

# Sonship

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The goodness of God and the sovereignty of His favour to man has come out in Christianity as nowhere else. His gracious dealings with men in other dispensations call for earnest attention and prayerful consideration, but today He is seen in the full blessedness of all that He is in nature and character, having given expression here in time to what engaged the Godhead: Father, Son and Spirit, in the timeless scenes of eternity past. It was then, mid scenes of celestial glory and eternal love, a love which is the nature of God, that believers were chosen of God to be before God for God's own pleasure and marked out for a place of association with God's Son in richest bliss for ever (John 17: 5-24: Eph. 1: 4, 5).

This choice for blessing and glory supposes for these a new relationship, namely, that of being made sons of God, the adoption, but the way it is brought to us and the time it comes calls for careful attention. It is brought to us in the Son of God; no less a Person could do this, and it reached us when we were at the lowest point of helplessness and ruin. The height of the blessing can only be seen in the light of the grace that has stooped so low, it is brought to us in the Son but at a time when we had wandered from our created state and place; so that we come not into it directly by creation but by redemption. The counsels of eternity pre-suppose man's creation and even his fall, for known unto God are all His ways from the beginning.

The calling of sonship therefore refers to the new state and place we are brought into by redemption and supposes a previous history as sinners at a distance from God that nothing could lift us from but the grace of God in Christ. That grace does not *stop* at mere recovery to where we were as created, but carries us into what God had in mind for us before we were created. It is brought to us in the Son of God's love; the blessing is seen in the Blessor and for us it means a new nature, relationship and calling, which has the Father for its source, the Holy Spirit in our souls the immediate cause and the Son Himself its model and expression.

All this dates back to the counsels of eternity which are indeed the outcome of Who God is, and which display God in a Trinity of Holy Beings; Father, Son and Spirit, in eternity past where so to speak the revealed and the unrevealed meet. We are taken back across the ages to eternity, in thought, to contemplate so far as creatures can, the Holy Trinity in the eternal and internal reciprocation of all that is native and proper to the Being of God, in thought, movement, plan and counsel, in the home of love, which is the very being of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There in a glory suitable to such a God, because taking its character and existence from His wondrous Being, lay the counsels, which, after we had fallen and wandered far away, would become operative in the Son in a relationship far beyond our first created state. Whatever may be our conception of the Being of God, infinite and glorious, omnipotent and omniscient, yet we may learn from this, that, at the centre from which all emanates, there beats a heart of eternal love, a love which is powerful and supreme and which makes all these other mighty attributes of Deity the willing and obedient servants of that same LOVE. "GOD IS LOVE."

As sinners living in alienation from God, we must begin with repentance and forgiveness by the gospel of God. This leads on to the sense of deliverance from the power of evil and complete salvation, so that we can be at home with God in the sense of His love and favour. This may be defined as soul

history as it speaks of the internal struggle which is passed through in the passage from darkness to the light of God. It is the moral journey from Adam to Christ, in which is apprehended, the transfer from the status of a fallen sinner, to a new creation in Christ before God.

It is clear however that God begins from His own side and from His own height, having in view that we should be "holy and without blame before Himself in love." The whole Trinity is engaged, as we have seen, to bring this about, and the fifteenth of Luke is a beautiful expression of it from the Lord Himself in parabolic form.

The spring and source of all is in the Father's love, but the relationship itself is in the Son. This excludes, in His glorious Person, all thought of generation, offspring or subordination. Such thoughts are not consistent with the co-existence, mutuality and co-equality of that God Who is One yet God all Three. "I and the Father are One," and again, "I am in the Father and the Father is in Me," (John 10: 30; John 14: 10), speak of the relations and intimacies of Godhead, from eternity to eternity, yet spoken in Manhood in time, by the Son. In coming out to reveal, He is Himself what He reveals, and being Man, while still abiding in the unity of Godhead, all the blessed joys and affections proper to the filial relation are His without a break, in the Manhood He took. In this way the communications that belong to the relationship, in its heavenly and eternal blessedness, is brought before us from the Son's own lips, in the seventeenth chapter of John. There, God the Spirit records, through John, the words of the incarnate Son in His prayer to the Father, and as units in the great aggregate that was before Him in that prayer we are privileged to listen and adore and to link ourselves with the home of Divine Love, and the counsels of eternity from which all has come.

