

Brief Notes on the Epistle to the Ephesians

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Ephesians 1.

We must introduce our meditations on this epistle by recurring a little to the ways of God from the beginning; because there is a wonderful unity in His counsels, and the whole volume sets its seal to the divine thought, "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning." Therefore, when we come to a scripture like this, it is well to pause and look about us, and see its relation to previous scriptures. If I come to a merely moral scripture, such as, "Let him that stole steal no more," I may take it and use it at once, and alone, but when it is doctrinal or prophetic scripture, which opens the divine mind, I have to ask how it is introduced, and what is to come after it, because we are to be fraught with divine, intelligence — "We have the mind of Christ."

The Epistle to the Hebrews unfolds the heavens, and speaks of heavenly calling, putting you in company with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; but it does not open the mystery of the church. The Epistle to the Ephesians opens the mystery of the church, but does not keep you in company with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We are advancing, and we are called to distinguish between the heavenly calling and the calling of the church. So there is a fitness in considering the Epistle to the Hebrews before the Epistle to the Ephesians.

Now, why do I say the Epistle to the Hebrews opens the heavenly calling? Because it associates you with Noah, Abraham, Moses, etc. The earth at the beginning was given to the children of men. What did they do with it? They forfeited it. Then what did God do with them? Well, He opened heaven to them! He gave them the earth to enjoy. They soiled and lost it by sin. Well, said He, I'll open heaven to you. This is one way in which the grace of God abounds.

What should I say of one who, when I had abused the gift which he put in my hand, put a better gift in my other hand? This is God!

Was not Adam brought back to God, and Enoch taken to heaven? I have no doubt that Abraham had the heavenly calling. They looked for a better country, "that is, an heavenly." Moses was carried up to Pisgah to bear witness of it. Enoch bore witness of it, and Elijah in a later dispensation. From the beginning there has been heavenly calling, but not church calling. So, when the apostle comes to address the Hebrews, who were brought from a Jewish root, he talks of heavenly calling, but does not go beyond it. When he comes to address himself to the Ephesians, once a Gentile people, the worshippers of the goddess Diana (but apart from all Jewish connections), he unfolds the mystery of

the church — the richest thing in the counsels of God. Let me say another thing. How did God unfold His purposes in the earth? He knew a family in the loins of Abraham. They flourished into a nation in the Book of Exodus; then under judges and prophets; but they did not ripen to the culminating point of glory till God put them under a king.

He goes on from step to step till the elect family flourished, under Solomon, into a kingdom. So it is with His heavenly purposes. It is not till the apostleship of Paul is set up that they unfold in the bright culminating point of the church. God is always consistent in His ways. Let the earth be the scene of His activities, we find them unfolding till they reach the palmy days of Solomon. In His heavenly purposes we follow on till we see the church at the highest point in creation, "The fulness of him that filleth all in all." So it is impossible not to stand and say, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"

Now, having prefaced thus, we stand before the Epistle to the Ephesians. It is desirable to come up to this writing with intelligence. Here we are listeners in heavenly scenes to the same kind of thine, as we saw in earthly scenery.

Let me remind you of a passage in Colossians: "the dispensation of God, which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God" - or, "to fill it out." (Col. 1: 25, 26.) To fill out the revelation of God — a magnificent commentary of Paul on his own ministry. Was it not left to Solomon to display the closing purpose of God in the earth by heading it with a throne? It was left to Paul to reveal in his ministry the bright magnificent point of the heavenly mysteries. We are brought up by him to the headship of Christ.

The apostle begins by addressing all the faithful in Christ Jesus. He steps over the Ephesians. So that we are all called to learn these things. "Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." This could not be said of the patriarchs. "In heavenly places" they would have been associated with us; but these are blessings in company with Christ.

Then, having put you in this peculiar place, he unfolds the divine roll of blessings to you. First, chosen in Him before the world was. These high privileges began before the foundation of the world. Could I say that properly of Abraham? Certainly he was chosen before the foundation of the world, but you are chosen "in him." The divine purposes rested in a peculiar way on a peculiar people.

Then, predestination always follows on election. Election touches the person; predestination the place or condition: "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ . . . he hath made us accepted in the beloved." Now is not that a peculiar form of adoption? Do I believe that Adam was a son of God? Indeed I do. Do I believe that he was "accepted in the beloved"? No, I do not. Do I believe that angels are sons of God? Indeed I do. Do I believe they are "accepted in the beloved"? No, I do not. So that here again is a peculiarity. It is an adoption of the highest order. We have the joy and liberty of the Beloved's sonship. He goes on to say, "In whom we have redemption by his blood, the forgiveness of sins." Why, to be sure, that is a thing of course. Who would think of asking a person up in heavenly places, "Are you forgiven?" Did you ever observe in the parable of the prodigal son that the father never says he forgives him? How could he? How could he frame his lips to say, "I forgive you"? You and I ought to walk in the sunshine of our calling in such a way as to assume forgiveness as a thing at the foot of the hill, while we are up at the heights. Let the music and dancing, the ring and the shoes, tell me I am forgiven. So the Father treats the prodigal, and so the Spirit treats us in Ephesians 1. Yet the soul is constantly busying itself about forgiveness when it should be viewing the magnificence of its calling in Christ. There is a style in love that love could never rid itself of. The father would have wept to say, "I forgive you." Would not you be ashamed to tell one coming back in sorrow, confessing

his fault, "I forgive you"? Talk of a father, on the neck of his weeping, penitent child, saying, "I forgive you"! How little we know of the ways of love!

