's need and clothed him with a robe from the father's house: the glory of grace gave him the place of a son in the house. The glory of God's grace has made believers sons, not servants.

(2) The revelation of the will of God for the glory of Christ and the blessing of the *church* (Vv. 8-14)

(Vv. 8, 9). Not only has God purposed us for blessing into which we shall be brought hereafter, and not only do we already possess the redemption of our souls and the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace, but this same grace has abounded towards us in order that we may have at the present time the *knowledge* of His purpose. God has made known to us the mystery of His will so that we may know the good pleasure that He has purposed in Himself.

It is God's will that the church, while here below, should be the depository of His counsels. God would have us to be wise and intelligent as to all that He is doing, and will yet do, for His good pleasure, for the glory of Christ, and for the blessing of the church. Having the mind of God would keep us calm in the presence of the world's unrest, and lift us above the sorrow and sin, as those who

know the outcome of it all.

In Scripture a “mystery” is not necessarily that which is mysterious, but rather a secret that is made known to believers before it is publicly declared to the world. In the world we see man doing his own will according to his own pleasure, and hence all the sorrow and confusion. But it is the privilege of the believer to know the secrets of God, and therefore know that God is going to work all things according to His good pleasure, and that in the end His purposes will prevail.

(Vv. 10-12). The verses that follow unfold to us this mystery of God. We learn that there are two parts to this mystery. Firstly, there is God's purpose for Christ; secondly, there is that which God has purposed for the church in association with Christ.

It is God's pleasure, in the dispensation of the fulness of times, to gather together in one all things in Christ. The “fulness of times” would hardly refer to the eternal state, for then God will be all in all. It would seem to have in view the world to come — the Millennial day — when the full result of the ways of God in government will be seen in perfection. All the principles of government that have been committed to men at different times, and in which men have so completely failed, will be seen in perfection under the administration of Christ. The ruin of the times has been seen under the government of man; the “fulness”, or perfection, of the times, will be seen when Christ reigns. Then every created thing or being, in heaven and earth, will move under His control and at His direction. As a result, unity, harmony and peace will prevail. Such is the secret, or mystery, of the will of God for the glory of Christ.

Further, we are permitted to see that it is God's good pleasure that the church, in association with Christ, shall have part in this vast inheritance over which Christ will be the Head. In the eleventh verse the apostle says, “we have obtained an inheritance”, referring doubtless to believers from among the Jews. The Jewish nation had lost their earthly inheritance through rejecting Christ and pursuing their own will. The remnant of the Jews, who believed in Christ, obtained a more glorious inheritance in the world to come, according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will. Associated with Christ in His reign, believers will display His glory. In that day He will be “glorified” and “admired” in all that believe (2 Thess. 1: 10). The world and the whole creation will be blessed *under Him*: the church will have her portion *with Him*. These believers from amongst the Jews had “pre-trusted” in Christ. They had trusted in Christ in the day of His rejection: the restored nation will trust Him in the day of His glory.

(V. 13). The “ye” of verse 13 brings in the Gentile believers to have part in the blessing of this glorious inheritance. They had believed the Gospel of their salvation, and had been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.

(V. 14). The “our” of verse 14 links believers together, from Jews and Gentiles. Such share in common this glorious inheritance. By the Spirit we enjoy a foretaste of the blessedness of the inheritance. This inheritance is a purchased possession — the price, the precious blood of Christ. All creation is His, for He is the Creator; and all is His by the right of purchase. Though all has been purchased, all has not yet been redeemed. He has purchased the inheritance by blood; He will redeem the inheritance by power. When He shall have delivered the whole creation from the enemy by His power, it will be to the praise of God's glory.

(3) The prayer that believers may know the hope of the calling and the glory of the inheritance (Vv. 15-23)

(V. 15). The prayer is introduced by setting before us the spiritual condition of the Ephesian

saints — a condition which encouraged the apostle to give thanks, and pray without ceasing, on their behalf. Very blessedly, they were marked by “faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints.” Christ being the object of their faith, the saints became the object of their love. There can be no greater proof of living faith in Christ than practical love to the saints. Faith puts the soul in touch with Christ, and, being in touch with Him, the heart goes out to all whom He loves. The nearer we get to Christ, the more our affections go out to those that are His.

(V. 16). Hearing of their faith and love, the apostle is constrained to give thanks and pray without ceasing for these saints. If only occupied with the defects and failures of one another, we shall be overwhelmed and constantly complaining about the saints. If we look for, and are occupied with, what the grace of God has wrought in the saints, we shall have cause for thanksgiving, while, at the same time, we shall not be indifferent to what may need correction. The apostle never overlooked what was of Christ in the saints, though never indifferent to what was of the flesh. Even as to the Corinthians saints, in whom there was so much that called for correction, he can give thanks for what he saw of God in them. We, in our weakness, are apt to fall into one extreme or the other. In our anxiety to show love we may treat very lightly what is wrong; or, in our opposition to what is wrong, we may overlook what is of God.

The apostle had been unfolding the counsels of God to these saints, and the fact that he is constrained to pray is, in itself, a witness to the immensity of these counsels. They are beyond the power of mere human words to express, and beyond the power of the human mind to apprehend. The apostle realises that if these great truths are to affect us, the mere assertion of them is not sufficient. In writing to Timothy he says, “Consider what I say; and *the Lord give thee understanding.*” So in this Epistle, Paul, led by the Spirit, can unfold to us the counsels of God, but he realises that only God can give understanding. Hence he turns to Him in prayer.

(V. 17). The apostle addresses “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ”, for, in this prayer, the Lord Jesus is viewed as Man. The prayer of Ephesians 3 is addressed to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for there the Lord is viewed as the Son. A further reason for the use of different Names in the two prayers may be that the apostle desires, in the first prayer, that we may know the *power* which carries out the counsels of God, for the Name of God is rightly connected with power; and the second prayer, being concerned with *love*, is very appropriately addressed to the Father.

In this prayer God is also addressed as “the Father of glory”, presenting the thought that the scene of glory to which we are going takes its character from the Father from whom it springs. His love and holiness will pervade that world of glory in which God will be perfectly displayed. While the Father is the spring and source of glory, the Lord Jesus, as Man, is the centre and object of glory. In Him all the power of God is displayed, His Name is above every name, and He is Head over all things to the church.

To enter into the truths which form the subject of the apostle's prayer, we need the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Christ. All the wisdom of God and all the revelation of God's will are made known in Christ. Hence we need the full knowledge of Christ to enter into the wisdom of God, the revelation that God has made known of Himself, and of His counsels.

(v. 18). Further, the knowledge of Christ for which the apostle prays, is no mere intellectual knowledge, but a heart acquaintance with a Person, for he says (as the text should read), “being enlightened in the eyes of your heart”. Again and again we see in Scripture, and learn by experience, that God teaches through the affections. It was so in the case of the poor, sinful woman of Luke 7, who “loved much” and quickly learned. It was so in the case of a devoted saint, Mary Magdalene, in John

20. Her affection for Christ was apparently more in activity on the resurrection day than that of Peter and John, and to this loving heart the Lord revealed Himself, and gave the wonderful revelation of the new position of His brethren in relationship with the Father.

With these introductory desires, the apostle makes the three great requests of the prayer:

Firstly, that we may know the hope of God's calling.

Secondly, that we may know the riches of the glory of God's inheritance in the saints.

Thirdly, that we may know the power that will bring to pass the purpose of the calling and bring the saints into the inheritance.

The calling is above in relation to divine Persons in heaven: the inheritance is below in relation to created things on earth. As we learn from Philippians 3: 14, the calling is on high, of God, and in Christ. The source of the call is God; therefore it is referred to here as "His calling". It is unfolded to us in verses 3 to 6 of this chapter. According to the divine call, we are *blessed* with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, we are chosen in Christ by the Father to be before God, *suited to Him*, "holy and without blame before Him in love", for the joy and satisfaction of His heart. Moreover, the calling tells us that we shall be before God, not as servants — like the angels — but as *sons* before His face. Further, the calling tells us that we shall be in God's everlasting *favour*, accepted in the Beloved. Lastly, we learn in the calling that we are going to be for the eternal praise of the glory of God's grace.

To sum up the calling as presented in these wonderful verses, it means that we are chosen and called on high to heavenly blessing, to be like Christ and with Christ before the Father, in relationship with the Father, in the everlasting favour of the Father, and for the eternal praise of the glory of His grace.

This is the calling about which the apostle prays, and as to which we may well pray that we may enter into its blessedness, and know what is "the hope of His calling". Here the hope has no reference to the coming of the Lord. As the saints are viewed in this Epistle as seated in the heavenlies, there is no allusion to the coming of the Lord. The "hope" is, as one has said, "the full revelation in the eternal glory of all that God has called us into in Christ, as the fruit of His counsels of a past eternity."

Secondly, the apostle prays that we may know "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." It has been said, "In His calling we look above; the inheritance, as it were, stretches out beneath our feet." The inheritance is presented in verses 10 and 11 of this chapter. There we learn that the inheritance embraces every created thing in heaven and earth over which Christ will be the glorious Head. In Him the church will obtain an inheritance, for we shall reign with Him. In the prayer the inheritance is referred to as "His inheritance *in the saints*". A kingdom does not consist merely of a king and territory, but of a king and his subjects. Moreover, "the riches of the glory of His inheritance" will be set forth in the saints. In that day He will be "glorified *in His saints*", and "admired in all them that believe" (2 Thess. 1: 10).

(V. 19). Thirdly, the apostle prays that we may know the power that is toward us by which these great things will be brought to pass. This power is spoken of as a "mighty power", and as "working", and therefore active towards us at the present time. It is an "exceeding" or "surpassing" power (N.T.). There are other and great powers in the universe, but the power that is "working" towards us surpasses every other power, whether it be the power of the flesh in us, or the power of the devil against us. What a comfort to know that in all our weakness there is a surpassing power toward us and working for us.

(Vv. 20, 21). Moreover, it is a power that has not only been revealed to us in a statement, but has

been put forth in the resurrection of Christ. The world and Satan were permitted to put forth their greatest display of power — the power of death — when they nailed Christ to the cross. Then, when the devil and the world had expressed their power to the utmost degree, God set forth His surpassing power by raising Christ from the dead, and setting Him as Man in the highest place in the universe, even at His own right hand. In this exalted position, Christ has been set above every other power, whether spiritual principalities and powers, or temporal might and dominion. There are names named for the government of this world, and the world to come, but Christ has a Name above every name — He is King of kings, and Lord of lords.

(V. 22). Furthermore, Christ is not only over every power, but all evil will be put under His feet. Such is the mighty expression of the power that will not only bring us to share with Christ this exalted place of glory, but which is toward us on our way to glory.

Then we learn another great truth: the One in whom all power has been set forth, who is set in a position above every power, who has power to put down all evil, is the One who is Head over all things to the church.

In relation to all the powers of the universe He is set “*far above*” every power. In reference to evil, all is subdued under His feet. In relation to the church, His body, He is Head, and Head to direct in *all things*. Thus it is the privilege of the church to look to Christ for guidance and direction in relation to all things. In the presence of every opposing power, and all evil, we have a resource in Christ our Head. He may indeed use gifts, and leaders, to instruct and guide, but it is to the Head we should look and not simply to the poor weak vessels that in His grace He may see fit to use.

(V. 23). In verse 22 we learn what Christ is to the church — what the Head is to the body. In verse 23 we learn what the church is to Christ — what the body is to the Head. The church is the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. The church, as His body, is for the display of all the fulness of the Head. Christ is to be set forth in the church. Nothing could be more wonderful than the place the church has in relation to Christ. One has said, it is His body “filled with His love, energised with His mind, working out His thoughts, as our bodies work out our thoughts and the purposes of our minds.” Alas! having failed to give Christ His place as Head over all things to the church, we have, as a necessary result, failed to set forth the fulness of Christ.

In all this great prayer the apostle is looking for a present effect upon the lives of the saints. The calling and the inheritance are secured to us, so the apostle does not pray that we may have the hope and the inheritance, but that we may *know* what they are. Thus the *knowledge* of what is coming is to have a present effect upon our lives and ways, delivering us, in the power of resurrection life, from the flesh and every opposing power, and separating us in spirit from this present world.

3

God's Work in Carrying Out His Purpose

(Ephesians 2)

In Ephesians 1 there are revealed to us the counsels of God for Christ and the church, closing with the prayer of the apostle that we may know the power to us-ward by which these counsels of love will be fulfilled.