The relationship of Son is seen in our Lord in different ways. He is "The Son of Man" though not begotten by man, and "Son of David" though not begotten by David. Character, and not offspring evidently is what we are to learn. Son of God is predicated of our Lord in a three-fold way. 1. Abstract Godhead; the Son in relation to the Father in the unity of the Godhead. 2. Incarnation: the Son of God a Divine Human Person. 3. Resurrection. "Declared to be the Son of God with power by resurrection from the dead. The first is Godhead and expresses His own place with the Father and the Spirit distinct from the creation. In the second, while eternally Co-Equal by virtue of the hypostatic union, yet, having become Man He is the Son of God, a Divine Human Person. In the third we see Him risen from the dead in His glorified Humanity, with all power in heaven and on earth given to Him, (Matt. 28: 18) all things in His hand, (John 3: 35; John 13: 4) and all put under His feet (Ps. 8: 6; Heb. 2: 8).

#### *1. Sonship before time and in the ages preceding Incarnation.*

It might be said that our Lord is never spoken of as Son till He became Man. This would deny the prophetic testimony of Scripture and endanger, not only the truth of His relationship but also the truth of His Godhead. It calls for consideration, however, for it affects both the progress of revelation, and its prophetic and anticipatory scope. We could not, in the progressive line of revelation, have the name of the Person till the Person Himself was revealed. Such a thing would have militated against the testimony of Scripture. It was necessary that the testimony, *then*, should be, "The LORD our God is One LORD. In the New Testament the Holy Trinity is revealed, and along with that the names distinctive of each Person in the Godhead.

On the other hand it is well-known that we can go back with the light of New Testament revelation, and see certain hints of a Trinity in the Godhead, coming out in the Old Testament in such passages as Gen. 3: 22; Gen. 11: 7; Numbers 6: 23-26, and perhaps also Isaiah 6: 3. If these dim allusions to the plurality of Persons in the Godhead may be gleaned from the Old Testament may we not also see, coming out, some allusion to the Names distinctive of each One. Surely we cannot fail to

see the name of the Son both in Isa. 9: 6, and Prov. 30: 4. But besides this if we compare Psalm 45: 6, with Hebrews 1: 8, we get full proof both of the Person and the Son, and His relationship to the Father as such. The Spirit, who inspired the Psalm, brings out its latent fullness in Hebrews, and thus we learn, that, long before Incarnation, the Father addressed the Son as God co-equal. "Unto the Son He saith, 'Thy throne O God is for ever and ever.'" Thus we get N. T. proof that our Lord is Son in eternity and O. T. proof of the same in the ages preceding His becoming Man.

## *2. The Son of God in Incarnation, the Man Christ Jesus.*

In His becoming Man, we pass from Sonship in abstract Deity, to the Son of God a Divine Human Person on the earth. The union in Him of the Divine and Human constitutes Him One glorious but unique Person. Since God, the Eternal, can never be less than God, He remains co-equal with the Father and the Spirit, sharing of the same necessity, in all the mysterious operations of the Godhead; upholding, ruling, controlling, both in the moral and physical orders of creation, while by virtue of Incarnation, He is something which the Father and the Spirit are not, He is Man. It is this that constitutes the mystery of the Person of our Lord. In these other great and glorious Beings of Godhead the One who is Father ever remains such in His own eternal Being, and the Holy Spirit also is eternally the same, but in our Lord we have God set forth in the Son of Man, and Man set forth in the Son of God. One glorious Person Who is both God and Man.

At the beginning of His ministry our Lord was owned by the Father as His beloved Son (Matt. 3: 17). Then immediately afterwards challenged by the devil (Matt. 4: 3) in the words, "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." Next, He is owned Son of God by the demons (Matt. 8: 29), acknowledged by those in the ship (Matt. 14: 33), and confessed by the Centurion after He had delivered up His Spirit to the Father. Nathaniel confessed Him Son of God (John 1: 49), so also did Martha (John 11: 27), and above all, note the confession of Peter (Matt. 16: 16), which drew forth from the Lord the revelation of His future work in building His Assembly in the resurrection sphere. We are reconciled to God by the death of His Son (Rom. 5: 11), the Son of God gave Himself for us (Gal. 2: 20), and, in His own Son, God condemned sin in the flesh (Rom. 8: 3, 22).