Now, to go on. He abounds towards us in all wisdom and knowledge, having opened to us the bosom secret — all things gathered together in Christ. That is a secret never made known before. In the prophet Isaiah we get a beautiful picture of the millennial earth; but do we ever get the millennial heavens with Christ at their head? Was it ever said by Isaiah that all things in heaven and earth should be headed up in the glorified Man? "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance." We are heirs with Him. Was that ever unfolded before? And till the inheritance comes we get the Holy Ghost. We get Him here under two titles — a seal, and an earnest. A seal of present salvation; an earnest of future inheritance. When I look at the place of the Holy Ghost, in the mystery of redemption, it is wonderful to see the official glories that attach to Him here on earth. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we have the official glories of Christ. Here we are called to witness the official glories of the Holy Ghost in this dispensation. What a blessed, glorious thing — to take the secrets of the divine bosom, and make them known to us! To seal us by His presence as possessors of present salvation, and to be the earnest of our inheritance! Ah, it is wonderful. I could not move a step in company with a soul not pregnant with the blessedness of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost being the One with whom we have to do.

"The purchased possession" here is the whole scene — the whole creation. It is purchased, but not yet redeemed. The blood of Christ has purchased the creation as well as you; but it is not yet redeemed, and while in that condition you have the Holy Ghost as an earnest. When it is redeemed you will be the heir of it. Are you redeemed yet? You are purchased, but you wait for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of your body, and that you will never get till God puts forth power as well as blood. The Apocalypse is the display of redemption; the gospel is the display of purchase — but the purchased thing is not redeemed till God puts forth power to rescue it from the hands of the destroyer.*

*Fully redeemed, I mean.

At verse 15 the apostle ceases to be a teacher and becomes an intercessor — and you will find that he never in prayer pulls down what, as a teacher, he had built up. You will sometimes hear people asking God to love them. I could never make such a prayer as that. I am to pray for a deeper sense of His love. Paul does not ask God to give them this, and the other; but he asks Him that they may have the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him — that the eyes of their understanding may be enlightened. Oh, for a better heart to know these things! But to ask God to love me, to make me a co-heir with Christ, to appoint me to heavenly places in Him! I will make a prayer much more humbling than that, I am so blessed in my calling; so poor in my enjoyment! If God has lit a candle, I will not ask Him to light it, but to take the film from my eyes, that I may see what He has done, what this magnificent purpose is, and the power that has brought us there. So he prays that you may have an eye to discern the brightness of the heavenly glory, and the resurrection-power that has conducted you from such ruins to such glories.

Ephesians 2.

We have reached the second chapter, but we must look back at the first to resume the course of our thoughts. We were observing that we must distinguish between the heavenly calling and the church calling. The church has heavenly calling; but it does not follow that all who have heavenly calling have church calling. Heavenly calling arose from divine disappointment in the earth. The earth was given to Adam. Adam forfeited it, and the Lord then takes His elect to heaven.

The thought introduces you to the idea of relief.

The Lord found another way to bless His elect. If the earth is lost, where will He put His saints? The blessed God of all grace says, I know how I will dispose of them; I will put them in heaven. The Lord never merely repairs a breach; He brings a better thing out of the ruin. So the forfeiture of the earth opened heaven, and the heavenly man finds himself in a better place than if he had never lost the earth.

The two dealings of God with the earth are in government and in calling out — strangership and citizenship alternately. Citizenship when God is dealing with, and settling the earth; strangership when God is calling people out of it. He has now called the church into strangership. That is the way to introduce our thoughts to the present dispensation. We see how God has been put into His present dispensational attitude. The earth is polluted, and God is put upon to take Himself and His people to heaven. It is a dispensation of intense strangership. But the church is something more than that. Moses, Abraham, etc., were taken to heaven as witnesses of heavenly calling. Ephesians 1 introduces a new thought. We are not only in heaven, but in Christ in heaven. See how full the chapter is with the word "in." We are blessed in heavenly places in Christ — accepted in the Beloved. God has chosen us in Him. In whom we have obtained an inheritance. We are raised in Christ. Seated in Him in heavenly places; and, when the world has told its story, you will find yourself a co-inheritor in Christ. That is a new thing; that is the body of Christ. That is one peculiarity of the church.

Let me call your thoughts a little aside. We see in the argument of the Galatians Abraham brought into our company; and in the argument of the Hebrews Abraham is brought into our company. Not so in the Ephesians. This is the divine accuracy of the Holy Ghost. In Galatians we do not get the church; we get sonship and heirship. I do not doubt that Abraham was as perfect as I am; but the moment the Spirit unfolds and displays the body of Christ Abraham has no place in the argument, we lose sight of him. I see you and myself, but not Abraham.

Is there not a meaning in these distinctions? Can I put myself in the presence of three such august witnesses to the mind of Christ and not see these things? I have no warrant for saying that Abraham takes a place in the church. Now, let me just ask you, Are you prepared for this? Is there any analogy in the divine dealings? I think there is. By-and-by the Lord will fill the whole face of the earth. All nations will bow to His sceptre. The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. But is that all I get in the millennial earth? No: I get the twelve tribes in special nearness. I get the land of Israel in special relationship to God. And I get in the midst of the tribes a royal people, and a priestly people. This is further separation; and I get a Jerusalem. No one can read the prophetic letter and not see that Jerusalem will have her special place, seated in her beauty, "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob." With that divine analogy I travel to the heavens. There will be beautiful varieties there — the noble army of martyrs, the goodly fellowship of the prophets. But, as Jerusalem will take the chief place on earth, so the church will take the chief place in heaven. So we may be prepared for what is revealed under the title of "the mystery."

Do you remember when Israel stood between the Red Sea and the hosts of Egypt what is said to them? "Stand still, and see the salvation of Jehovah." They had got from under the claims of the destroying angel. They were in the salvation. of God; but God had secrets in the cloud not yet unfolded to them. There was a glory there that could scatter the hosts in the Red Sea. It could turn one side, and take the wheels off the Egyptian chariots. It could turn the other, and make crystal walls on either side of the Israelites. So, in standing before the Ephesians, we do not come to see justification by blood, but to let the rich purpose of God unfold itself to our gaze. How blessed are these divine ways! Are we

satisfied to know the blood on the lintel has delivered us? All leans on that; but still I say, Stand by, and mark the secrets - go and inquire into the cloudy glory before you. This is just the attitude to take up in Ephesians.