In Ephesians 2 we are permitted to learn, firstly, how the power of God works *in us* (Vv. 1-10),

and, secondly, God's ways *with us* (Vv. 11-22), for the formation of the assembly in time in order to fulfil His counsels *for us*.

(1) The work of God in the believer (Vv. 1-10)

(Vv. 1-3). The chapter opens by presenting a solemn picture of the condition and position into which man had fallen under the old creation. The first two verses present the condition of the Gentile world, while verse 3 brings the Jew into this solemn picture. "We" Jews, says the apostle, "were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

Jew and Gentile are seen to be dead to God in trespasses and sins, but alive to the course of an evil world under the power of the devil — the prince of the power of the air. Thus man is disobedient to God, fulfilling the lusts of the flesh and the mind, and by nature under the judgment of God.

The Jew, though in a place of external privilege, proved by his lusts that he had a fallen nature and was on common ground with the Gentile. Both Jew and Gentile are dead to God. In the Epistle to the Romans we are viewed as under the sentence of death as the result of what we have done — our sins. Here we are viewed as already dead to God as the result of what we are — as having a fallen nature. This condition of death is not, however, a condition of irresponsibility, for the apostle describes man as "walking", having "conversation" and fulfilling his lusts. It is to God that man is dead. To the influences of the world, the flesh and the devil, he is actively alive. Moreover, the devil has obtained mastery over man through his disobedience to God, and the fallen nature we have is the result of that disobedience — we are children of disobedience.

(V. 4). If all the world is dead to God, there is no possibility of man extricating himself from such a condition. A dead man can do nothing in regard to the one to whom he is dead. Any blessing for a dead man must wholly depend upon God. This prepares the way for the activities of the love of God. The truth presented is not so much our entering into these things experimentally, but rather the way God works, according to His own love to satisfy Himself.

In the first three verses we see man acting according to his fallen nature, bringing himself under judgment. In the verses that follow we have, in direct contrast, God presented as acting according to His nature, bringing man into blessing. When man acts according to his nature, he acts without reference to God from motives of lust in his own heart. When God acts according to His nature, He acts without reference to man, and from motives of love in His heart. God's love works in us when "dead in sins", not when we began to awaken to a sense of our need, nor when we responded to that love.

Four qualities of God come before us — love, mercy, kindness and grace (verses 4 and 7). Love is the nature of God, the spring of all His actions, and the source of all our blessings. If God acts according to the love of His heart, the blessing that results can only be measured by His love. The question, then, is not what measure of blessing will meet our needs, but what is the height of blessing that will satisfy the love of God. Grace is love in activity towards unworthy objects, and goes out towards all. Mercy is shown to the individual sinner. Kindness is the bestowal of blessings upon the believer. God acts, then, "because of His great love", not because of anything that we are. who can measure His "great love", and who can measure the blessing that is according to that love?

(V. 5). This love is first expressed to us in the activities of grace that quicken us, as individuals, with Christ. If we are dead there can be no movement on our side towards God. The first movement must come from God. A new life has been imparted to us, but it is a life in association with Christ. It is a life which, in fact, is the life of Him with whom we are quickened. Thus our condition by grace is the exact opposite of our condition by nature. We were dead to God with the world by nature, we are now

alive to God with Christ by grace.

(V. 6). But not only is our condition changed, our *position* is also changed. Quickening is the communication of life; resurrection brings the one who is quickened into the place of the living. This place is set forth in Christ. Jewish and Gentile believers are raised up together and made to sit together in the heavenlies *in Christ*. Quickening is “with Him”, but risen and seated is “in Him”. Actually we are not yet raised and seated in the heavenlies. Nevertheless, we are before God in this new position in the Person of our representative. We are represented “in Christ”.

(V. 7). Having reached the height of the Christian position, we are now told the glorious purpose that God has in view in thus acting towards us in love. It is that “He might display in the coming ages the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.” God, as it were, says, “In the coming ages I am going to show what is the fruit of Christ's work, and what is the purpose of My heart.” It is obvious that nothing but the highest condition and position in which a man can be found is adequate for such great ends. When angels and principalities “see a poor sinner, and the whole church, in the same glory as the Son of God, they will understand the exceeding riches of the grace that has set them there.”

(Vv. 8, 9). All is brought to pass by the grace of God, and every blessing we enjoy is the gift of God. The very faith by which salvation is received is the gift of God. The works of man have no place in securing this blessedness; all is of God, and hence there is no room for man to boast.

(V. 10). This leads to a further truth. Not only are our works shut out — for God has done all the work — but we also are His workmanship, and, as such, we form part of a new creation in Christ Jesus. If, however, the works of the law are excluded as a means of salvation, we are not to infer that works have no place in the Christian life. There are indeed works suited to the place of blessing into which we are brought, which God has before prepared that we should walk in them. These works will come before us in the later part of the Epistle, in which we are exhorted to walk worthy of the vocation, and to walk in love, to walk as children of light, and to walk carefully (Ephesians 4: 1; Ephesians 5: 2, 8, 15).

The “good works”, of which this verse speaks, are more than doing a good work, which it would be possible for a natural man, whose walk is anything but good, to do. Here believers are viewed as not only doing good works, but as walking in them. Moreover, the good works are prepared of God and lead to a godly walk.

(2) The work of God with believers (Vv. 11-22)

The great theme of chapter 2 is the formation of the church in time in view of God's counsels for eternity. The early part of the chapter unfolds to us the work of God in us individually, whether Jew or Gentile; the latter part presents the work of God with Jewish and Gentile believers, in order to unite them together in “one body” and one house for the dwelling place of God.

(Vv. 11, 12). Before setting forth the present position of believers in Christ, the apostle contrasts the former position of Gentiles *in the flesh* with their new place. So far from the church being the aggregate of all believers from the beginning of the world, there existed in times past (the times before the cross) a God-appointed distinction between Jew and Gentile which, as long as it existed, made the existence of the church impossible.

The apostle reminds the Gentile believers that, at that time, there existed very sharp distinctions between Jew and Gentile. In the ways of God on earth the Jew enjoyed nationally a place of outward privilege to which the Gentiles were entire strangers. Israel formed an earthly commonwealth, with

earthly promises and earthly hopes, and were in outward relationship with God. Their religious worship, their political organisation, their social relations, from the highest act of worship to the smallest detail of life, were regulated by the ordinances of God. This was an immense privilege in which the Gentiles, as such, had no part. It was not that the Jews were any better than the Gentiles, for, in the sight of God, the great mass of the Jews were as bad as the Gentiles, and some even worse. On the other hand, there were individual Gentiles, such as Job, who were truly converted men. In the ways of God on earth, however, He separated Israel from the Gentiles, and gave them a special place of privilege, for, even if unconverted, (as was the case with the mass), it was an immense privilege to have all their affairs regulated according to the perfect wisdom of God. The Gentiles had no such position in the world, not enjoying public recognition of God, nor having their affairs regulated by divine ordinances. Indeed, the very ordinances that regulated the life of the Jew sternly kept Jew and Gentile apart. The Jew, therefore, had a place of outward nearness to God, while the Gentile was outwardly afar off.

Israel, however, entirely failed to answer to their privileges, turning from Jehovah to idols. The commandments and ordinances of God, which gave them their unique position, they wholly disregarded. The prophets, through whom God sought to appeal to their conscience, they stoned. Their own Messiah, who came into their midst in lowly grace, they crucified; and they resisted the Holy Spirit who bore witness to a risen and glorified Christ. As a result, they have lost, for the time being, their special place of privilege on earth, and have been scattered among the nations.

(V. 13). The setting aside of Israel prepares the way for the great change in the ways of God on earth. The vivid glimpse into the past, given by the Spirit of God in verses 11 and 12, makes by contrast the position of believers in the present the more striking. Following upon the rejection of Israel, God, in the pursuit of His ways, has brought to light the church, and has thus established an entirely new circle of blessing wholly outside the Jewish and Gentile circles.

This new position of believers no longer views them as in the flesh, but in Christ. Therefore the apostle commences to speak of this new position with the words, "But now in Christ ...", and proceeds to draw a contrast with the former position in the flesh. In connection with the flesh, the Gentile was outwardly far off from God, and the Jew, though outwardly near, was morally as far off as the Gentile. Speaking to the Jews, the Lord has to say, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth ... but their heart is far from Me" (Matthew 15: 8).

The apostle then proceeds to show how God has wrought to form the church. Firstly, believers are "made nigh by the blood of Christ", the Gentiles being brought from the place of distance, in which sin had put them, into the place of nearness set forth in Christ. This is not a mere outward nearness by means of ordinances and ceremonies, but a vital nearness that is seen in Christ Himself, risen from the dead and appearing before the face of God for us. Thus it is said, "In *Christ Jesus* ye ... are made nigh by the blood of Christ." Our sins put us far off; the precious blood of Christ washes away our sins and makes us nigh. The blood of Christ declares the enormity of the sin which demanded such a price to take it away; it proclaims the holiness of God that could be satisfied with no less a price, and reveals the love that could pay the price. It is not only that the believer can draw nigh to God, but that in Christ he is "made nigh".

(V. 14). Secondly, Jewish and Gentile believers are "*made both one*". None can overestimate the importance of being made nigh by the blood; but, for the formation of the church, more is needed. The church is not simply a number of believers "made nigh", for this will be true of every blood-bought saint from every age: it is formed of believers from among Jews and Gentiles "*made both one*". This

Christ has accomplished by His death. In a double sense “He is our peace.” He is our peace between God and the believer; and He is our peace between Jewish and Gentile believers.

(V. 15). In His death Christ removed “the law of commandments” which was the cause of distance between God and man, and between Jew and Gentile. The law, while promising life for those who kept it, condemned those who broke it. Seeing that all have broken the law, it inevitably brought condemnation to those under it, and thus put men at a distance from God. Moreover, it raised a sharp barrier — a middle wall — between Jew and Gentile. Until this barrier was removed there could be neither peace between God and men nor between Jew and Gentile. In the cross the condemnation of the broken law has been borne, and thus the enmity between men and God, and Jew and Gentile, has been removed. The peace that is the result is set forth in Christ; He is our peace. We look back to the cross and see that everything between God and our souls — sin, sins, the curse of a broken law and judgment — was there between God and Christ, our Substitute; we look up and see Christ in the glory with nothing between God and Christ but the everlasting peace He has made, and therefore nothing between God and the believer. Our peace is set forth in Christ, who is “our peace”.

Moreover, Christ represents both Jewish and Gentile believers; therefore He is our peace as between ourselves: we are made one. In the cross Christ has entirely abolished the law of ordinances as a means of approach to God, and made a new way of approach by His blood. The Jew who approaches God on the ground of the blood has done with Jewish ordinances. The Gentile is brought from his place of distance from God, the Jew away from his dispensational nearness, and both are made one in the enjoyment of a common blessing before God never before possessed by either. The Gentile believers are not raised to the level of Jewish privileges, nor are the Jews degraded to the Gentile level; both are brought on to entirely new ground on an immeasurably higher plane.

Thirdly, believers from Jews and Gentiles are made into “one new man”. We have already seen that they are “made both one”, but this does not express the full truth of the church. Had the apostle stopped here, we should indeed have seen that believers are made nigh by the blood, and made one as having all enmity removed, but we might have been left with the thought that we are made one company in happy unity. This indeed is blessedly true, but it is far short of the full truth as to the church. So the apostle proceeds further and tells us not only that we are “made nigh”, and “made both one”, but that we are made “one new man”. The expression “new man” tells of a new order of man, marked by the beauty and heavenly graces of Christ. No one Christian is adequate to set forth the graces of Christ; it requires the whole church to set forth the new man.

(V. 16). Fourthly, there is the further truth that believers are formed into “one body”. Believers, from Jews and Gentiles, are not only united to set forth the graces of the new man, Christ characteristically in all His moral excellencies, but they are also formed into one body. This is more than a company of people in unity: it is a company of people *in union*. They are united to one another by the Spirit in order that they may be a corporate body on earth to set forth the new man. Thus, not only have Jewish and Gentile believers been reconciled to each other, but, as formed into one body, they are reconciled to God. It would not suit the heart of God for the Gentile to be far off, nor for the Jew to be outwardly near; but God can rest with delight as having formed Jewish and Gentile believers into one body by the cross, which has not only removed all that caused enmity between Jewish and Gentile believers, but also enmity towards God.

(V. 17). All this blessed truth has been brought to us by the Gospel of peace preached to the Gentiles who were far off, and to the Jews who were dispensationally near. We can understand why the preaching is introduced at this point in a passage that speaks of the formation of the church. The apostle

has just spoken of the cross, for without the cross there could be no preaching, and without the preaching there could be no church. Christ is looked at as the Preacher, though the Gospel He preaches is proclaimed instrumentally through others.