The Gospels describe our Lord in the mystery of His Person. To faith and affection He may be seen as possessing all things, yet having nowhere to lay His head, there is supreme Majesty, combined with dependance and obedience. He is the Child born, but the Son given (Isa. 8: 20). He clothes the heavens with blackness, and dries up the sea, yet gives His back to the smiters, and His cheek to them that plucked off the hair (Isa. 50: 2-6). When in abstract Godhead, the Son created (Heb. 1: 2) having become Man, He still upholds all things, but by virtue of Manhood He can suffer, serve and obey.

As sons then we can meditate upon the glory of God's own Son He is also called the Son of the Father (2 John 3). We are privileged to know Him, love Him, and adore Him. Heaven owns Him, earth owns Him, and to do so, hell will be compelled. The whole vast arena is necessarily brought in because of who He is. How marvellous that this earth is the centre of the conflict between good and evil. When He spoke of being Son of God who would clear the tomb of all its dead, they took up stones to kill Him. The glory of the Son of God shines forth at the grave of Lazarus (John 11: 4), in His muzzling the storm on the lake (Mark 4: 39), in His walking on the water to meet His distracted disciples, and in numberless other ways, but in spite of all, He was charged with blasphemy, because He said He was the Son of God.

But all this had to come to an end. for He had come down to die. In the days of the flesh He abode alone (John 12: 24). It does not mean that He did not go out and in among men, for this He did; He was alone a sinless spotless Man of a different order from the poor sinful creature He came to save.

He did not take flesh to adorn a fallen race, but to go to the cross that the history of man in the flesh might reach its end in death. He laid down flesh and blood, to establish in resurrection an entirely new creation. The true Corn of wheat must die to bring forth fruit, and in this way, surround Himself with a race after His own order in resurrection. On the part of God, His death was a necessity, on the side of Man it was called for in the way of relief, both are perfectly met because of Who He is, the Son of God in Manhood.

It is most remarkable how the power of evil seems to come into close co-operation here, with the working out of the will of God. Such was the malevolence of the combined forces of evil, that short of His death they could not stop. Heaven claimed that He should die; earth needed that death as a means of deliverance from sin and the judgment of God, and hell demanded it on account of hatred to all that is of God. And so all combined, however different the motive, to bring to an end that wondrous life of devotedness to God, which shed its heavenly lustre on all around. It was not the death of God for that could not be, nor was it the death of a mere man for that could not avail; it was the death of One who is both God and Man. Nothing less would meet the claims of God with regard to our state, and nothing more was needed because of who He is. Sin has been condemned! in His Person, and removed in His death, and now He is seen, in the potential power of life, in a new state; having left behind in death that state to which sin is in us attached. Before the cross He stood in the condition He had taken in view of death that sin might be dealt with in Him. The desire of divine love was that His banished might be brought back (2 Sam. 14: 14), so the Son becomes the sin-bearer in all its full dread reality though, indeed, He never could be more precious to the Father and the Spirit than at that moment He bears God's judgment, meets man's need, and submits to the power of evil, down to death itself. In this way God is declared in love, man is met in his need, and the forces of evil are defeated, in a victory which abides to all eternity.

Such was the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and such is its efficacy that God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, shall be adored for evermore. We can think of that death as the vindication of God's glory in the assertion of His rights and the recovery of His place in the heart of the creature, and His authority as moral Governor of the universe; but in a richer and deeper sense the death of our Lord Jesus Christ has so covered the Being, Throne and Majesty of God with glory as not only to meet all the effects of sin in every part of the creation, but to lay a basis for the bringing into effect all that was in His heart before sin came in.

3. *The Son of God in resurrection.* Resurrection may be spoken of as a great key truth of the New Testament. It is closely linked with the truth of the Lord's Person. He is marked out Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1: 4). This passage calls for careful consideration. God's gospel is concerning His Son, it unfolds the fulness of His unique Person, the Son become Man. Next, the Scripture opens out to show both the Divine and human in Him. Come of David's seed shows His humanity, marked out Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, His Divinity. The first statement is to show who He is, the next two statements declare the Divine and the human in Him. We cannot understand the working out of the ways of God in the whole mediatorial order apart from this, every official position He fills hangs upon it. In abstract Godhead He creates but becoming Man he redeems, then follows His place as Reconciler, Head of the body, the church, and Head of all principalities and powers (Col. 1: 13, 14, 16, 18, 20-21). The Son of God the risen Man builds His Assembly (Matt. 16-18), and is supreme in administrative authority in the House of God (Heb. 3: 6). Lordship, Headship, Priesthood, everything right down to the execution of all judgment are His. It is because the Son has become the Son of Man that all judgment is committed unto Him (John 5: 22, 27).