Now mark this: the moment the history of Israel closed in the Babylonish captivity, the glory departed. The glory never went over to the Gentile. The sword went; the glory never. A great deal of your intelligence of scripture depends on your taking up a right attitude in presence of it. If you know what point you are standing on, it gives you a divine advantage. Now, in standing before Ezekiel, we see that the glory has gone up to heaven, and the sword has gone to the Gentile. Has the glory ever come back? It has; not to accompany the sword of Caesar, but shrouded in the humiliation of the Man of Nazareth. The sword had failed to keep the earth in order. We know where the glory dwells. It has not accompanied the sword of Caesar, as it did the sword of David and Solomon. The glory is as much apart from the sword now as when it went up before Ezekiel and the sword went to the Gentile. The powers that be are not ordained of Jesus; they are ordained of God as God. Power belongs to God in His supreme place. Jesus expresses God brought into certain conditions and relationships. All dignities belong to Jesus in title; but we could not look at Him yet and call Him King of kings, and Lord of lords. The epitome of the remnant's religion is, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." In a theocracy, Caesar and God are together. Now, I must recognise God's domain and Caesar's domain. I must take knowledge of the confusion, and not say that the glory is returned to link itself with the sword; or He who said, "Who made me a ruler or a judge?" would have been a very different person in this world.'

Do you and I detect the unity and variety of the divine volume? It is a beautiful whole, but infinite in variety.

Thus, having seen our attitude, we are entering on the second chapter. We are let down a little here, but only to take up an important truth; to see out of what we are called. The chapter distinguishes itself into three parts. From verse 1 to 7 we have the subject of death and life; from verse 7 to 10 we have the subject of good works; and from verse 10 to the end, distance and nearness.

What manner of people were we when God took us up to baptise us into the body of Christ? Our condition was death — a profound moral ruin. What is the verdict that lies on us? "Dead in trespasses and sins." But, then, what condition are we brought into by Christ? The contrast is very fine. It is life of the highest order that has been imparted to us. We are linked with Christ Himself. How suitable, having shown us our high calling in the first chapter, to show us in the second the place out of which we were called! Our death-state in nature could not be lower; our life-estate in Christ could not be higher.

Another subject is good works, and I am charmed with the beauty of it. "Not of works, lest any man should boast."

As far as good works could have been the ground of boasting, they are shut out by God; but you are created of God in such a way that you must be bringing them forth. John's epistle shows us the same thing; our very new creation secures them.

Then, to the end of the chapter we get the subject of alienation and nearness. This is just like death and life. Two things attach to us: in our own person, either death or life; in relation to God, either alienation or nearness. I look at myself, and see death in me, but as to life, I have been quickened with the highest form of life a creature could enjoy. So by nature nothing could be more distant than my alienation: "No hope, and without God in the world." Essentially cut off from Him, my nearness now in Christ is ineffable. It could not be more perfect. It is right we should have low thoughts of ourselves, but the value of Christ rests upon every stone of the temple. The whole temple is built in the Lord; and

then, when built, what other glory is put upon it? The Holy Ghost dwells there.

Thus we have disposed of the first two chapters. The first unfolds our position in Christ; the second draws us aside to look at ourselves. He shows me first, in my own person, dead — then in alienation from God. Then He reverses it, and shows me what manner of life I have got, and what manner of nearness I have got; and there is not a single feeble thought in it. Have you feeble thoughts? They belong to nature. They are not the breathings of the Holy Ghost. They are not the counsels of God touching you. He is not weak when He delineates your condition in nature. He is equally strong when He delineates your condition in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 3.

We will now read from the opening of chapter 3 to Ephesians 4: 16. When we meditate on such a scripture as the Epistle to the Ephesians, we ought to take care that knowledge be not overvalued; that we do not give it a disproportionate place. When Nicodemus came to the Lord to inquire into heavenly secrets, He turned him back from being a mere inquirer as to heavenly objects, to begin with himself. So Paul refused to bring out the mystery to the Corinthians because of their low moral standing. So we ought to approach Ephesian truth rather cautiously, looking at our own moral condition. The Lord's dealing with Nicodemus was morally of one character with Paul's dealing with the Corinthians. So there is a moral title to breathe Ephesian atmosphere, or else we might get giddy on such heights. We must tread softly, not timidly as if they were not our own. These deepest secrets of the bosom belong to us; but the vessel is to be fitted morally to receive them.

Now we, were distinguishing in the first chapter between the heavenly calling and the calling of the church; and in the second chapter we were looking at our death and life condition, and our alienated and near condition. In entering on the third chapter we resume the mystery. Did you ever see a moral beauty in this chapter being a parenthesis! It has struck me a good deal, the mystery being a parenthesis, that it should be here, unfolded in a parenthetical chapter.

Here we get the church more largely opened out to us. Paul was the depositary of this mystery, and he got it by revelation. You will say he got everything by revelation; and so he did, as he tells us in Galatians. Where does Paul date his apostleship? From Christ in the flesh? No; from Christ in glory. Where the other apostles? From Christ in the flesh — the Lord walking down here. But Paul never knew Christ in the flesh. So specific was his calling, and so specific the truth committed to him. By revelation, then, the mystery was made known to him.

Now, why does he say, "in few words"? Why, if he had spent chapters on it, it would have been but few words. If all that the Lord had done had been written, the world itself would not contain the books that should be written, John tells us in a note of admiration. Just so; this thing was so magnificent that to spend chapters on it would have been but few words. You and I want to find these notes of admiration in ourselves. They are very suited to us. "He made known unto me the mystery . . . which in other ages was not made known ... that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs," not with the Jews merely, but with Christ. The body will have Jews in it; but still it is characteristically Gentile. So he loses sight of the Jews, and tells the Gentiles that they are fellow-heirs with Christ.