(V. 18). There is the further truth of great blessedness that by one Spirit we both (Jew and Gentile) have access to the Father. The distance is not only removed on God's side; it is also removed on our side. By the work of Christ on the cross God can draw near to us preaching peace; and by the work of the Spirit in us we can draw near to the Father. The cross gives us our title to draw nigh; the Spirit enables us to use our title and practically draw near to the Father. If access is by the Spirit, then, clearly, there is no room for the flesh. The Spirit excludes the flesh in every form. It is not by buildings, or ritual, or organs, or choirs, or through a special class of men, that we gain access to the Father. It is by the Spirit, and further it is by "one Spirit", and therefore in the Father's presence all is of one accord.

We see, then, in this great passage, firstly, the two classes of which the church is composed, those who were once outwardly near and those who were once far off. Secondly, we see that God has made them one new man, and He has made them into one body. Thirdly, we learn the way in which God has accomplished this great work — by the blood of Christ, "by the cross", by the preaching, and by the Spirit.

(Vv. 19-22). Thus far we have viewed the church as the body of Christ, but in the ways of God on earth the church is viewed in other aspects, two of which are brought before us in the closing verses of the chapter. Firstly, the church is viewed as growing unto "an holy temple in the Lord"; secondly, as "an habitation of God".

In the first aspect the church is likened to a progressive building, growing unto an holy temple in the Lord. The apostles and prophets form the foundations, Christ Himself being the chief Cornerstone. Throughout the Christian dispensation, believers are being added stone by stone until the last believer is built in, and the completed building displayed in glory. This is the building of which the Lord says in Matthew 16, "I will build My assembly, and hades' gates shall not prevail against it." Christ is the Builder, not man, hence all is perfect, and none but living stones form part of this holy structure. Peter gives us the spiritual significance of this building when he tells us that the living stones are built up a spiritual house to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God, and to shew forth the excellencies of God (1 Peter 2: 5, 9). In Revelation 21 John sees a vision of the completed building descending out of heaven from God, radiant with the glory of God. Then, indeed, from that glorious building unceasing sacrifices of praise will rise up to God, and a perfect testimony to the excellencies of God will go forth to man.

Then the apostle, still using the figure of a building, presents another aspect of the church (verse 22). After having viewed the saints as being built into a growing temple, he then views them as forming a house, already complete, for a habitation of God through the Spirit. All believers on earth, at any given moment, are looked at as forming the habitation of God. Jewish and Gentile believers are "buildd together" to form this habitation. The dwelling place of God is marked by light and love. Therefore, when the apostle comes to the practical part of the Epistle, he exhorts us to "walk in love" and to "walk as children of light" (Ephesians 5: 2, 8). The house of God is thus a place of blessing and testimony, a place where saints are blessed with the favour and love of God, and, as so blessed, they become a testimony to the world around. In Ephesians the habitation of God is presented according to the mind of God, and therefore only what is real is contemplated. Other Scriptures will show, alas, how, in the hands of men, the habitation has been corrupted, until at last we read that "judgment must begin at the house of God" (1 Peter 4: 17).

We have, therefore, in the chapter a threefold presentation of the church:

Firstly, the church is viewed as the body of Christ, composed of Jewish and Gentile believers united to Christ in glory, thus forming one new man for the display of all that Christ is as the risen Man, the Head over all things. Let us remember that the church is not only “one body”, but it is “His body”, even as we read, “the church, which is His body”. As His body, the church is His fulness, filled with all that He is in order to express all that He is. The church, His body, is to be the expression of His mind, just as our bodies give expression to what is in our minds.

Secondly, the church is presented as growing unto a temple composed of all the saints of the whole Christian period, wherein sacrifices of praise ascend to God, and the excellencies of God are displayed to men.

Thirdly, the church is viewed as a complete building on earth, composed of all saints at any given moment, forming the habitation of God for blessing to His people and testimony to the world.

4

God's Way in Making Known His Purpose

(Ephesians 3)

We have seen that Ephesians 1 presents the counsels of God as to the church, while Ephesians 2 presents the work of God in and with believers to fulfil His counsels. Ephesians 3 presents the administration of the truth of the church, or the way that God has taken to make known the truth to the Gentiles through the instrumentality of the apostle Paul.

Comparing Ephesians 3: 1 with Ephesians 4: 1, it will be clearly seen that Ephesians 3 is parenthetical. Ephesians 2 presents the doctrine and Ephesians 4 the practice consistent with the doctrine. Between the doctrine and the practice we have this important digression in which the Holy Spirit presents the special administration, or service, committed to the apostle. In the second verse this service is referred to as “the *dispensation* of the grace of God”, and in verse 9 as “the *fellowship* of the mystery”. In both verses the word is the same in the original language. The best translation is “administration”, an administration being a particular service. This service was to proclaim the Gospel and make known the truth among the saints. In the course of this parenthesis we have the presentation of further great truths in connection with the church.

(1) The effect of ministering the truth of the *church*

(Vv. 1, 2). The apostle tells us that the immediate effect of ministering the truth of the church was to bring the one who proclaimed it into reproach with the religious world. This great truth aroused the special hostility of the Jew, inasmuch as it not only viewed Jew and Gentile in the same position before God — dead in trespasses and sins — but it in no wise exalted the Jew to a place of blessing above the Gentile. Moreover, as the truth of the church set aside the whole Jewish system, with its appeal to the natural man by means of an outward worship in temples made with hands, it raised the opposition of those who upheld that system. As then, so now, the maintenance of the truth of the church as revealed to, and ministered by, the apostle Paul will involve reproach and opposition from those who seek to maintain an outward religious profession, or an ecclesiastical system after the Jewish pattern.

It was, then, the carrying out of this special service, which proclaimed the Gospel of the grace of God to the Gentiles, that raised the malice of the prejudiced Jew and brought the apostle into prison. In the estimation of the Jew, a man who could talk of going to the Gentiles was not fit to live (Acts 22: 21,

22). Paul, however, did not view himself as a prisoner of men for any wrong-doing, but as a prisoner of Jesus Christ because of his service of love in making known the truth to the Gentiles.

(2) The truth of the *church* made known by revelation

(Vv. 3, 4). In order that we may receive the great truth of the church on divine authority, the apostle is careful to explain that he acquired his knowledge of “the mystery” of the church, not through communications from men, but by direct revelation from God, even as he says, “By *revelation* He made known unto me the mystery.” This meets a difficulty that may rise in connection with the truth of the mystery. When Paul preached the Gospel in the Jewish synagogues he invariably appealed to the Scriptures (see Acts 13: 27, 29, 32, 35, 47; Acts 17: 2, etc.), and the Jews of Berea are expressly commended inasmuch as they searched the Scriptures to see if the word preached by Paul was in accord with them. But directly the apostle ministered the truth of the church, he could no longer appeal to the Old Testament for confirmation. It would be useless for his hearers to search the Scriptures to see if these things were so. The unbelief of the Jews made it difficult for them to accept many truths that were in their Scriptures, even as Nicodemus failed to grasp the truth of the new birth, but to accept something that was not there, and which set aside the whole Jewish system that was there and had existed with the sanction of God for centuries, was to the Jew, as such, an insuperable difficulty.

Many Christians can hardly appreciate this difficulty, inasmuch as the truth of the church is largely obscured in their minds, or even totally lost. Viewing the church as the aggregate of believers through all time, they have no difficulty in finding what they believe to be the church in the Old Testament. That this has been the thought of godly men is amply proved by the headings that have been given to many Old Testament chapters in the Authorised Version. Accept, however, the truth of the church as unfolded in the Epistle to the Ephesians, and at once we are faced with this difficulty which can only be met by the fact that the truth of the church is an entirely fresh revelation.

(V. 5). This great truth, which Paul received by revelation, he speaks of as “the mystery”, and again in verse 4 as “the mystery of the Christ”. In using the term “mystery” the apostle does not wish to convey the thought of anything mysterious — a purely human use of the word. In Scripture a mystery is something which has hitherto been kept secret, that could not be otherwise known than by revelation, and when revealed can only be apprehended by faith. The apostle proceeds to explain that this mystery was not made known to the sons of men in the Old Testament days, but now is made known by revelation unto Christ's “holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit”. The prophets referred to in this verse are clearly not Old Testament prophets, but rather those referred to in Ephesians 2: 20. In both cases the order is “apostles and prophets”, not “prophets and apostles”, as might be expected had the reference been to prophets of the Old Testament. Moreover, the apostle is speaking of what is “now” revealed, in contrast with what was formerly revealed.

(3) The truth of the *church* thus revealed

(V. 6). Having shown that the truth of the church was made known by revelation, the apostle, in a brief passage, sums up the truth of the church, and explains why it is referred to as “the mystery”. Clearly the mystery is not the Gospel, which was not hidden in other ages, for the Old Testament is full of allusions to the coming Saviour, however little these allusions were understood.

What, then, is the mystery? We are plainly told, in verse 6, that this new revelation is that the Gentiles “should be joint heirs, and a joint body, and joint partakers of His promise in Christ Jesus by the glad tidings.” The Gentiles are made joint heirs with the Jews, not only in Christ's earthly kingdom, but in the inheritance that includes both things in heaven and things on earth. And more, the Gentile believers are formed with Jewish believers into a joint body of which Christ is the Head in heaven.

Moreover, they jointly partake of God's promises in Christ Jesus. The Gentile is not raised to the Jewish level on earth, nor is the Jew brought down to the Gentile level, both are taken off their old standing and raised to an immeasurably higher plane, united to one another on entirely new ground, even heavenly ground *in Christ*. All this is brought to pass by the Gospel which addresses both on one common level of guilt and utter ruin. The three great facts referred to in this verse have already come before us in Ephesians 1. The promise in Christ includes all the blessings unfolded in the first seven verses of that chapter, the inheritance is opened out before us in verses 8 to 21, and the truth of the "one body" in verses 22 and 23.

(4) The truth revealed to and ministered by Paul

(V. 7). Not only was the mystery revealed to Paul; he was also made the minister of the truth. The mystery was also revealed to the other apostles (verse 5) but to him was committed the special service of ministering this truth to the saints. Hence, only in the Epistles of Paul do we find any unfolding of the mystery. The grace of God had given this ministry to the apostle; the power of God enabled him to exercise the gift of grace. God's gifts can only be used in God's power.

(V. 8). Moreover, the apostle tells us the effect that this great truth had upon himself. In the presence of the greatness of God's grace he sees that he is the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1: 15): in the presence of the immense vista of blessing unfolded by the mystery he feels that he is less than the least of all saints. The greater the glories that are opened to our vision, the smaller we become in our own eyes. The man who had the largest apprehension of this great mystery, in all its vast extent, was the man who owned that he was less than the least of all saints.

In order to fulfil his ministry, the apostle not only proclaimed the irretrievable ruin of man, but the unsearchable riches of Christ, riches beyond all human computation, carrying blessings that have no limit.

(5) The end in view in the ministry of the truth

(Vv. 9-11). The preaching of the Gospel was in view of the second part of Paul's service — to enlighten all with the knowledge of the mystery, to show all men how the counsel of God from eternity to eternity is brought about in time by the formation of the assembly on earth, and thus to bring to light that which has hitherto been hidden in God from the foundation of the world.

Further, not only would God have all men enlightened as to the formation of the assembly on earth, but it is His intent that now all the heavenly beings should learn in the church His manifold wisdom. These heavenly beings had seen the creation come fresh from the hand of God, and, as they beheld His wisdom in creation, they shouted for joy. Now in the formation of the church they see "the *all-various wisdom* of God". Creation was the most perfect expression of creatorial wisdom, but in the formation of the church God's wisdom is displayed in every form. Before the church could be formed, God's glory had to be vindicated, man's need met, sin put away, death abolished, and the power of Satan annulled. The barrier between Jew and Gentile had to be removed, heaven be opened, Christ be seated as Man in the glory, the Holy Spirit come to earth, and the Gospel be preached. All this and more is involved in the formation of the church. These various ends could only be attained by the all-various wisdom of God, wisdom displayed, not only in one direction, but in every direction. Nor has the failure of the church in its responsibilities altered the fact that in the church the angels learn the wisdom of God. On the contrary, it only makes more manifest the marvellous wisdom that, rising above all man's failure, overcoming every obstacle, at last brings the church to glory "according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."