There are certain operations of our risen Lord where Godhead is prominent and others where we see plainly demonstrated that He is true Man. This calls for careful attention. As revealer He acts on the part of God manward: only a Divine Person could do this. On the side of our approach, He is on man's part Godward, the risen glorified Man.

These two great thoughts might be followed out with profit, as showing the characteristic difference between certain New Testament Epistles. The one to the Colossians shines with the glory of God the Son, while Ephesians unfolds His glory as the risen Man, both thoughts centering in the same blessed Person. In the former it is the Son, in eternal dignity, as Creator, going on to give all the weight of what He is to the work of the cross, and as the Head of the body, linking up the church with Himself in the vast scheme of reconciliation (Col. 1: 16-20). In the latter it is the one Man under whom God has put all things in heaven and earth: the same, Who, having descended, has now ascended far up above all heavens, that He might fill all things. In Colossians the Creator Son is Redeemer, the latter bringing in His Manhood. In Ephesians the glorious Man fills all things, which brings in His Godhead.

This beautiful combination is seen from another point of view in the Epistle to the Hebrews. May we follow with deep adoration, apart from all thought of speculation, dissecting, or prying into the unrevealed. There the heavenly calling is set forth as including a new Priest (Heb. 5), a new inheritance (Heb. 6), a new law (Heb. 7), a new covenant (Heb. 8), a new Sanctuary (Heb. 9), and a new company of worshippers (Heb. 10), but before these things are mentioned all is introduced by the Gods head and Manhood of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Heb. 1, the Son Who created has made purgation for sins, for this He had to take flesh and blood (Heb. 2: 14). This brought Him down past angels, but now, having accomplished His miss sign, He is seen in the centre of the glory, having carried Manhood, in Himself, to the right hand of God.

It will thus be seen that apart from the union in our Lord of the Divine and human we could have nothing. No Atonement, and hence no salvation; no Saviour for sinners, and hence no escape from the eternal consequences of our sins and sinful condition. By His becoming Man, God and Man are brought together in one glorious Personality — not transformation but Incarnation which is the crowning miracle of eternity. By it, the eternal Son came into time in view of going down into death itself, thus becoming in Himself the fulfiller of every promise, type, shadow and prophecy, that came out in the ways of God in the Old Testament, and going beyond everything to the accomplishment of the counsels of eternity.

We are now to consider the way in which man is brought into this relationship with God. God's counsels had marked out a company for association with the Son by adoption. The fulfilment of these counsels was comparatively late, hence the order of divine operations must be carefully noted. Man's creation, the permission of the fall, with the protracted period of divine dealings, in Providence, Grace and Government had to run their courses. Created beings have, of necessity, to be tested, and this explains the riddle of divine dealings, during the ages preceding the coming of the Son. The Son of God appeared at the end of these ages, to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. (Heb. 9: 26). His rejection, and death, completed the story of man's broken down responsibility, and in this way, all the grace and goodness of God, seen in the times of Prophets, Priests and Kings, in His marvellous forbearance with men, was sinned away. This brought the Son which concluded the story, and the creature's worst and darkest crime, was seen at Golgotha's hill. Thank God, all have been foreseen long before. In promise, type and shadow, the death of our Lord Jesus Christ was fore-shown in the Old Testament, on the side of man's need, as well as of his guilt. (See Lev. 1 to 7, and compare Gen. 37 to 45).

It was just at the moment when the creature had reached his lowest point that the pent up fulness of God's love broke forth. Instead of coming forth in judgment on the murderers of His Son, the very best of all that He is, comes out by the resurrection of Christ from the dead. By the bearing of sin's judgment, a basis had been laid for the perfect settlement of all moral questions, and the sin-Bearer came forth from the dead in a new state, the beginning of a new creation into which neither sin nor death, can ever enter.

Note carefully the meaning of resurrection. We can conceive it to be a return to the life before lived, as in the case of Lazarus. The condition of life in which our Lord rose from the dead was different altogether from that which He laid down in death, although, in Him, that flesh and blood condition was perfect. His resurrection takes us back across the ages to the plan of eternity. The attempt to bring back our Lord to the life of flesh and blood, constitutes the great failure of Evangelical Christendom today. "Beware that thou bring not my son thither again" was said of the typically risen man. (Gen. 26: 6). The Son had been marked out for glory, constituted Heir of all things; in the volume of the book, namely, the decree of eternity, all have been written. Since this had to be reached by redemption we can see the necessity for His taking flesh and blood, but the order of Manhood that abides for eternity is a new creation. This He reached not merely, by the Virgin's womb, but by the travail of the cross, and His glorious resurrection, which was the birth of a new creation. (See John 16: 21 to 22).