Here we have a new kind of inheritance — to be of the same body, and fellow-heirs with the Son of His love; not Gentiles grafted on a body of Jews. "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints." This is characteristic. The Jews were taken up because they were the least of all nations. You were taken up because you were a poor uncircumcised distant Gentile, with no hope or God; and Paul was

taken up because he was less than the least of all saints. He takes the beggar from the dung-hill. That is the way of God.

Now, what was the operation of the mystery? "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." This reminds us of Colossians 1: 25, Paul's ministry came "to fulfil [or fill out] the word of God." You will say, Will you put it above the ministry of Christ? Indeed I do, dispensationally. The ways of God shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day. What light we stand in! We are in the light as God is in the light. The multiform, variegated wisdom of God is now told out in all its forms of beauty. That which I now get is high calling into fellow-heirship; one body with the Lord of glory. I have reached the very head itself, and sit down in sight of the coronation of Christ and His elect. So I have completed it; I have reached the manifold wisdom of God. Then he comes down a little, "In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him." How he loves to put that foundation under our feet! If we are in the light where God dwells, we are in the citadel of strength which God has erected. It would not do to be in the light if we were not surrounded by the citadel.

The apostle now becomes a suppliant, as he did before in Ephesians 1. Having again rehearsed the mystery, he becomes in verse 14 a man of prayer for us. In chapter 1 he prays to the God of our Lord Jesus; and he prays that you may know the glory that awaits you, and the strength that is conducting you there; and he prays to the God of our Lord Jesus.

Here his prayer is that you may know the love that has destined you there; and he prays to the Father of our Lord Jesus. His heart instinctively turns itself to the Father's bosom, which is the source of all our eternal blessedness: "Out of thy heart thou didst it," as David says. And does not your heart instinctively dictate this distinction, as you find yourself in prayer with God in glory, the Father in love, and Christ in salvation. When I think of glory and strength I am in company with the God of the Lord Jesus. When I think of love, I am in company with the Father of the Lord Jesus. These are evidences in the book that address themselves to the conscience. Scripture is a great self-evidencing body of light. Then he makes his prayer. One little word we must pause on: "Of whom the whole family," etc. Critics say a better translation is, "every family," and I accept it from the whole context.

I believe there are to be households in heaven as well as on earth. I believe when I take an intelligent view of the coming millennial heavens I see various families, as well as on the millennial earth. I see principalities, thrones, dominions; and I see the church as the body of Christ carried and seated above all. There may be, as was quoted before, "the noble army of martyrs," "the goodly fellowship of the prophets." There may be a patriarchal household, and a prophetic household in the world to come; but the church of the living God, in company with her Head, will be there above all.

It is a fine thing to read astronomy and geography after this manner.

There will be a heaven, by-and-by, studded with the sons of God — with morning stars! and there will be no jealousies or envyings among them.

We want largeness of thought; and largeness of thought need not take us out of accuracy of thought.

Having closed this parenthetical chapter, and its parenthetical purpose, we are entering the fourth chapter. He resumes what he was saying in Ephesians 3: 1, "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord." That again is characteristic, that the church should have her high calling told out from a prison in Rome. If we walked a natural path and died a natural death, we should go from prisons and stakes to Christ in glory. The saint should be an unresisting witness against the world. The world thinks separation from it

an insult; and it will not be insulted without revenge. So Paul unfolds the mystery from the gloomy dungeons of Rome. The church is a martyred thing on the earth.

Now he tells us to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We should be cherishing that temper of soul that makes us in honour esteem one another. What a beautiful casket in which to deposit such a treasure! "All lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering." In the moral history of Christendom pride has broken that casket. Then he shows what the unity of the Spirit is, which we cannot destroy. We may break the casket, and expose the treasure, but we cannot break it. Do we come from north, south, east, and west, Jews and Gentiles? When we sit down together, it is in one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

We must pause a little on the verses that follow. Suppose I say, We must look back to Genesis 3. You may answer, These are very distant scriptures, both locally and in the material. But there is a beautiful connection between them. In Genesis 3 we see the victory of the serpent and the ruin of man. In Ephesians 4 we see the conquest of Christ and the redemption of man. It is the undoing of the mischief of Genesis 3. Satan made man a drudge on the earth and a captive to his lusts. The Lord comes to make the devil and his hosts His captives. There is a magnificent moral opposition in this. And what has He done with the old captive He puts him in a more wonderful place than that out of which Satan took him. When He comes to make the hosts of hell His captives, He will let those hosts of hell learn what He can do with him that was once hell's captive. He has made us independent of everything. We are not only made proof against the deceiver, but we grow up by resources in ourselves. The church grows up with energies deposited in herself. He makes captivity captive, on the one hand, and on the other hand shows what He is about to do with that poor thing that the serpent once ruined. The story is reversed since Genesis 3. We get the captivity of man, and the glorification of man. There the doctrinal part ends.

Now, how shall our souls deal with it? Shall we be prepared for such magnificent disclosures of God's mind? Are they too weighty for us? I have often felt it so. Intercourse with men on the footstool is so pleasant; but that arises from a quantity of the human mixing with that which should be unmixed. So he prays that we might be strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man. The human mind is not able to measure these things. If my heart were opened to the sense of what the Lord Jesus is, I should say, "Nearer, my Lord, to Thee; nearer to Thee!" The footstool may be very pleasant, but, "nearer to Thee!" That Christ may dwell in my heart, and not the scene around me; and that I may know His love, which passeth knowledge.

Ephesians 4.

I observed that the doctrinal part of the epistle closes at Ephesians 4: 16. We will read to the end of the chapter. Let us just retrace the doctrinal teaching of the epistle. The first grand characteristic we are given about the calling of the church is, that it is a calling in Christ. So we find in chapter 1 the word "in" abounds. "Seated in heavenly places in him," "Accepted in the beloved," etc., etc.; and it is not only present possessions in Christ, but our interest in Him was before the world began (ver. 4), and after the world closes. (Ver. 11.) You will tell me all the ransomed rest on sovereignty, and so they do, and the very angels, too, who kept their first estate; but the character of church-election is that it is not mere abstract election, but election "in him," and you never leave Him.