(6) The practical effect of ministering the truth

(Vv. 12, 13). The apostle turns aside from the unfolding of the mystery to give a brief word as to its practical effect. These wonders are not unrolled before our vision simply to be admired, admirable indeed as they are. The mystery is also exceedingly practical when rightly apprehended and acted upon. To act in the light of the truth will make us at home in God's world, but will put us outside man's world. As the blind man of John 9, when cast out by the religious world, finds himself in the presence of the Son of God, so the apostle, while in man's prison on earth, has access to the Father's presence in heaven.

Christ Jesus, the One through whom all these eternal purposes will be fulfilled, is the One by whom we have access to the Father with confidence. If this great truth gives us boldness and makes us at home in the Father's presence, in the world it will lead to tribulation. This Paul found, but he says, "Faint not at my tribulations." To accept the truth of the mystery — to walk in the light of it — will at once put us outside the religious world. Act upon this truth, and at once we shall meet with opposition from the Christian profession. It will be, as it was with Paul, a continual conflict, and especially with all that judaizes.

Opposition there must be, for these great truths entirely undermine the worldly constitution of every man-made religious system. Is the truth of the mystery, with the knowledge of which Paul sought to enlighten all men, proclaimed from the pulpits of Christendom, holiness conventions, or even from evangelical platforms? Is the truth of the mystery, involving the total ruin of man, the utter rejection of Christ by the world, the session of Christ in the glory, the presence of the Holy Spirit on earth, the separation of the believer from the world, and the calling of the saints to heaven — is this great truth proclaimed, or acted upon, in the national churches and religious denominations of Christendom? Alas! it has no place in their creeds, their prayers or their teaching. Nay, more, and worse, it is denied by their very constitution, their teaching and their practice.

(7) The prayer that these truths may be made good in the believer

(Vv. 14-21). The great truths unfolded in these chapters very naturally lead to the second prayer of the apostle. In the second chapter of the Epistle the apostle has unfolded the great truth that believers, from amongst Jews and Gentiles, have been builded together to form the dwelling place of God. In the third chapter the apostle has presented the truth of the mystery, showing that believers, also taken from Jews and Gentiles, are brought on to entirely new ground to form a joint-body in Christ. We then learn that this mystery has been disclosed to the intent that the manifold wisdom of God should now be displayed, according to the eternal purpose which God purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Ephesians 3: 10, 11).

Having this great end in view, the apostle turns to the Father in prayer, that the saints may be in a right spiritual condition to enter into the fulness of God. To bring about this spiritual condition in the saints we see, in the course of the prayer, that every divine Person is engaged in connection with the saints. *The Father* is the source of all blessing, *the Spirit* strengthens us that *the Christ* may dwell in us to fill us with the fulness of God, so that God may be glorified by being displayed in the saints now, and throughout all ages.

(V. 14). As the prayer has in view the eternal purpose which has been "purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord", it is addressed to "the Father" who is the source of these eternal counsels. For the same reason there is no mention of death or resurrection in the prayer. The eternal counsels were all settled before death came in, and the complete fulfilment of these counsels, to which the prayer looks on, will be in a scene where death can never enter.

(V. 15). This new scene of glory being in view, we are told that in this coming world of blessing every family in heaven and earth will be named of the Father. In the first creation all the animals were passed before Adam, who gave them names that set forth the distinguishing characteristics to be displayed in each family. So in connection with the eternal counsels for the new creation, every family in heaven and earth — angelic beings, the church in heaven, and the saints on earth — will be named of the Father, and thus each family has its distinguishing character according to the eternal counsels of the Father.

The prayer is therefore in view of all that will be brought to light in eternal ages, according to the counsels of God before the foundation of the world — a scene of which the Father is the source of all, the Son the centre of all, and every family in heaven and earth displays some special glory of the Father.

(V. 16). The first request is that the Father would grant us according to the riches of His glory to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man. The apostle does not say “according to the riches of His grace”, as in Ephesians 1: 7, but “according to the riches of His glory”, because the prayer is not connected with meeting our need, but rather with the fulfilment of the counsels of the Father's heart.

In the prayer of chapter 1 the request is that we may know the power of God toward us; here it is that we may have the power *in us* to strengthen us in the inner man. The outer man is the visible, natural man by which we are in touch with the things of the world. The inner man is the unseen and spiritual man, formed by the work of the Spirit in us, and by which we are in touch with unseen and eternal things. Just as the outer man needs to be strengthened by material things of this life, so the inner man needs to be strengthened by the Spirit to enter into the spiritual blessings of the new world of God's counsels.

(V. 17). The second request is that the Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith. The first request leads to the second, for only as we are strengthened by the Spirit will Christ dwell in our hearts by faith. The effect of the Spirit, who has come from the Father, working in our souls, will be to fill us with the Father's thoughts of Christ — to think with the Father about the Son.

The request is not that we may be strengthened with might to perform some miracle, or to undertake some arduous work, but that a spiritual condition may be wrought in our souls by Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith. The power of the world around us, of the flesh within us, and the devil against us, is so great, that, if Christ is to have His true place in our hearts it will only be as we are strengthened by the Spirit in the inner man.

Moreover, the prayer is that the Christ may “*dwell*” in our hearts. We are not to treat Him as a visitor to be entertained on some special occasion, but as One who has an abiding place in our hearts. This can only be by faith, for faith looks out to Christ, and as He is before us as an object He will have a dwelling-place in our hearts. The One who is the centre of all God's counsels will thus become the centre of our thoughts. As one has said, “The supreme object to God becomes the supreme object to us.” What a witness for God we each should be if our lives were governed by one engrossing object, and that object Christ! Too often we are like Martha of old, distracted with “much serving”, and “careful and troubled about many things”. “One thing” only is “needful”, to have Christ as the sole Object of our lives, then service and all else will follow without distraction. May we, like Mary, choose this “good part”.

The result of Christ dwelling in the heart is to root and ground us in love. If Christ, the One in whom, and through whom, all the love of the Father has been made known, is dwelling in our hearts,

He will surely fill the heart with a knowledge and enjoyment of divine love.

(V. 18). Christ dwelling in the heart prepares the way for the third great request, that we may be “fully able to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height.” God teaches us through our affections, so that the way to this apprehension is not only by faith, but by “being rooted and grounded in *love*”. Through the work of the Spirit, Christ dwells in our hearts by *faith*; dwelling there by faith He fills our hearts with *love*, and love prepares us to apprehend. Further, this love leads us to embrace “all saints”, for the more we enjoy the love of Christ, the more our hearts will go out to all who are loved by Christ.

Then the apostle desires that we may apprehend “the breadth, and length, and depth, and height”. This would appear to be the whole range of God's “eternal purpose”, already referred to in verse 11. This eternal purpose in its breadth embraces “all saints”, in its length stretches into the age of ages, in its depth reached down to us in all our need, and in its height brings us into a scene of glory.

(V. 19). All this scene of blessedness is secured for us by the love of Christ — the One who “loved the church, and gave Himself for it.” Hence the fourth request is that we may “know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.” It is a love that can be known and enjoyed, and yet it passes knowing. If we cannot measure the height of glory from which Christ came, or fathom the depth of sorrow into which He has been, still less can we measure the love that has wrought for us, that takes in the vast host of the redeemed, small and great, that is caring for us in our passage through time, and that is coming for us to bring us into the home of love to be there with Him, and like Him, for the gratification of His heart of love. Such love can be known, and yet will forever remain a love that passes knowing.

The fifth request is that we may be filled with all the fulness of God. The fulness of God is all that God is as revealed and made known in Christ. The Son has fully declared the Father in His love and holiness, in His grace and truth; and the apostle desires that we should receive, in full measure, of the divine fulness that it may be displayed in the saints.

(V. 20). The sixth request is that all the apostle has been praying for the saints may be wrought in them by the power of God. God is, indeed, able to do exceeding abundantly “for us”, as is often said. Here, however, where the leading thought throughout the prayer is the spiritual condition of the saints, it is neither what God can do *for us* or *with us* that is in view, but rather His ability and willingness to work “*in us*” in answer to these requests, and to do this “above all that we ask or think”.

(V. 21). The seventh and last desire is that there may be glory in the church unto God by Christ Jesus throughout all ages. Every request in the prayer leads up to this wonderful thought that through all the ages the saints should set forth the fulness of God, and thus be for His glory. The whole prayer clearly shows that it is God's desire that what will be true of the saints throughout the eternal ages should mark them in their passage through time — that all that God is should shine forth in His people.

5

The Believer's Walk in Relation to the Assembly

(Ephesians 4: 1-16)

The last three chapters of the Epistle form the practical portion in which the apostle exhorts to a walk worthy of the great truths presented in the first three chapters. It will be noticed that, as believers,

we are exhorted to conduct consistent with our privileges and responsibilities in three different connections:

Firstly, we are exhorted to a worthy walk in view of our privileges in relation to the assembly as being members of the body of Christ, and as forming the dwelling place of God by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4: 1-16).

Secondly, we are exhorted to practical godliness as individuals who profess the Name of the Lord while passing through an evil world (Ephesians 4: 17-5: 21).

Thirdly, we are exhorted to a consistent walk in connection with the family and social relationships that belong to the order of creation (Ephesians 5: 22-6: 9).

(V. 1). On account of his testimony to the grace of God to the Gentiles, and to the great truth of the Mystery — Jewish and Gentile believers formed into one body, and united to Christ as Head — the apostle had suffered persecution and imprisonment. He uses his sufferings on account of the truth as a motive to exhort believers to walk worthy of their great privileges. Our walk is to be consistent with our calling. In order, then, to profit by these exhortations we need to have a clear understanding of our calling. In the first chapter of the Epistle we have the calling presented according to the counsels of God before the beginning of the world, without reference to how far it has actually been fulfilled in time or realised in our souls. It is God's purpose that believers should be “holy and without blame before Him in love” for His good pleasure and glory. In Ephesians 2 we see how God has wrought to bring this calling into actual existence in this world in view of its complete fulfilment in the ages to come.

Two great truths are implied in the calling of God: firstly, that believers are formed into one body of which Christ is the Head; secondly, that they “are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.” Further, we learn in the Epistle God's present purpose in these two great truths. In connection with the church, viewed as the body of Christ, we read that His body is “the fulness of Him that filleth all in all” (Ephesians 1: 23). Again, in verse 13 of this chapter, we read of “the fulness of Christ”; and in Ephesians 3: 19 we read of “the fulness of God”. It is, then, the purpose of God that, as the body of Christ, the church should set forth all the moral excellencies that form the beautiful character of Christ as Man — His fulness. Then, as the house of God, the church is to set forth the holiness, grace and love of God — His fulness.

This, then, is the high privilege to which we are called — to represent Christ by setting forth His excellence, and to make God known in the fulness of His grace.

In Ephesians 3 we learn that the suited condition of soul for realising the greatness of our calling is only possible as Christ dwells in the heart by faith, and as God “worketh in us.” If Christ has His place in our hearts we shall esteem it a great privilege to be here to set forth His character. If God works in us, we shall delight to witness to the glory of His grace.

Christ is in heaven as a glorified Man, our risen Head, and the Holy Spirit, a divine Person, is on earth dwelling in the midst of believers. As realising the glory of Christ and the greatness of the Person that is dwelling in us, it becomes us to walk in a worthy way.

(Vv. 2, 3). In verses two and three the apostle sums up the walk that is worthy of our calling. If walking in the realisation of our privileges to represent Christ, and as being in the presence of the Spirit, we should be marked by these seven qualities — lowliness, meekness, long-suffering, forbearance, love, unity and peace.

The conscious sense of being before the Lord and in the presence of the Spirit must of necessity lead to lowliness and meekness. If we have our brethren before us, we may seek to make something of ourselves, but with God before us we realise our nothingness. In His presence we should be marked by lowliness that does not think of self, and by meekness that gives place to others.

The lowliness and meekness that make nothing of self lead to long-suffering and forbearance with others. We may find at times that others are not always lowly and meek, and this will call for long-suffering. We may have to suffer rebuffs and insults, and have to bear with those who act in this way. But we are warned that the forbearance is to be exercised in love. It is possible to bear with much in the spirit of pride that treats an offending brother with contempt. If we have to be silent, let it be with love that grieves over unworthy conduct.

Furthermore, we are to use diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace. It is important to distinguish between the unity of the body and the unity of the Spirit. The unity of the body is formed by the Holy Spirit uniting believers to Christ and to one another as members of one body. This unity cannot be touched. There is also “one Spirit” who is the source of every right thought, word and act, so that, in the body, one mind should prevail — the mind of the Spirit.