To tarry a moment on this should call for no apology, for the cross is God's final reckoning with this world.

There, the history of man in his responsibility is brought to an end. It may be said how can this be so when we see man in his sinful condition before our eye to this very day? The answer is that moral questions are not affected by time. As God passed over the sins of men in view of the cross, during the ages preceding it, (Rom. 3: 25. margin). and dealt with the fallen race, though in a condition that was irretrievable, so He does in the ages which follow in the working out of His own ways relative to His nature and character as moral Governor of the creation. His doing this fits in beautifully with the great truth that in the death of Christ every question of creature responsibility was settled for eternity. The new creation is so definitely in view in Ephesians that God passes over the first man's world and its history and begins by raising Christ from the dead, and opening out the scene of glory, which has Christ the risen One as its head, and Centre. It may be said that the last three chapters, which are the practical part of the Epistle have the time scene in view. It is there that those who are brought by faith into a new creation in Christ Jesus as belonging to the first three chapters of the same Epistle, fill in the remains of their responsible life in connection with the testimony of God in His world.

By apprehending the above, we see the resurrection of our Lord as the dawn of another world, the doorway from the Adamic order of life into the eternal order. We are brought into it, as having been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1: 4) and in this way, to use the words of another, "We belong in the counsels of God to a system set up by Him in Christ before the world existed, which is not of the world when it does exist and exists after the fashion of this world has passed away for ever."

Turning to the bearing of this upon ourselves, we come at once to the place and work of the Holy Spirit. In the working out of divine counsels His is the subjective side. While it is true that we come in to it by faith in Christ Jesus, on the divine side it is by adoption. As children of God we are begotten by God, but as sons we are adopted. This shows a clear distinction between the blessing of children and falling of sons. The former is indeed sweetest of all, as giving the birth tie, and sowing a new

beginning, a new generation in this world formed in the divine nature; the latter gives the dignity of the new place and calling, but implying that past history which necessitated the cross. It connects with the Father and the Son in a new life death cannot touch. We have entered a new chapter in our history, which connects us with heaven and eternity, and knows no end, wherein we have imparted to us a sympathy in every interest of heaven, and a susceptibility to every divine touch, and which binds us to the testimony of God in this world for the rest of our life in flesh and blood.

This complex position the Lord had before Him with His own, the last night before He suffered. (John. 13 to 17). At glance at this will show the perfect way He took to lift them not only from the hopes, joys and sorrows of nature and the time scene, but to transfer them in thought from Judaism and the earthly system, with its Messianic connection, by linking them up with Himself and the Father in the new heavenly order where eternal thoughts and purposes come to light.

"Part with Me" is the ruling idea in this section of the Gospel. It anticipates what came out of the message sent through Mary later. (John 20: 17). Between chapters seventeen and twenty all the requirements of God concerning the state of His people, had been met in His death. All being met, the new thing comes out. "Go to My brethren and say unto them I ascend to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God." He had said to them before He suffered, "Ye now therefore have sorrow but I will see you again, and your sorrow shall be turned into joy. (John 16: 22). This wondrous relationship with Him and the Father is confirmed, and enjoyed in the Assembly, for in John 20, the risen One comes among them saying; "Peace unto you." In this way Hebrews 2: 12 is antedated, where He now declares the Father's name and leads the brethren's praise, while all is linked together with the prophetic statement of Psalm 22.

It is not difficult to see that the words — "Part with Me" are intended to convey the thought of association with Himself, in the glory system beyond death. The mystical bearing of the feet-washing shows how He would maintain His own unrivalled claim on our affections by ministering to us from heaven in such a way as to keep up the sense in our souls of our place with Him there in the joy of the Father's love. Having gone to prepare a place for them He will come again and receive them to Himself, but counting on their affections that He is indispensable to them He would during the interval come to them. (John 14: 18). Meantime, He bequeaths to them, and may we say ourselves, all that is His. "My" peace, (John 14: 27). My love, (John 15: 9. John 17: 26). My joy (John 15: 11). and the glory (John 17: 21), and to crown all, the Spirit would be with them and: in them, that they might be conscious of His company in all the requirements of the testimony.