The church finds herself in closest connection with Christ from before the foundation of the world till the glory after the world has ran its course. This is the first thought about the church. These things are not predicated of Israel. It is the peculiar calling of the church to be linked and bound up

with Christ. Then this church has been "hid in God." It was, so to speak, God's bosom secret, the secret that lay nearest to His heart and deepest in His counsels. We do not find the election of the worthies of old spoken of in that way of mysterious beauty and intimacy. It was hid in God from all ages up to the ministry of Paul.

The Epistle to the Ephesians is an instance of accumulation of language. Language grows on the thoughts of the Spirit Himself. Will you tell me, if your soul is bubbling up with some commanding thought, that you will not tell it out again and again, multiply words about it, and even become eloquent? For the heart, not the head, is the parent of eloquence. That, is the style of the Spirit in bringing out this secret in this epistle. We get "the praise of his glory," and "the riches of the glory," and "the praise of the glory of his grace," and "the exceeding riches of his grace." So in Ephesians 2 when He comes to show those who are the objects of this calling. When He shows their death-estate, description after description is given of them; and when you are brought to see your nearness, again the Spirit multiplies descriptions of what you are.

The consummation of revelation waited on Paul's ministry, the Gentile apostle. When he brought out this secret, it was the last in the revelation of God, and it was the crown of all the divine purposes. Let me refer you to a little analogy: how did the work of the old creation proceed? One thing after another was created in its beauty, and man came at the last. He was put in the garden; and what was his condition there? He was at home there; but when the cattle were brought up to be named by him, he was not only at home in his own proper place, but he gets the lordship of everything before him. He was in his dominions. Was that all? There remained a thing behind, and that thing was the chiefest. He had everything before he got the woman. It was the last thing revealed, and the tip-top of his happiness. It opened his lips, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Adam was happy before, but he was not abounding. When the woman was given to him, it was the height of his joy. So we ought to be prepared for the church waiting for the ministry of Paul. I should be prepared for the last ministry bringing out the richest thing in the counsels of God.

I get the same thing in the story of Jerusalem. When Israel went into Canaan, the sword of Joshua reduced the land to their possession. So it went on in the days of the Judges; and in the days of King Saul they still remained in possession; but all that time Jerusalem was a Jebusite city; all through that season this favoured spot, this chief spot in the land — this queen, destined to fix the eye of God — was in the clutches of the Gentile; and it was not till the days of David, God's own king, that it became the chief absorbing centre of everything in the land, the sanctuary, the throne, the place where the tribes went up. It was the chiefest of everything, and it came last. Do we not get there an image of Ephesian truth? God delights Himself in analogies. What are parables but divine analogies? And so, in the very end of the book, we see the woman re-appearing as the last and chiefest. The victories have been won — the kingdom seated in dignity; the very last thing in the book is the revelation of the church coming down to show herself in her beauty. (Rev. 21) So I am prepared to listen to Paul, without charging him with arrogancy, when he says he fills out the word of God.

Again, the revelation of the church is the richest display of God in grace, glory, and wisdom. The calling of Israel was a rich display of Him. Be it so. God cannot put His hand to anything without displaying Himself thus. But when we come to listen to the mystery of the church, the body and bride of Christ, we are instructed to know that grace, in its glory, in its riches — in its exceeding riches — has been manifested, and manifested in the face of creation — in the hearing and seeing of principalities and powers in heavenly places; and there is a simplicity about all this. Does magnificence touch simplicity? It would not be simply divine if it were not unutterably glorious. If it lay deepest in the divine mind, it was most full of grace, glory, and wisdom. Principalities and powers shall hold their

breath while listening to the story that the calling of the church is rehearsing.

Now, what are its titles? It is called the body and the bride; and what do they mean? The body is the expression of this — that the church is set in the highest place of dignity. As the bride she is set in the nearest place of affection. As the body of Christ, occupying the chiefest point in dignity, all that is in this world and in that which is to come will be beneath her. He will be seated above all; and the church, which is His body, is the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. As the bride she will be in the nearest place of affection. You cannot be too near to the person you love. As the bride of Christ, the church is set close to His heart. The church is destined to be to the heart of Christ what the woman was to Adam. Ephesians 5 is as the utterance of Adam over the woman. "We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones," is a re-echoing of the ecstatic utterance of the first man over the first woman.

If we love a person, we love to see them in dignity and glory. There you are set in the tip-top place of dignity, and, as the bride, in the nearest place of affection. You might be surprised to hear me say that the Lord Jesus did not complete the revelation of God. When you read the four gospels, do you read them as the full picture of gospel grace? The Lord's ministry was a transitional time. Till His death was accomplished He had not the platform for the display of full gospel grace, or the instrument for forming the church. How could you form a thing without the instrument? The Spirit was not given; and the Head was not yet glorified. The opening of the book of God prepares me for the mystery, and the close of the book shuts me up to it, and seals it on my apprehension, as we now see.

But in the Epistle to the Ephesians we get not merely the church but saints individually. (Eph. 5 and Eph. 6.) We do not lose our personality. This is said to be the meaning of Ephesians 4: 12. That is an individual thing. The business of gifts is with you individually: "He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints." There is a deep intimacy and personality between me and Christ that nothing can ever touch. So the first business of gifts was with each individually, "For the perfecting of the saints." Then, let the perfected saints set themselves to the work of the ministry, and to the edifying of the body. Consequently, in Corinthians, when he had the mystery to bring out, he says, "We speak wisdom among them that are perfect." So, when we come to practical details in our chapter, we are addressed individually, "That ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk" (ver. 17), and so on; "Who being past feeling" (ver. 19), that is, a seared and hardened conscience, with no sense of their own lasciviousness. "But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus."