It is this unity of the Spirit that we are to use diligence to keep. It has been truly said, “Walking according to the Spirit can be done individually; but for the unity of the Spirit there must be walking with others.”

Realising that we are members of “one body” we shall see that we are not to walk merely as isolated individuals, but as related to one another in one body, and, as such, we are to use diligence that we may be controlled with one mind — the mind of the Spirit. This unity of the Spirit is not simply uniformity of thought, nor a unity arrived at by agreement, or by mutual concessions. Such unities may entirely miss the mind of the Spirit.

In the early days of the church we see the blessed result of believers having the mind of the Spirit. Of these saints we read that they were filled with the Spirit, the result being that they were of “one heart” and “one soul”. It is evident that this unity of the Spirit has not been kept. Nevertheless, the Spirit is still here, and the mind of the Spirit is still one, therefore the exhortation still remains that, in the realisation of our membership of the one body, we should endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit. The only way to maintain this unity of the Spirit is for each one to judge the flesh. If we allow the flesh in our thoughts, words and ways, it will at once bring in a jarring element. It has been said, “The principle of the flesh is every man for himself. That does not bring in unity. In the unity of the Spirit it is every man for others.”

Moreover, we are to use diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit “*in the uniting bond of peace*”. The flesh is ever self-assertive and ready to quarrel with others with whom it may not agree. If we cannot agree as to the mind of the Spirit, let us patiently search the Word of God under the guidance of the Spirit in the spirit of peace. If two believers are not of the same mind it is evident that one, or both, have missed the mind of the Spirit, and the danger is that they may fall to quarrelling. How necessary then that the endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit should be carried out in the spirit of peace that binds us together. Another has said, “What comes from the Spirit is always one. Why are we not always agreed? Because our own minds work. If we had only what we learned from Scripture, we should all be the same.” (J.N.D.)

(Vv. 4-6). The important question naturally arises, What is the one mind of the Spirit that we are to endeavour to keep? It comes before us in verses four to six. The one mind of the Spirit is set forth in these seven unities, the one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God

and Father of all. These are the great truths that the Spirit is here to make true to our souls and to maintain. Walking with one another in the light of these truths, we shall keep the unity of the Spirit, while any practical denial of them, or departure from them, will be a breach in the unity of the Spirit. Thus there come before us in these verses the different spheres in which a walk according to the Spirit is to be expressed. This walk is seen in connection with the one body, the one Spirit, and the one hope, in the circle of life, in connection with the Lord in the circle of Christian profession, and in connection with God in the circle of creation.

It is of the first importance to have our thoughts so formed by the word of God that we discern these three circles of unity that actually exist under the eye of God, and thus not only have before us what God has before Him, but also be able to form a just estimate of the solemn departure of Christendom from the truth.

Firstly, the apostle says, “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.” Here all is real and vital; it is the circle of life. The one body is formed by one Spirit and moves on to the one end — the glory. This unity is in God's keeping. It cannot be kept by our endeavour, or broken by our failure, but we may miss the one mind of the Spirit by a denial of these great truths in practice. This, alas, has been done in the Christian profession, for in the light of the great truth that “there is one body” — not many — all the different bodies of believers formed in Christendom stand condemned, while the “one Spirit” condemns all human arrangements by which the Spirit is set aside. Moreover, the professing church has settled down in the world and become the world, and thus is a denial of the heavenly hope of our calling.

Secondly, there is a wider circle that includes all who profess Christ as Lord (whether real or unreal in their profession). This is the circle of profession marked by one authority, the Lord, one profession of belief, the faith, and into which we are introduced by one baptism. With the Lord is connected authority and administration. The recognition that there is one Lord would shut out the authority of man, and exclude all independent action. If we admit that there is “one Lord” we cannot admit that it is right for an assembly to ignore discipline truly exercised in the Name of the Lord in another assembly. Thus again, by independency, we may miss the one mind of the Spirit by the practical denial of there being “one Lord”.

Thirdly, there is the widest circle of all — the creation circle. There is one God who is the Father, the source “*of all*”. Moreover it is good for us to know that, whatever the power of created things or beings, God is “*above all*”. Furthermore, God is working out His plans “*through all*”, so God can say, “When thou passest *through* the waters, I will be with thee; and *through* the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest *through* the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee” (Isaiah 43: 2). Lastly, God works *in the believer* to effect His purpose for the believer. The recognition of these great truths would not only lead us to reject the infidel evolutionary theories of men, but encourage us to act rightly in all circumstances and relationships of life which are connected with the creation order.

Alas! in the great Christian profession today we see the practical denial of each of these circles. The Spirit is set aside by human arrangements, the one Lord is set aside by independency, and the one God is set aside by infidel reasonings.

In the verses that follow, the exhortations appear to have special reference to each of these circles. Firstly, we are exhorted as members of the one body in verses 7 to 16; secondly, we are exhorted as to our conduct as owning one Lord in verses 17 to 32; lastly, we are exhorted as to the relationships of life in connection with the circle of creation in Ephesians 5 to Ephesians 6: 9.

(V. 7). Having in these introductory verses laid the ground for a walk worthy of the calling, the apostle proceeds to speak of the provision that has been made in order that the believer may walk rightly in relation to the first circle, the one body, and grow in likeness to Christ the Head.

Firstly, the apostle speaks of the gift of grace: “Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.” In contrast with that which is common to all, of which the apostle has been speaking, there is that which is given to “every one”. The one Spirit of verse 4, and the one Lord of verse 5, shut out independency; “every one” of verse 7 maintains our individuality. While every member has its special function, all serve the unity and good of the whole body. In the natural body the functions of the eye and the hand are different, yet both act in common for the good and unity of the body. The “grace” is the special service with which each one has been favoured. It is not necessarily a distinct gift, but to all a measure of grace is given that each may serve others in love. This grace is according to the measure in which Christ has given it.

(V. 8). Secondly, to promote spiritual progress and growth, the apostle refers to distinct gifts. The subject is introduced by presenting Christ as ascended on high, for these gifts come from the triumphant and exalted Christ. An allusion is made to the history of Barak to illustrate the sovereign power of Christ in bestowing gifts (Judges 5: 12). When Barak delivered Israel from captivity, he led captive those by whom they had been led captive. So Christ has triumphed over all the power of Satan, and, having delivered His people from the power of the enemy, He is exalted on high and gives gifts to His people.

(Vv. 9, 10). Two parenthetical verses are introduced to set forth the greatness of Christ's victory. At the cross He went into the lowest place in which sin can put a man. From the lowest place where, as our Substitute, He was made sin, He ascended to the highest place in which a man can be set — the right hand of God.

(V. 11). Having led captivity captive by breaking the power of the enemy that held us in bondage, Christ acts in power and makes others the instruments of His power. It is not simply that He gives gifts and leaves us to apportion the gifts among ourselves, but He gives certain men to exercise the gifts. It is not that He gives apostleship, but He gives apostles, and so with all the gifts. Here, then, it is no longer the grace given to “every one”, but “some” given to exercise gifts. Firstly, He gave apostles and prophets, and the church is built upon the foundation of apostles and prophets. The foundation has been laid and they have passed away, though we still have the benefit of these gifts in the writings of the New Testament.

The remaining gifts, evangelists, pastors and teachers, are for the building up of the church when the foundation has been laid. These gifts continue during the whole period of the church's history on earth. The evangelist comes first as the gift by which souls are drawn into the circle of blessing. Being brought into the church, believers come under the gifts of the pastor and teacher. The evangelist brings Christ before the world: the pastor and the teacher bring Christ before the believer. The pastor deals with individual souls: the teacher expounds Scripture. It has been said, “A person may teach without being a pastor, but you can hardly be a pastor without teaching in a certain sense. The two are closely connected, but you could not say they are the same thing. The pastor does not merely give food as the teacher; he pastors, or shepherds, the sheep, leads them here and there, and takes care of them.”

It will be noticed that there are no miraculous gifts mentioned in this passage. They would hardly be in place in a portion that speaks of the Lord's provision for the church. Miracles and signs were given at the commencement to call the attention of the Jews to the glory and exaltation of Christ and the power of His Name. The Jews rejected this testimony and the signs and miracles ceased. The Lord's

love to His church, however, can never cease, and the gifts that bear witness to His love continue, as it is written, “No man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church” (Ephesians 5: 29).

(V. 12). Having spoken of gifts, the apostle now brings before us the three great objects for which the gifts have been given. They are given, first, for the perfecting of the saints, or the establishing of each individual believer in the truth. Secondly, they are given for the work of the ministry, which would include every form of service. Thirdly, they are given “for the edifying of the body of Christ”. The blessing of individuals and the work of the ministry have in view the edifying of the body of Christ. Every gift, whether it be evangelist, pastor or teacher, is only rightly exercised as the edification of the body of Christ is kept in view.

(V. 13). In the verses that follow, we learn more precisely what the apostle means by the perfecting of the saints. He is not speaking of the perfection that will be the believer's portion in resurrection glory, but of that spiritual progress in the truth, and the knowledge of the Son of God, which lead to unity and to our becoming fully developed Christians down here.

The faith of which the apostle speaks is the whole system of Christian truth. The unity is not a unity of common agreement as in a creed, or an alliance formed by the expedients of men, but a unity of mind and heart produced by the apprehension of the truth as taught by God in His word. Connected with the faith is the knowledge of the Son of God, for in Him God is fully made known and the truth livingly set forth. Anything that touches the faith, or in any way belittles the glory of the Son of God, will hinder the perfecting of the saints. The knowledge of the faith as revealed in the word, and set forth in the Son of God, leads to the full-grown man as set forth in all fulness and perfection in Christ as Man. The figure sets forth the idea of Christians fully developed and in full vigour. The passage appears to have in view all saints, for it does not speak of full-grown men, but “the full-grown man”, conveying the thought of all Christians setting forth in unity an entirely new man. The measure of the stature of the full-grown man is nothing less than the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. “The fulness” presents the thought of completeness. “The full-grown man” is nothing less than the display in believers of all the moral excellencies of Christ. The whole passage contemplates believers as a corporate body to set forth the fulness of Christ. Moreover, the standard set before us is not only that every trait of Christ should be seen in the saints, but that they should be seen in perfection. It may be said that this will never be attained in the saints down here. Actually this is so, but God cannot set before us a standard that is short of the perfection seen in Christ. We do well to beware of seeking to evade what God sets before us, and excuse our shortcomings by saying that God's standard is impossible of attainment.

(V. 14). The effect of this full growth would be that we should no longer be babes in Christian knowledge, liable through ignorance to be “tossed and carried about by every wind of that teaching which is in the sleight of men, in unprincipled cunning with a view to systematized error.” Alas! there are those in the Christian profession who, with sleight and cunning craftiness, are ready to deceive the unestablished in the truth, and behind their wrong doctrine there is generally “systematised error”. Whenever in the history of God's people there is a definite denial of any great truth, or any special error put forth concerning the Person of Christ, it will generally be found that behind the particular wrong doctrine there is a whole system of error.

(V. 15). In times of conflict there is a great danger of being “tossed to and fro” by listening to this one and the other. All around we see a mixed and lifeless Christianity powerless against delusion. Our only safeguard against all error will be found, not in the knowledge of error, but in “holding the truth in

love”, and having a living Christ before our souls. If Christ is the Object of our affections, every truth as to Christ will be held in love, with the result that we shall grow up to Him in all things, and we shall become morally like the One who holds our affections.

Further, the One in whose likeness and knowledge we grow is the Head of the body. All wisdom, power and faithfulness are in the Head. All may be in disorder in the scene around us, but if we know Christ as the Head we shall realise that no power of the enemy, and no failure of the saints, can touch the wisdom and power of the Head.

(V. 16). In the sixteenth verse we pass from what the Lord is graciously doing through the gifts to learn what He Himself is doing as the Head of the body. That which *every joint* supplieth is not the exercise of gift, for the gifts are not given to everyone, but every true Christian has something given from the Head to contribute to fellow members of the body. In the human body, if every member is under the direct control of the head all the members will function together for the good of the whole. In like manner, if every member of the body of Christ were under the direct control of Christ the body would make increase and edify itself in love.

Thus, in the course of the passage, there is grace given to every one (verse 7), there are special gifts (verse 11), and there is that which is supplied from the Head to every member for the blessing of the whole body (verse 16).

We may also notice the large place that love has in the Christian circle. We are to show forbearance to one another *in love* (verse 2), we are to hold the truth *in love* (verse 15), and the edifying of the body is to be *in love* (verse 16).