All was to be carried on with a feeling of holy intimacy, and a sense of the favour that makes us trustworthy; He brings us into the intimacy of friends and unfolds the secret of His own and the Father's heart, and then goes on to show that we are the objects of the Father's affection (John 16: 27) because we have trusted in His Son.

This leads to the innermost circle of all where we are permitted with holy reverence, to listen to the communings in time of the Son with the Father concerning the interest of the Godhead from eternity to eternity; in all that which concerns the Holy Trinity from that eternal past where creature thought must stop, right on through time's all-changing flight to an eternity of bliss where God shall be known, unveiled in the Son in all that He is and does, in endless glory and satisfied bliss. What grandeur of glory is here? "If the Son shall make you free you shall be free indeed." We are introduced, as it were, by the Son into the counsel chamber of eternity to hear words which speak of the love and glory proper to Godhead in His holy being and nature; and as linking us up with Itself in the revelation now brought to light by the unveiling of the counsels of eternity. Surely we find ourselves here in the

place of sons with holy liberty attaching to it and which, so to speak, is its life, with the plenitude of holy communications which feeds the affections, moulds the will, and bows the whole being down with richest praise and adoration. When we reflect that all this came out from our Lord in almost the same hour as that prayer and agony which drew forth the sweat of blood, (Luke 22: 44) and within a few short hours of the abandonment of the cross, what can we do but adore.

Holy Peerless SON OF GOD how great and glorious Thou art, surpassing all our creature thought. When we think of Thy love, and the place it led Thee to for us, we can but wonder, worship and adore. Soon, at the centre of the vest creation of God Thou shalt have full praise, when everything, animate and inanimate, shall unite to give Thee Thy dues in God the Father's ear, and when, with Thee, that glorious company of sons which Thou art not ashamed to call brethren shall worship God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit for evermore.

In full accord with all we have seen, the Spirit unfolds through Paul in the Epistle to the Ephesians the counsels of God, and the new creation. The link is given in the message to the disciples (John 20: 17). He spoke there of "My Father and your Father, My God and your God," and in this Epistle we get two remarkable prayers, one to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ and the other to His Father, now through grace, become our God and Father. Could words be found to show more clearly the difference of His Person, and relationship with the Father and ours who, by grace, come in by adoption. Never once did He say, our Father, as including Himself with them. God is leading many sons to glory, and for that He gave "His own Son." The message which reveals the new relationship which is founded upon His death, and gives association with Himself in life, and nature, maintains at the same time, His own proper place with the Father, in words which put the matter beyond the region of dispute.

The suitability of the Lord's words to the overcomer in the Philadelphian church as fitting in with His message in John 20 and with the two Ephesian Prayers will not be questioned. "He that overcomes, him will I make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name" (Rev. 3: 12). How sweetly does He repeat the words "My God." Once only, in the history of Time had these words been duplicated by Him, and well we know that that was in the hour which must stand alone for ever, in that same history.

Looking for a moment at the two prayers in the Ephesian Epistle, they seem to cover the whole ground of divine counsel, concerning the Assembly. It may be best to take each in its setting in the chapter in which it appears. Ephesian 1 opens with the counsels of God, and closes with Christ the exalted Man, Head over all things to the Church which is His body. The closing words touch the truth of the mystery which is the outstanding feature of Paul's ministry and joins with the truth of Ephesian 3 and the prayer there.

The God of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 1: 17) is the Father of glory, the origin and source of all that is morally excellent. The desire is that the saints might get the full knowledge of Him in a three-fold way, namely; that we may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power which he wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead. The hope of His calling refers to the consummation in glory when sons shall be at home with the Son in the unbroken joy of the Father's love forever. The riches of the glory of His inheritance is the vast scene of glory which is for God and which He takes up in and by the Assembly. Our inheritance is contingent on our calling as sons and is given in v. 10 and 14. It connects with the first petition and speaks of the day of display when all that is proper to sonship will

be ours to enjoy with Himself for ever. God's inheritance is that world of bliss which is filled by the many families, but taken up in the sons which are His own workmanship created in Christ Jesus; that company which, indeed, will be His eternal dwelling place (Rev. 21: 3: Eph. 3: 21). It greatly helps to take the first petition of the prayer along with v. 3-8, the second with v. 11-14, and the third with v. 20-23.