The introduction of the word Jesus here shows personality; and do you not love a personal lesson? Do you not delight to think that you and Christ have a business that none can interfere with? Look at John's gospel as a beautiful picture of the sinner and Christ together. We do not find the Lord in John as a social man, working with apostles. He works alone with the sinner. It is very sweet to see the Spirit refusing to lose sight of the individual. "And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness." This is a much richer creation than the first. Adam was the only object in the first creation that carried an understanding; but you could not say he was created "after God, in righteousness and true holiness.

We are told to put away lying, as being members one of another. "Be ye angry, and sin not." Anger may be as holy a feeling as any other, but do not retain it so as to let it degenerate into nature. Then we are to "resist the devil," and "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour . . . that he may have to give to him that needeth." This is very beautiful. He is not merely to cease from stealing, but to become a workman for others. "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your

mouth . . . and grieve not the holy Spirit of God." Our works are looked at and our words, and now our tempers.

Are you not thankful that Christianity legislates for every bit of you? But what dignity! Your lips may be employed in communicating grace to the hearers; and your thoughts, either in refreshing or grieving the Holy Spirit of God!

"Forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." This is a change from "The Lord's Prayer." There you are instructed to know that God will measure Himself by you: "Forgive . . . as we forgive." Here is quite the reverse; I am to measure myself by God: "forgiving, as God hath forgiven you." This shows as we were observing before, that the Lord's ministry was a transitional thing; it had not come out into the full glory of salvation. Now a ministry has gone forth for the perfecting of us individually, and for our edification as the body of Christ.

Ephesians 5.

We have observed that the doctrinal part of the epistle closed at Ephesians 4: 16. Then from that point to Ephesians 6: 9 we get the practical part, and we get conflict in the end.

Read now chapter 5 and chapter 6 to verse 9, where we get the practical details of christian life. I should like, first, to say a little about precept.

If we consult the Epistles to the Romans and the Colossians, we shall find in them a different construction from the Philippians. There the apostle is eminently a pastor, looking at the souls of the Philippians. But in the Ephesians, Romans, Colossians, he is a teacher; therefore in them we get doctrine followed by precept. Now, why do we get precepts in the epistles? Do you always get your conduct directly from precepts? No; but by putting your mind in connection with Christ Himself, and the grace of God in your calling. So we get in Titus, "The grace of God . . . hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly"; that is, if I know the moral virtue of the grace in which I stand, I shall be taught without precepts to live soberly, righteously, and godly.

Peter tells us exactly the same thing. "Seeing, then, that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be"; and again, "Seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent." There is no precept to be diligent, but the eye of the soul is directed to the glory and to the dissolution of all things present, and it says, What manner of persons ought we to be! So practical power derives itself from the grace of our calling.

We get the same thing in the Book of Genesis; there are no precepts there, but the patriarchs lived holy lives (through the Spirit, surely) by virtue of their calling. One is called out by "the God of glory." It is said, as on the lips of Joseph, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God." It is not that he had precepts, but he looked at God. So in your daily walk you are not commonly looking at precepts but at Christ. But why, then, the precepts? For several reasons:

First, precepts serve as tests. If a soul is backsliding, you may use them in discipline. It is very well in such a case to have a well-defined precept to guide you.

Secondly, God is dealing with living realities in His word. If doctrines tell me that God is dealing with me, precepts tell me that it is with me God is dealing. God is not revealing an indefinite light that may sparkle before me. He addresses Himself to me, a corrupt creature, and says, "Let him that stole steal no more."

Thirdly, there is this beauty in precepts they do greatly honour the doctrine; they are the expression of the hidden moral virtue that lies in the doctrine. For instance, "Grieve not the holy Spirit of God." The doctrine had already taught me that I had received the Spirit as the seal of salvation. The precept tells me that the Spirit I have received is sensitive of the least touch of unholiness. So the doctrine is glorified by the precept.

Fourthly, I will tell you further what precepts do. They show you that your holiness must be dispensational. You will say, Is not holiness holiness? No; I boldly say, it is not. We can only judge of it in the dispensed light of God. Is it unholiness now for the Jew to traffic with the Gentile? No; it is not. Yet under the law they dare not eat with them. So holiness may vary its form.

Now, suppose I were to keep a good conscience just because my conscience resented evil, and were moral because morality is comely, would that be christian morality?

No holiness is christian holiness but such as derives itself from the truth. When you come to apply that to yourself, you will find you have something to do! You will have to associate the Lord Jesus with every bit of your life. How did the elders obtain a good report? Was it a precept that worked Abraham's separation from his kindred and his father's house, and Moses' abdication of Egypt? It was God making Himself known to them. Precepts will never make a christian man. The soul must come in contact with the revelation of God.

"Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us." Now, let me ask you, supposing I was a good neighbour just to keep my conscience a little easy, would that be meeting the demands of this passage? "Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us"; that makes kindness christian kindness. I take the Lord Jesus as my great prototype. Does not this take morals out of the hand of Moses? This puts my morals on a new ground altogether. I am to walk in love, because Christ has loved me, and given Himself for me, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour. The Lord has not only presented you in all the value of His blood, but in the sweet savour of His sacrifice. Is it accepted in the righteous one you are? No; but "accepted in the beloved." The high priest, when he took the blood into the holiest, went in enveloped in a balmy, savoury cloud of incense. Was it a grudging acceptance that waited on the sacrifice of Christ? No; it was a delightful acceptance; and you are in all the value of that acceptance. Well, then, could I give the atmosphere in which I am set before God one glance of faith and come back to indulge my enmities?

You know your renewed conscience would never be satisfied by merely doing what is right. You must have the springs of action purified. It is what Christ has done that asks it from you. These uncleannesses, as I read in verse 3, do not become saints. Am I to lay aside uncleanness because it is uncleanness? No; but because it does not become saints. So it goes on: "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord." I refuse participation in uncleanness, because I was in darkness, but now I am transformed. I am a new creature, a child of light.

And I pause here again to ask you, Would you qualify this beautiful intensity? Do you want to leave Christ when you come to the practical details of life? We never leave Christ.