The whole passage presents a beautiful picture of what the church should be down here according to the mind of the Lord. We can form no true conception of Christianity, or of the church, by looking at Christendom, or by what passes under the Name of Christ upon earth. To get any true thought of the church, according to the mind of the Lord, we must abstract our thoughts from all around, and have before us the truth as presented in the word and set forth in the Son of God.

6

The Believer's Walk as Confessing The Lord

(Vv. 17-19). The apostle has exhorted us to a walk that becomes believers in relation to the assembly. He now exhorts us to the individual walk that is becoming to those who confess the Lord in an evil world. He testifies to us in the Lord, whose Name we have professed, that henceforth we should no longer walk as other Gentiles. This leads the apostle to give a brief but vivid picture of the condition of the unconverted Gentile world. Such walk in a vain show and follow vain things. Their minds are darkened, being wholly ignorant of God and of the life that is according to God. They are ignorant of God because their hearts are hardened by the evil lives they live, for such have given themselves over to lasciviousness. We thus learn that it is the evil lives men live that hardens the heart; that the hardened heart darkens the understanding; and that the darkened understanding leaves men a prey to every vanity.

(Vv. 20-24). In contrast with the vain and ignorant life of the Gentile world, the apostle presents the life that follows from the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. It has been pointed out that the apostle does not say “as the truth is in Christ”. This would have brought in believers and their position before God in Christ. He uses the personal name, Jesus, to bring before us a right practical walk as set forth in His personal path. As one has said, “He says 'Jesus', therefore, because he is thinking, not of a

place that we have in Him, or of the results of His work for us, but simply His example, and Jesus is the Name belonging to Him as here in the world.”

The truth set forth in Jesus was the truth as to the new man, for He is the perfect expression of the new man that bears the character of God Himself — “righteousness and true holiness”. The truth, then, as it is in Jesus is not the reformation of the old man, nor the changing of the flesh into the new, but the introduction of the new man, which is an entirely new creation bearing the character of God. The first man was not righteous, but innocent. He had no evil in him, and no knowledge of good and evil. The old man has the knowledge of good and evil, but chooses unrighteousness and corrupts himself according to his deceitful lusts. The new man has the knowledge of good and evil, but is righteous, and therefore refuses the evil.

The truth that we have learned in Christ has been set forth in Jesus. The truth that we have been taught and learned in Him is that, in the cross, we have put off the old man and have put on the new. In the light of this great truth we are in our daily path, as a present thing, being renewed in the spirit of our minds. Instead of the mind of the flesh, which is enmity against God, we have a renewed mind marked by righteousness and holiness, which refuses the evil and chooses the good. The new man does not mean the old man changed, but an entirely new man, and the “renewing” refers to the daily life of the new man.

The apostle does not say we are to put off the old man, but says, “having put off ... the old man”. The old man has been dealt with at the cross, and faith accepts what Christ has done. We have not to die to sin, but to reckon ourselves as having died to sin in the Person of our Substitute.

(V. 25). In the remaining verses of the chapter the apostle applies this truth to our individual conduct. We are to put away the deeds of the old man, and put on the character of the new man. We are to put away lying and speak truth, remembering that we are members one of another. This being so, it has been truly said, “If I lie to my brother it is as if I deceived myself.” We see, too, how the great truth that believers are members of one body has a practical bearing on the smallest details of life.

(V. 26). We are to beware of sinning through anger. There is such a thing as being rightly angry, but such anger is indignation against evil, not against the evil-doer, and behind such anger there is grief on account of the evil. Thus we read of the Lord that He looked on the wicked leaders of the synagogue “with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts” (Mark 3: 5). The anger of the flesh ever has self in view; it is not grief on account of evil, but resentment against one that has been offensive. This fleshly anger against the evildoer will only lead to bitterness that occupies the soul with thoughts of revenge. The one entertaining such thoughts finds himself continually fretting, and in this sense lets the sun go down upon his wrath. Anger against evil will lead to grief that finds its resource in turning to God, where the soul finds rest.

(V. 27). We are warned that by acting in the flesh, whether in anger or in any other way, we open the door for the devil. Peter, by his self-confidence, made room for the devil to lead him into a denial of the Lord.

(V. 28). The life of the new man is in entire contrast with the old, so that the one characterised by stealing from others becomes a contributor to him that needs.

(V. 29). In conversation we are not to speak of those things which would corrupt the minds of the hearers, but rather to speak of that which edifies and ministers to a spirit of grace in the hearers.

(Vv. 30, 31). In the first part of the chapter the exhortation to a worthy walk flows from the great truth that believers collectively are the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit. Here we are reminded that as

individuals we are sealed by the Spirit. God has marked us out as His own in view of the day of redemption by giving us the Spirit. We are to beware of grieving the Holy Spirit by allowing bitterness, the heat of passion, wrath and noisy clamour, injurious language and malice.

(V. 32). In contrast with the evil speaking and malice of the flesh, we are to be kind, tender-hearted and forgiving towards one another in the consciousness of the way God has acted towards us in forgiving us for Christ's sake.

7

The Believer's Walk as a Child of God

(Ephesians 5: 1-21)

(V. 1). In this portion of the Epistle believers are viewed, not only as owning that there is one God, but as being in relationship with God as His children. The whole passage exhorts us to walk as becometh children. The “therefore” of the first verse connects this portion with the last verse of the preceding chapter. God has acted towards us in kindness and grace, and now it becomes us to act towards one another as God has acted towards us. We are therefore exhorted to be imitators of God “as dear children”. We are not to seek to imitate God in order to become children, but because we are children. Walking as “dear” children implies a walk governed by affection. A servant may walk rightly in legal obedience, but it becomes a child to walk in loving obedience. We are not servants but sons.

We cannot and are not asked to imitate God in His omnipotence and omniscience, but we are exhorted to act morally like Him. Such a walk will be characterised by love, light and wisdom; and in all these things we can be imitators of God. The apostle, in the verses that follow, develops the walk in accord with these beautiful moral traits. First, he speaks of walking *in love* in contrast with a world marked by lust (verses 1-7). Secondly, he exhorts us to “*walk as children of light*” in contrast with those who live in darkness (verses 8-14). Finally, he exhorts us to “walk carefully, not as unwise but as wise” (verses 15-20).

(V. 2). Firstly, as children, we are exhorted to walk in love. At once Christ is set before us as the great example of this love. In Him we see the devotedness of love that gave Himself for others, and this devotedness goes up to God as a sweet-smelling sacrifice. Such love goes far beyond the demands of the law which requires that a man love his neighbour as himself. Christ did more, for He *gave Himself* to God for us. It is this love we are asked to imitate, a love that would lead us to sacrifice ourselves for our brethren. Such love will in its little measure, even as with the infinite love of Christ, go up as a sweet savour to God. The love that led the Philippian assembly to meet the necessities of the apostle was to God “an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God” (Philippians 4: 16-18).

(V. 3). The love that is devoted to the good of others would shut out unholiness that gratifies the flesh at the expense of others, and the covetousness that seeks one's own gain. Our walk is to be as becometh saints. The standard of our morality is not simply the walk that becomes a decent man, but that which is becoming to saints. When it is a question of expressing love it is “as dear children”; when it is refusing lust it is “as becometh saints”.

(V. 4). Moreover, the passing merriment that the world finds in filthiness, indecent talking and buffoonery is unbecoming in the saint. The quiet, deep joy of praise, not the laughter of the fool,

becometh saints (Ecclesiastes 7: 6).

(V. 5). Those who are characterised by uncleanness, covetousness and idolatry will not only miss the blessings of the coming kingdom of Christ and of God, but being disobedient to the Gospel will come under the wrath of God. In contrast with this present evil world, the kingdom of God will be a scene in which love prevails, and from which lust is excluded. That which will be true of the coming kingdom should mark the family of God today.

(V. 6). We are warned not to be deceived with vain words. Evidently, then, men with their philosophy and science will excuse lust and seek to throw a glamour of poetry and romance over sin in order to give it an attractive appearance. Nevertheless, because of these things the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience. "The sons of disobedience" are those who have heard the truth, but have rejected it. In a special way the Jews in Paul's day were, as a class, the sons of disobedience, but it is fast becoming true of Christendom. Men will, however, be judged for their wicked deeds, though the crowning sin will be disobedience to the Gospel.

(V. 7). With such we are to have no fellowship. The children of God and the children of disobedience can have nothing in common.

(Vv. 8-10). Secondly, once we were darkness, now we are light in the Lord. It is not simply that we were in the dark, as being ignorant of God, but we were characterised by a nature that is darkness, for it found its pleasure in everything that is contrary to God. Now we are partakers of the divine nature, and that nature is marked by love and light. Therefore the apostle can say, not only that we are light, but that we are light in the Lord. Having come under the sway of the Lord, we have come into the light of what is suited to Him. We shall love what He loves.

Being light in the Lord we are to walk as children of light, a walk that will show itself in "all goodness and righteousness and truth", for these things are the fruit of light. Thus walking we shall prove in our circumstances what is acceptable unto the Lord, and be a reproof to the unfruitful works of darkness. One has said, "A child while observing his father learns what is pleasing to him, and knows what he would like in the circumstances that transpire." It is in this way we prove "what is agreeable to the Lord".

(Vv. 11-13). Already we have been warned against having fellowship with evil workers. Now we are warned against fellowship with the works of darkness; we should rather reprove them. To speak of the things that the flesh can do in secret is shame. The light of Christ reproves the evil that it exposes. In Christendom people cannot publicly commit gross sins that are openly committed in heathendom. The light in Christians is too strong. Alas! as the light declines sins again become more public and open.

(V. 14). The unbeliever is dead to God. The true believer, if not heeding these exhortations, may fall into a condition of sleep in which he is like a dead man. In such a condition he will not profit by the light from Christ. The exhortation to such an one is, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." It has been well said, "It is Christ Himself who is the source, the expression, and the measure of light for the soul that is awake."

(Vv. 15-17). Thirdly, we are exhorted to walk wisely. Learning from the first fourteen verses that the true measure for a right walk is God's nature of light and love, we are to profit by this teaching, and "walk carefully, not as unwise but as wise." In an evil world the Christian will need wisdom, but this wisdom is in regard to what is good. So, in another Epistle, the apostle can write, "Be wise as to that which is good, and simple as to evil" (Romans 16: 19). Our wisdom will be seen in redeeming the time,

and understanding what the will of the Lord is. The days are evil, and if the devil could have his way there never would be a time or opportunity for that which is pleasing to the Lord. To do good we shall, as it were, have to seize the occasion from the enemy. If understanding the will of the Lord, we shall often find that an evil day can be turned into an occasion for doing good. Nehemiah, by prayer and fasting, learnt the will of the Lord concerning His people, so that when the opportunity came, in the presence of king Artaxerxes, he seized the occasion (Nehemiah 1: 4; Nehemiah 2: 1-5). It is possible to have a great knowledge of evil and yet be ignorant of the will of the Lord, and thus still be “unwise”.

(Vv. 18-21). Divinely-given wisdom will lead to sobriety in contrast with the excitement of nature. The world may work up some passing excitement leading to excesses of evil, but the Christian has a source of joy within, the Holy Spirit. Having the Spirit we are exhorted to be filled with the Spirit. If the Spirit were ungrieved, and allowed to control our thoughts and affections, the result would be a company of people entirely apart from the world and its excitements, that rejoiced together in a life of which the world has no knowledge, and in which it can find no pleasure. This life finds its expression in praise that flows from hearts that delight in the Lord. It is a life that discerns the love and goodness of God in “all things”, however trying the circumstances may be. It therefore gives thanks at all times for all things unto God and the Father in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. In this, as in all else for the Christian, Christ is our perfect example, for, when rejected by Israel in spite of all His mighty works, “*At that time* Jesus answered and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth” (Matthew 11: 25).

Moreover, if filled with the Spirit, we should be marked by that spirit of lowliness and meekness that would lead us to submit to one another in the fear of Christ, in contrast with the self-importance of the flesh that asserts itself and its liberty to act without reference to the consciences of others.

Thus the believer filled with the Spirit will be marked: firstly, by a spirit of praise to the Lord; secondly, by submission with thanksgiving to all that the Father allows; thirdly, by submission to the other in the fear of Christ.

8

The Believer's Walk in Connection with Natural Relations

(Ephesians 5: 22-Ephesians 6: 9)

In this portion of the Epistle we are exhorted as to the conduct that becomes Christians in connection with earthly relationships. The apostle first speaks of the most intimate of relationships, wives and husbands (Ephesians 5: 22-33), then of children and parents (Ephesians 6: 1-4), and finally of servants and masters (Ephesians 7: 5-9).