So, when we come to meditate on conflict, we are just as much in His company as in the details of life, or as up in heaven in the early part of the epistle. There is something sublime in this. If a doctrine comes to unfold God to me, a precept comes to show me the moral virtue that lies hid in it. The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, as in the benevolent virtues — righteousness, as in integrity and honesty, and all connected with truth. We find goodness and righteousness in the world, but we shall not find them connected with truth, save in the household of faith. These things are given to make us practically Christ. As an old writer says, "Christ Himself is the ground of all laws to a Christian",

one loathes cultivation of soul by anything short of Christ. Christ would have us sober, truthful, honest.

Now are ye light; and what quality of light? Light "in the Lord." You have not kindled the spark that is in you from Moses, but from the Lord of light. You have borrowed a ray from Him, and you are to walk in it, proving what is acceptable to Jesus. I am sure after this we shall not ask why the precepts of the New Testament, when we see the blessed Lord connected with each bit of the details, the Spirit bringing down my Lord Jesus to be the sanction of my ways.

You will often find here that the Spirit is not satisfied with mere abnegation of evil. He insists on the cultivation of good. "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good." There is the negative in company with the positive. The evil is denied, and the good is brought in. So here, "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them"; because you have put off the old man. But are you merely an emptied, stripped thing? No; you have put on the new man. As the old man would have made plunder of what belonged to another, so now you are to work for him whom before you would have plundered. Moses never set me to that work; will Christ measure Himself by Moses? Will He measure Himself by anything but Himself? There is such dignity in this. We should keep morals up in their own elevation. Moses would drag them down; I do not say this when we get Moses passed through the filter of Christ, as in the Sermon on the Mount. Would Moses have required you to lay down your life for another? Christ does, because Christ has done it. "Wherefore it saith" (I would rather have *it* in ver. 14), it is the voice and language of Light. The light that is now shining is the light of Christ. So "Christ shall give thee light"; a peculiar moral light has risen now.

"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time." Now, how is understanding to exercise itself? In the philosophy of the schools? I am to have an understanding of the will of the Lord. He keeps you, again I say, as a heavenly creature in company with Christ; as a man walking across the face of the earth, He keeps you equally with Christ. When He sends you into the field of battle He arrays you in Christ, He puts Christ upon you. Who but the Spirit could come down into the traffic of such a world and keep Christ in your company through it all! So the old man might get drunk with wine. The new man has the Spirit to fill himself with. If that is to be mortified, this is to be cultivated.

And how will this filling with the Spirit express itself? "In psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." *There* is a vessel filled with the Spirit. It is the very same vessel, only transmuted. It was once filled with wine; now, in a spirit of thanksgiving, it is bubbling up with melody to the Lord. We have been in a fervent, heated atmosphere, heated by the Holy Ghost; and now we are suddenly let down, with a beautiful calmness, into the ordinary virtue of taking a low place. There is a beauty in the very style of this. How can we be sufficiently charmed with it! We do not know which to admire most, the doctrinal or the practical part.

Having come down to that, He details it, and addresses husbands and wives. There, I need not say, how deeply we are in company with Christ. Do not a wife and husband get their sanctions from Christ? Many a good wife never thinks of the Lord Jesus. Is that a christian wife?

Here let me turn aside to note a title that occurs three times in this epistle. Christ is called "The Head" in chapters 1, 4 and 5; but in each place the Headship has a different aspect.

In Ephesians 1 it is as the Head of the body. He is Head over all things to the church, the principal feature of the mystic man.

In Ephesians 4 it is as being Head of influence, dispensing virtue to the 'members. "From whom

the whole body fitly joined together . . . maketh increase of the body."

Here in Ephesians 5 we see Him in another aspect, as the Head of authority, "The husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church." In verse 32 it ought to be, "This is *the* great mystery." Then, having addressed wives by the common duties that belong to them, in Ephesians 6 it is the same thing with children. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right." Even in the time of Moses this was an honourable duty. But here it is because it is right in the view of the Lord. This takes it out from the legal promise, and the Lord becomes the new sanction.

So with fathers. A father ought to be his child's christian servant. I mean, that he should every hour be watching that the nurture and admonition of the Lord be ministered to his child. He should minister Christ to him.

As to servants — beautiful this is! — they are to be obedient. It matters not the character of their master. They are to be doing service, "as unto the Lord." Did you ever get up to that verse in James (James 1: 9), when you see people maintaining station in this life, that you ought positively to rejoice in anticipation of these distinctions passing away? Not touching the thing in passing along, 1 Timothy 6 would tell me that; but it ought to be the hidden joy of the heart that by-and-by station will have passed away with the fashion of this world.

Then as to masters. Do not be guilty of threatening. The lordly ways of masters and mistresses are hateful. How does your Master in heaven treat you?

Here the practical part ends; but I ask Does it not dignify you? As George Herbert says, "Who sweeps a room, if for Thy laws, makes that, and the action fine." It is the same thing to Christ if you are up there in His company. It is the same Jesus who is enfolding, embracing, enriching you in every step of the journey, and that for His own eternity.

Ephesians 6.

We have observed that this epistle naturally distributes itself into three parts — doctrinal and practical; and here, from verse 10 to the end, we get a scene of conflict. Teaching, walk, and conflict.

The teaching, we remember, was the education of the church — the body of Christ; and we were observing that there was heavenly calling before there was church calling. We have constant proof all along the line of Old Testament days of heavenly calling, but we have only distant, shadowy intimations of the body of Christ. As has been said by another, "It would have sounded absurd in the ears of a Jew to talk in divine, mysterious language of giving Messiah a body, completing Him, filling Him out." It is not said of Abraham that he was blessed in heavenly places in Christ, incorporated in Christ. This is the grand teaching of this highest of all the epistles.

Then, leaving the doctrinal part, we enter on the practical, which goes on to verse 9 of this chapter; and I should like to repeat what we were observing. When we come to the practical part of the epistle, we get the doctrinal part gloriously honoured. Precepts become, in the hands of the Spirit, the expression of the moral virtue that lies in the doctrine. If I had my heart open to God, I should be guided by the intrinsic virtue of my calling; and, oh, if we have common spiritual taste, we must enjoy that! Is it not beautiful to see the doctrine and precepts thus in company? In the same way Peter stands before the doctrine and wonders that we should not prove the moral virtue of it, and so do I.