As individuals we own Christ as Lord, and the responsibilities of every relationship are to be carried out in the fear of the Lord. The wife is to be subject to her own husband “as unto the Lord” (v. 22); children are to obey their parents “in the Lord” (Ephesians 6: 1); fathers are to train their children in the “admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6: 4); servants are to do “service as to the Lord” (Ephesians 6: 7); and masters are to remember that they have a Master in heaven.

(1) Wives and husbands

(Vv. 22-25). Christian wives are exhorted to submit to their husbands in everything and Christian husbands are exhorted to love their wives. Special exhortations always have in view the particular

quality in which the individual addressed is likely to fail. The woman is liable to break down in submission, and is therefore reminded that the husband is the head of the wife, and that her place is to be subject. The man is more prone than the woman to fail in affection; therefore husbands are exhorted to love their wives.

In order to emphasise the subjection of the wife and the affection of the husband, the apostle turns aside to speak of Christ and the church, and we learn the great truth that earthly relationships were formed after the pattern of heavenly relationships. When God first established the relationship of man and wife, it was after the pattern of that which then existed only in His counsels, Christ and the church. Thus, on the one hand, the relationship of Adam and Eve to each other, as husband and wife, becomes the first figure in Scripture of Christ and the church; and, on the other, Christ and the church are used to illustrate the true attitude of husbands and wives to each other. The wife is to be subject to her husband as the head, even as Christ is the Head of the church, and is the Saviour of these mortal bodies. Again, if the husband is exhorted to love his wife, it is after the pattern of Christ and the church, for he is to love “even as Christ also loved the church.”

It may be thought that the standard set is very high, and that the statements that wives are to be subject to their husbands in everything, and that husbands are to love their wives even as Christ loved the church, are very strong; but what wife would mind being subject to a husband that loved her even as Christ loved the church, and what husband would cease to love a wife who was always subject as the church should be to Christ?

The apostle's heart is so full of Christ and the church that he takes occasion by these practical exhortations to bring before us a very vivid summary of the eternal relations of Christ and His church, to which we do well to take heed.

He reminds us that “Christ is the Head of the church”; that “Christ also loved the church”; and that Christ nourisheth and cherisheth the church. He is the Head to guide, He has the heart to love, and the hand to provide for her every need. Amidst all the difficulties we have to face, our unfailing resource is found in looking to Christ our Head for wisdom and guidance. In all our sorrows, and the failure of human love, we can count on the unchanging love of Christ that passeth knowledge; and in all our needs we can count upon His care and provision.

Moreover, the love of Christ is brought before us in a threefold way. There is that which His love has done in the past, what it is doing in the present, and what it will yet do in the future. In the past Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. Not only did He give up a kingly crown, kingdom glories and earthly ease to tread a path of humiliation and sorrow, but at last *He gave Himself*. More He could not give.

He not only died for us in the past; He is living for us in the present. Today He is sanctifying and cleansing the church with the washing of water by the word. He is daily occupied with us, separating us from this evil world and practically cleansing us from the flesh. This blessed work is carried on by the application of the word to our thoughts and words and ways.

Let us remember that He did not first make the church worthy to be loved, then love it and give Himself for it. He loved it as it was, then gave Himself for it, and now works to make it suitable to Himself. God acted very blessedly on the same principle in regard to Israel. Jehovah could say to Israel, “I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood ... thou wast naked and bare. Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness ... and entered into a covenant with thee ... I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands, and a chain on thy neck ... and a beautiful crown upon

thine head ... thou wast exceeding beautiful ... thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it was perfect through my comeliness, which I had put upon thee” (Ezek. 16: 6-14). Israel's time of need was God's time of love. So Christ loved the church in all its deep need, and gave Himself for it; then, having possessed it, He cleanses it and makes it suitable to Himself. We are not satisfied if someone we love is not to our liking, and Christ will never be satisfied until the church is perfectly suited to Him.

(V. 27). In the future, in His love, He will present the church to Himself “not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.” The present sanctification of verse 26 is connected with the presentation in glory of verse 27: that is, the condition in which we shall be presented to Christ in glory, “holy and blameless”, is the measure of our sanctification even now. While here we shall not attain to the standard of glory, but there is no other standard. Moreover, the condition in glory is not only the standard of our sanctification, but, as perfectly set forth in Christ, it is the power of our sanctification.

“The word”, discovering to us what we are and occupying us with Christ in glory, is the power for cleansing. The word and the sanctifying effect of Christ in glory are brought together by the Lord in His prayer, “Sanctify them by the truth: Thy word is truth”, and the Lord adds, “I sanctify myself for them, that they also may be sanctified by truth.” The Lord set Himself apart in the glory as an object for His people on earth, and as we are occupied with Him we are changed into His likeness from glory to glory.

Alas! Christendom has entirely failed to walk in the light of these great truths concerning Christ and the church. In practice it has ceased to give Christ His place as Head, and consequently has failed in subjection to Him. Therefore we need hardly be surprised at the failure to maintain the relationships of life, formed after the pattern of Christ and the church, leading, on the part of the woman, to a widespread revolt against subjection to the man, and, on the part of the man, to unfaithfulness and lack of love for the woman. The ruin of Christendom, the scattering of believers that has split Christendom into innumerable sects, can all be traced to two evils : professing Christians have abandoned the place of subjection to Christ that belongs to the assembly and have usurped the place of authority belonging to the Head.

The beginning of these evils was found in the assembly at Corinth. There the Christians set up leaders in the place of Christ, and then formed themselves into parties in subjection to their chosen leaders. The evil which had its beginning at Corinth is fully developed in Christendom, where clericalism has practically set aside the Headship of Christ, and independence has taken the place of subjection to Christ.

(Vv. 28, 29). Having presented so blessedly the truth of Christ and the church, the apostle returns to his practical exhortations. Men ought to love their wives as their own bodies, for so truly are they one that the husband can look at his wife as himself. As such, the man will delight to nourish his wife, meeting her every need, and cherish her as one that is very precious. Again the apostle presents Christ, and His care for the church, as the perfect pattern for the husband's care for his wife. Not only has Christ died for us in the past, and is dealing with us in the present in view of eternity, but as we pass along our way, He watches over and cares for us, treating us as Himself. Because “we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones”, He could say to Saul of Tarsus, in the days when he was breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the saints, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?” One has truly said, “A man's flesh is himself, and Christ takes care of Himself in taking care of the church.” Again, “Christ never fails, and there cannot be a want in Christ's church without there being an answer

to it in Christ's heart.”

(Vv. 31, 32). The man that loveth his wife loveth himself and he is to leave other relationships to be joined to his wife. The apostle quotes from Genesis, but he expressly states that this is a great mystery which has in view Christ and the church. Christ, as Man, left all relations with Israel according to the flesh in order to secure His church.

(V. 33). Nevertheless, says the apostle, while seeking to enter into these eternal truths of the great mystery of Christ and the church, let each husband see that he loves his wife as himself, and let the wife rightly fear her husband.

(2) Children and parents

(Vv. 1-3). It has been remarked that the exhortations in the Epistle to the Ephesians all commence with those from whom submission is due. The special exhortations are preceded by the general exhortation to submit yourselves one to another (v. 21).

The exhortations to submission are especially addressed to wives, children and servants, the wives being exhorted before the husbands, the children before the parents, and the servants before the masters. This order would seem to attach great importance to the principle of submission. One has said, “The principle of submission and obedience is the healing principle of humanity.” Sin is disobedience and came into the world through disobedience. Ever since, the essence of sin has been man doing his own will and refusing to be subject to God. An insubject wife will make a miserable home; an insubject child will be an unhappy child; and a world not subject to God must be an unhappy and miserable world. Not until the world is brought into subjection to God, under the reign of Christ, will its sorrows be healed. Christianity teaches this subjection, and the Christian home should anticipate something of the blessedness of a subject world under the reign of Christ.

The obedience of the child is, however, to be “in the Lord”. This supposes a home governed by the fear of the Lord, and therefore according to the Lord. The quotation from the Old Testament, which connects the promise of blessing with obedience to parents, shows how greatly God esteemed obedience under law. Though in Christianity the blessing is of an heavenly order, yet in the governmental ways of God the principle remains true that honouring parents will bring blessing.

(V. 4). Parents are not to bring up their children on the principle of law which might lead them to say to the child, “If you are not good, God will punish you”; nor are they to bring them up on the principles of the world which have no reference to God. If they are trained simply with worldly motives, to fit them for the world, we must not be surprised if they drift into the world. Moreover, parents are to be careful not to irritate and repel their children, and thus destroy their influence for good by losing their affection. Only will their affections be retained, and the children kept from the world, as they are brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. They are to be trained as for the Lord, and as the Lord would bring them up.

(3) Servants and masters

(Vv. 5-9). For the Christian servant to render obedience to an earthly master, a heart that is right with Christ will be required. Only as the servant of Christ, seeking from his heart to do the will of God, will he be able to serve his earthly master with “good will”. What is done of good will to the Lord will have its reward.

Christian masters are to be governed by the same principles as the Christian servants. In all his dealings with his servants the master is to remember that he has a Master in heaven. He is to treat his

servants with the same “good will” that he expects from the servants. Moreover, he is to forbear threatening, not using his position of authority to utter threats.

9

The Conflict

(Ephesians 6: 10-21)

The Epistle to the Ephesians closes with a striking passage which sets forth the Christian conflict. This conflict is not the exercise of soul that we may pass through in seeking to lay hold of the truth. It supposes that we know and appreciate the wonderful truths of the Epistle, and the conflict arises from seeking to retain and maintain these truths in the face of every opposing power.

In the course of the Epistle the apostle unfolds to us our heavenly calling, the inheritance of glory to which we are predestined, the mystery of the church, and the practical life consistent with these great truths. If, however, we are set to enter into our heavenly blessings and to walk in consistency with them, we shall at once find that all the power of Satan is arrayed against us. In his hatred of Christ, the devil will seek to rob us of the truth, or, failing to do this, he will seek to bring dishonour upon the Name of Christ and discredit the truth by bringing about moral breakdown amongst those who hold the truth. The more truth we have the greater the dishonour to Christ if we break down by the allowance of the flesh. We must therefore be prepared to face conflict, and the more truth we have the greater will be the conflict.

In view of this conflict, three things are brought before us: firstly, the source of our strength; secondly, the character of the enemy with whom we wrestle; thirdly, the armour with which we are provided to enable us to withstand the assaults of the enemy.

(1) The power of the Lord

(V. 10). The apostle first directs our thoughts to the power that is for us before he describes the power that is against us. To face this conflict we must ever remember that all our strength is in the Lord. Paul therefore says, “Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.” Our difficulty oftentimes is to realise that we have no strength in ourselves. Naturally we should like to be strong in numbers, strong in gifts, or strong in the power of some forceful leader, but our real and only strength is “in the Lord, and in the power of His might”.

The prayer of the first chapter brings before us the power of God's might. Christ has been raised from the dead and set at God's right hand in heavenly places, “far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come”. Now, says the apostle, that is the “exceeding greatness of His power to *us-ward* who believe”. The power that is against us is far greater than our power, but the power that is toward us is a surpassing power — it surpasses all the power that is opposed to us. Moreover, the One that has supreme power is the One that possesses “unsearchable riches”, and loves us with a love that “passeth knowledge” (Ephesians 3: 8, 19).

In the days of old, Gideon was prepared for the conflict by first being told that “the Lord is with thee”; then he was exhorted to “go in this thy might.” Gideon's family might be the poorest in Manasseh, and he himself the least in his father's house, but what did Gideon's poverty or his weakness matter if the Lord, who is rich and mighty, was for him and with him? (Judges 6: 12-15.) So, in a later

day, Jonathan and his armour-bearer could face a great host in the might of the Lord, for, said Jonathan, “There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few” (1 Samuel 14: 6).

So we, in our day, with failure behind us, weakness amongst us, and corruption all around us, need a fresh sense of the glory of the Lord, the power of the Lord, the riches of the Lord, the love of the Lord, and, with the Lord before us, to go forward “in the power of His might”.

Apart from Christ we have no power. The Lord can say, “Without Me ye can do nothing”, but, says the apostle, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians. 4: 13). It is, then, only as our souls are kept in secret communion with Christ that we shall be able to avail ourselves of the power that is in Him. This being so, all Satan's power will be directed to putting our souls out of touch with Christ, and seeking to keep us from feeding on Him and walking in communion with Him. It may be that he will seek to draw us out of communion with Christ by the cares and duties of every-day life, or by sickness and weakness of the body. He may seek to use the difficulties of the path, the contentions among the people of God, or the petty insults we have to meet, to depress the spirit and fret the soul. If, however, instead of allowing all these things to come between our souls and the Lord, we make them occasions for drawing near to the Lord, we shall learn what it is to be strong in the Lord, while realising our own weakness; and we shall learn the blessedness of the word, “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee” (Psalm 55: 22).

(2) The power of the enemy

(Vv. 11, 12). Firstly, we are exhorted to remember that it is not against flesh and blood that we wrestle. The devil may indeed use men and women to oppose the Christian and deny the truth, but we have to look beyond the instruments and discern the one that is using them. A woman, in flesh and blood, opposed Paul at Philippi, but Paul discerned the evil spirit that moved the woman, and in the power of the Name of Jesus Christ he entered into conflict with spiritual wickedness, commanding the evil spirit to come out of her (Acts 16: 16-18).

A true disciple, in flesh and blood, opposed the Lord when Peter said, in view of the Lord's sufferings, “Be it far from Thee, Lord”, but the Lord, knowing the power of Satan behind the instrument, could say, “Get thee behind me, Satan” (Matthew 16: 22, 23).

The conflict, then, is against Satan and his hosts, whatever the instrument used. Principalities and powers are spiritual beings in a position of rule with power to carry out their will. They may be good or evil beings; here they are evil beings, and their wickedness would seem to take a twofold direction. In reference to the world they are the rulers of the darkness of this world; in reference to Christians they are the “spiritual power of wickedness in the heavenlies”. The world is in darkness, in ignorance of God, and these spiritual beings rule and direct the darkness of paganism, philosophy, science falsely so-called, and infidelity, as well as the superstitions, corruptions and modernism of Christendom. The Christian is brought into the light, and blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. The opposition to the Christian takes, then, a religious character by spiritual beings who seek to rob him of the truth of his heavenly calling, beguile him into a path that is a denial of the truth, or into conduct that is inconsistent with it.

Further, we are instructed as to the character of the opposition. It is not simply persecution, or a direct denial of the truth; it is the far more subtle and dangerous opposition described as “the wiles of the devil”. A wile is something that looks fair and innocent, and yet beguiles the soul from the path of obedience. How often, in this day of confusion, the devil seeks to lead those who have the truth into some by-path, which at the beginning deviates so little from the true course that to raise any objection to it might seem fastidious. There is one simple question we can each ask ourselves by which every

wile may be detected, “*If I pursue this course where will it lead me?*”

When the devil suggested to the Lord that He should turn the stones into bread to meet His needs, it looked a very innocent thing to do. Nevertheless, it was a wile that would have led out of the path of obedience to God, and a denial of the word which said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”

To turn the Galatian believers from the truth of the Gospel, the devil used the law as a wile to entrap them in legal self-importance. To turn the Corinthian saints from the truth of the assembly, the devil used the world as a wile to lead them into carnal self-indulgence. To turn the Colossian saints from the truth of the mystery, the devil used the wiles of “enticing words”, “philosophy” and superstition to entrap them in religious exaltation. These are still the wiles we have to face.

(3) The armour of God

(V. 13). In this conflict human armour will not avail. We can only withstand the devil in the “*armour of God*”. Human resources such as natural ability and natural strength of character will be of no avail in this conflict. Confidence in such armour may lead us to engage with the enemy, but only to suffer defeat. The apostle Peter found this when, with confidence in his own strength, he entered into conflict, only to fail before a maid. God may indeed use human ability and scholarship in His service; here, however, it is not a question of what God uses in His service, but rather of what God has given us to use in conflict with the wiles of the enemy. The enemy we have to meet is not flesh and blood, and the weapons of our warfare are not carnal (2 Corinthians 10: 4).

Furthermore, in this conflict we require the “*whole* armour of God”. If one piece is missing, Satan will be quick enough to detect the lack and attack us in the vulnerable place.

Moreover, the armour has to be “*put on*”. It by no means follows that because we are Christians we have put on the armour. The armour is provided for us as Christians, but it remains with us to put it on. It is not enough to look at the armour, or to admire it, or to be able to describe it; we must “put on the whole armour of God.”

Then we learn that the armour is needed in view of the “*evil day*”. In a general sense the whole period of the absence of Christ is for the believer an “evil day”. There are, however, occasions when the enemy makes special attacks upon the people of God, seeking to rob them of special truths. Such attacks constitute for the people of God an evil day. To meet such we need to have on the whole armour of God. It is too late to be putting on the armour in the midst of the struggle.

We need the armour “to withstand” and “to stand”. Having withstood in resisting the enemy's offensive in any particular attack, we shall still need the armour to stand on the defensive. When we have “done all”, we still need our armour in order “to stand”. It is often when we have gained some signal victory that we are in the greatest danger, for it is easier to gain a point of vantage than to hold it. The armour having been “put on” cannot with safety be put off as long as spiritual wickedness is in heavenly places and we are in the scene of Satan's wiles.

If we include the prayer as one of the pieces of armour, there are seven distinct pieces of armour.

(V. 14). 1. *The Girdle of Truth*. We are to stand with our loins girt about with truth. Spiritually this speaks of the thoughts and affections held in order by the truth. By applying the truth to ourselves, and thus judging all the thoughts and movements of the heart by the truth, we should not only be set free from the inward working of the flesh, but we should have our affections formed according to the truth, and thus have the lowly mind with our affections set on things above.

So the first piece of armour strengthens the inner man and regulates our thoughts and affections, rather than our conduct, speech and ways. Oftentimes we make great efforts to preserve a correct outward demeanour towards one another while, at the same time, careless as to our thoughts and affections. If we are to withstand the wiles of the enemy we must commence by being right inwardly. The Preacher warns us as to what we say with our lips, as to what our eyes look upon, and as to the path our feet tread, but first of all he says, “Keep *thy heart* more than anything that is guarded” (Proverbs 4: 23-27). James warns us that, “if ye have bitter envying and strife *in your hearts*, glory not, and lie not against the *truth*” (James 3: 14). Strife amongst brethren commences in the heart, and has its root in “bitter envying”. When the truth holds the affections, strife, bitter envying and other evils of the flesh will be judged, and when they are judged we shall be able to withstand the wiles of the devil in the evil day.

Alas! too often the evil day finds us unprepared. We have neglected to put on the girdle, and so in the presence of some sudden provocation we act in the flesh, and when reviled we revile again, and instead of patiently suffering we threaten. Let us seek to wear the girdle, and thus walk with the thoughts and affections habitually held in check by the truth.

2. The Breastplate of Righteousness. With the second piece of armour we pass to our practical conduct. Practical righteousness is expressed in the Christian by a walk in consistency with the position and relationships in which he is set. We cannot stand before the enemy with a conscience that accuses us of unjudged evil in our ways and associations. We cannot stand for the truth which in practice we deny. Having put on the breastplate, and thus walking in practical righteousness, we shall be fearless when called to face the enemy in the evil day.

(V. 15). 3. The Feet Shod. Practical righteousness leads to a walk in peace. The Gospel of peace that we have received prepares us to walk in peace amidst the world's unrest. When the heart is governed by the truth, and our ways are practically in accord with the truth, we shall walk through this world with peace in the soul, and be able to meet the evil day in a spirit of peace and calm. We shall not be indifferent to the turmoil in the world, but we shall not be excited and filled with anxiety as to passing events. Of natural men the Scripture says, “The way of peace have they not known” (Romans 3: 17), but those whose feet are shod with peace are marked by peace even when in conflict.

(V. 16). 4. *The Shield of Faith*. However necessary it is to have the thoughts and affections held in order by the girdle of truth, and our conduct preserved in righteousness by the breastplate, and to be walking in peace through this world, something else is needed for the conflict. We need “above all”, or “over all”, the shield of faith to protect us from the fiery darts of the enemy. Here faith is not the reception of God's testimony concerning Christ by which we are saved, but the daily faith and trust in God which gives us the assurance that God is for us. In the pressure of the manifold trials that come upon us, whether from circumstances, ill-health, bereavement, or in connection with the many difficulties that constantly arise among the people of God, the enemy may seek to cloud our souls with the horrible suggestion that after all God is indifferent and not for us. On that dark night when the disciples had to face the storm on the lake, and the waves beat into the ship, Jesus was with them, though asleep as one indifferent to their danger. This was a test for faith. Alas! unprotected by the shield of faith, a fiery dart pierced their armour, and the terrible thought arose that, after all, the Lord did not care for them, for they awoke Him and said, “Carest Thou not that we perish?” (Mark 4: 37, 38).

A fiery dart is not a sudden desire to gratify some lust which arises from the flesh within; it is rather a diabolical suggestion from without that would raise a doubt as to the goodness of God. Satan

hurled a fiery dart at Job when, in his terrible trial, his wife suggested that he should “curse God, and die.” Job quenched this fiery dart with the shield of faith, for he said, “Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” (Job 2: 9, 10). The devil still uses the trying circumstances of life in his endeavour to shake our confidence in God and to drive us from God. Faith uses these very circumstances to draw nearer to God and thus triumphs over the devil. Again, Satan may seek to instill some abominable thought into the mind, some infidel suggestion that burns into the soul and darkens the mind. Such thoughts are not quenched by human reasonings, or by falling back on “feelings” or “experiences”, but by simple faith in God and His word.

(V. 17). 5. The Helmet of Salvation. Having on the helmet will enable the believer to hold up his head boldly in the presence of the enemy. Resisting by faith the fiery darts of the devil, we find in our trying circumstances that God is for us, and that He saves us, not only from trials, but, like the disciples in the storm, *through* trials. We are thus enabled to go forward with courage and energy in the consciousness that, however weak we are in ourselves, God is the God of our salvation, and that Christ is able to save us to the uttermost (Hebrews 7: 25).

6. *The Sword of the Spirit*. We are definitely told that this piece of armour is the word of God, and yet not only the word, but the word used in the power of the Spirit. This is the one great offensive weapon. Until we have put on the armour that regulates our inmost thoughts, our outward walk, and establishes us in confidence in God, we shall not be in a right condition to wield the sword of the Spirit. When the word of God is used in the power of the Spirit against the enemy it is irresistible. When tempted by the wiles of the devil, the Lord on each occasion resisted the enemy with the word of God used in the power of the Spirit. “It is written” exposed and defeated the devil. The word of God *abiding in us* is our strength, for the apostle John can say of the young men, “Ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one” (1 John 2: 14).

One has said, “Our business is to act according to the word, come what may; the result will show that the wisdom of God was in it.” The one using the word may be weak, and have little natural intelligence, but he will find that the word of God is quick and powerful, and that through it every wile of the enemy is exposed.

(Vv. 18-20). 7. *Prayer*. Having described the armour, and exhorted us to put it on, the apostle closes with the exhortation to prayer. The armour, however perfect, is not given to make us independent of God. It can only be rightly used in the spirit of dependence upon the One by whom it has been provided.

The Lord exhorts us “always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18: 1); and Paul exhorts “that men pray everywhere” (1 Timothy 2: 8). Here we are exhorted to pray “at all seasons”. Prayer is the constant attitude of dependence upon God. Under all circumstances, in all places, and at all times, we are to pray. Prayer, however, may become a mere formal expression of need; it is therefore linked with “supplication”, which is the earnest cry of the soul conscious of its need. It is, moreover, to be under the guidance of the Spirit, and to be accompanied with the faith that watches for God's answer. When Peter was in prison, “prayer was made without ceasing ... unto God for him”, but apparently the church failed somewhat in “watchfulness”, for, when God answered their prayer, it was only with difficulty that they believed that Peter was free. Further, prayer in the Spirit will embrace “all saints”, and yet come down to the need of a special servant. So the apostle exhorts the Ephesian saints not only to pray for “all saints”, but also for himself.

Throughout the ages the saints have needed the armour of God, but in these closing days, when “the darkness of this world” deepens, “the wiles of the devil” increase, and Christendom is returning to

paganism and philosophy, how deeply important it is to put on the whole armour of God to “withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”

Let us then stand:

Having our loins girt about with truth, and thus be kept inwardly right in thought and affection.

Having on the breastplate of righteousness, so that we are consistent in all our practice.

Having our feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace, so that we walk in peace in the midst of a world of discord, strife and confusion.

Taking the shield of faith, so that we walk in daily confidence in God.

Taking the helmet of salvation, and thus realising that God is making all things work together for our good and salvation.

Taking the sword of the Spirit, whereby we can meet every subtle attack of the enemy.

Lastly, “praying always”, so that we can use the armour in the spirit of constant dependence upon God.