Then, in the next place, it gives precepts a dispensational character. God is not dwelling in the same light now as when He was sitting on the throne in Jerusalem. That was an earthly light, a light

that shone on earth. The light in which God now dwells is the awful yet most precious mystery, that He has been rejected here in His dear Son, and that that Son is now glorified in heaven. And you must be in the light where God dwells. You must make God's dispensational truth the rule of your ways. I speak not, of course, of the light in which God dwells, as in His own proper glory — as we read in 1 Timothy 6: 16.

Now, the difference between Ephesians 5 and Ephesians 6 is this: in chapter 5 we see the saint taking his walk in the midst of the circumstances of human life. Here we see the saint in the field of battle. Do you believe your conflict is as constant as your walk? Are you to be in conflict today and in conflict again tomorrow. There is plenty of work for us to do; our hands will be full enough if we are practical living saints of God.

Now, in opening this third view, he tells us to be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might, taking to us the whole armour of God, that we may withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. The Spirit contemplates that it is a war from beginning to end. There may be certain battles; but, having done with the specific fight, you must still stand as in a war! Are you prepared for finding human life a war? That is what this passage is pregnant with. Whether the specific fighting be present or not, your whole soul is to rest in the conclusion that it is incessant war till you have done with this world, this flesh., and the devil. If two nations are at war, they may not be fighting every day, a battle may be a rare thing, but war has been proclaimed. The Lord forbid that you and I should not know that as long as we are in the body we are in a field of battle.

"The evil day" is a specific battle. If we have won the victory, why are we still to stand? Because war has been proclaimed. Have you proclaimed war with the lusts that are in your members, and the spirit of the world around you? Your soul is to recognise that, while you are in the body, you are a fighting man. That being your position, you are to put on the whole armour of God, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Now, how do you understand this? Do you rest in the thought that wicked spirits are in heavenly places? It is abundantly taught us. In 2 Chronicles 18 the Lord says, "Who shall entice Ahab king of Israel?" "I will entice him," says a spirit; "I will go out, and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets." This is a fruitful lively expression of the thing that is taken up in Ephesians 6.

It is beautiful to see the Spirit so at home in His own scriptures. He takes it up as a settled thing that Satan is in heaven. He does not make a difficulty, or a question about it. He assumes it as a thing sealed and accredited, and so takes it up. What does the Lord say? "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." This was not a mere honorary expression. Then in Revelation 12 Satan is cast down from heaven. Satan and the principalities and powers are now in heavenly places.

But what do these wicked spirits do? They come down with all their wiles and lies and deceivings to practise them in your heart and mine; as in Micaiah's vision, the lying spirit came down with a wile to Ahab; and again, as Satan tempts David to number the people. The Old and New Testaments are pregnant with all this. Paul says, "We are not ignorant of his devices"; and again, "O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil." All these prove that he acts by wiles. He acts by violence, and by persecution also, but that is not contemplated here. If we go over the story of Satan in scripture, we shall find him an accuser. Was he not an accuser of the brethren in the Book of Job? And is not the very same character attached to him in the Book of the Apocalypse?

Thus we now find ourselves put in the presence of the enemy. I am in the war, and I can never get out of it, though I may get out of the evil day. What then am I to do? I am to take the whole armour of

God.

And now I just ask you to inspect each part of this armour. Is there one single piece of that which is declared to be the armour of God fitted to send you out into the field of battle with flesh and blood? Is that the way He armed Joshua and David? They were to meet flesh and blood; and they were carnal weapons which He put into their hands. Now there is not a touch of that here. There are no slings and stones and jaw-bones of asses; and this is declared to be the whole armour of God. If this is not the armour I have on me, I am not fighting for Christ. Saints may take carnal weapons; but if I do — if, for instance, I go into a court of justice to assert my rights — do not let me talk of being in the light of God. That is where dispensational truth is so important. I find here that the Spirit sends me into a field of battle, and I find that my security depends on truth, righteousness, faith, peace, and the sword of the Spirit.

Now, supposing we were to describe a few of these wiles. Infidel heresies, superstitious vanities, evil doctrines, false expectations about the history of the world. We are not here in company with our lusts, but in conflict with direct attempts of the enemy. We must withstand the temptations of our hearts in walking through the world, as in Ephesians 5. Here we are set face to face with Satan, the deceivableness of unrighteousness, doctrinal heresies; these are the things we are to withstand. And is it not perfectly right that, being delivered by the Seed of the woman, we should make our war with him who was our captor? How could you attach yourself to Jesus, and not turn round in the face of the enemy and let him know that you are at war with him?

Having passed this fervent scene, we find that, having this armour on us, if a quickened condition of soul be not maintained in communion, the armour will be cumbrous, "Praying always . . . and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds." Did you ever hear of such a thing as the ambassador of one nation being put in bonds by the nation to which he was sent? Why, God has fared worse in this world than any nation in it would., and pray, what message did this ambassador bring? A message of boundless grace. And that is the way He has been treated. The law of nations would not allow it for an instant. Yet that is the way God for eighteen hundred years, in the Person of His servants and witnesses, has consented to be treated.

Then he tells them that he sends Tychicus, "That he might comfort your hearts." Oh, if we could be in that way! — in prison, yet able to comfort others. As dear Saunders, a clergyman in the Bishop of London's coal-hole, sent to his wife, "Be merry, dear wife, be merry; we're all merry here. We weep with Him now, but we shall laugh with Him for ever." That is equal to Paul, sending from a prison in Rome a cheering word to his brethren at Ephesus. What cannot the Spirit of God work?

The Lord grant that we may be taught by the doctrine, instructed in morals, and put in something of strength for the battle by this closing scene. AMEN.