What a blaze of glory is here and what marvels concerning the Son of God's love. Do not let us forget that the counsels of God centre in the Son; it is because of this that we are brought in, but if we are brought in it at all it is to nothing less than sharing with Himself all that He has won. The prayer gives what is necessarily eternal, but stops at the glorious kingdom display. The points of it are the calling, the inheritance and the power that operates in the new creation. God is its theme, Christ and His glory are the objective, and for this we are brought in. All is closely linked with the truth of the House of God. The saints are God's workmanship, He dwells in His sons: they are His household, to set forth the honour and glory of their God.

Ephesians 2, shows God's house as the resting place of the glory, the centre from which His testimony of life and blessing emanates. There are salvation (v. 8) made nigh by the blood (13), the new man (15), reconciliation and the body of Christ (16), access (18), and citizenship (19) these necessitate the House of God, set up to be the depository of every blessed feature of the divine system. From this springs the parenthesis of Ephesians 3. The spirit lays hold of one of the main items of truth from Ephesians 2; namely, the body of Christ (see Ephesians 2: 16), and dwells on the great truth of Christ and the Assembly, as the mystery which had been hid in God, but was now made known, and which as we have said, is the outstanding feature of Paul's ministry.

In Ephesians 3, the place of the Assembly is strewn in relation to the creation. God created all things by Jesus Christ to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in the heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God." The tremendous greatness of all this puts the Apostle on his knees to pray to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 1 the prayer was in three great petitions, to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, here it is to His Father; there it was that we might know certain things; here it is that the Christ, who is the Centre of it all, might dwell within us. Here one great thought suggests another, or in other words, one great thing rises out of another till we reach the grand climax of being filled into all the fulness of God.

We do not dwell further on this. The link between sonship and the truth of the body of Christ, consists in the way eternal counsel has designed, that God should have a bride for His Son, and that those He has marked out for companionship with Him as sons, should be the company which form His body and bride to come out with Him in His splendour in the day of displayed glory. This shows what the saints are to God the Father in the calling of sonship, and what they are to Christ the risen Man in fulness of life. In the former we are associated with God's Son, He the Firstborn, we His companions, the company He is not ashamed to call brethren; all being the work of the Holy Spirit, who is here to glorify the Father and the Son. If comparisons may be permitted in such an exalted sphere of blessing, the filial place must be first; the bride of Christ is for the display of Himself in that day of wondrous glory, when she is seen as "a bride *adorned in holy splendour*"; but what the saints are to the Father, as companions of His glorious Son, carries us, in thought, beyond the possibility of display to the inner circle of holy love, and the intimacies of the Father and the Son, as filled with the Spirit for ever.

The above may be beautifully amplified in the practical part of this epistle (Ephesians). Note the double bearing of the practical life in testimony and conflict. Passing over Ephesians 4 where the saints are seen as God's House we reach in Ephesians 5 the highest character of practice ever set before a

creature. And just as the relationship is twofold so also is the bearing of the moral obligation. "Be ye *imitators of God*" concerns our conduct *as sons with the Father* but in Ephesians 6 we are to stand before the enemy, clad in the whole armour of God, as being set for the maintenance of *the rights of Christ here*.

"Be ye imitators of God as beloved children and walk in love" reminds us of the closing paragraph of Matt. 5 where we are to come out like our Father, by loving our enemies, and praying for them which despitefully use, and persecute us. Here we are exhorted to walk in love, and further down to walk in light (Eph. 5: 1, 2, 8). The two words "Love" and "Light" are given by the Spirit as expressing who God is (1 John 1: 5 and 1 John 4: 8, 16). Being brought before God for His pleasure, we take on the impress of Himself in such a way, that we come out here through grace the moral reflex of Himself.

Who can estimate the greatness of the privilege seen in all this? The blessed God would set Himself before the creation, men and angels in the beauty of His Being in Love and Light but deigns to do it in His saints. That we may be capable for it He has suited us morally for Himself by associating us with His Son in the calling, nature and acceptance of the Son. Being made at home. in this so that the feelings, tastes, joys and delights proper to such a relationship are ours now; we can, through grace, in the very place where our Lord was cast out and crucified, set forth the nature and character of God.

The other aspect of moral obligation comes out as we have said in Ephesians 6. The Lord Jesus Christ is coming soon to assert His rights with an helmet of salvation upon His head; and wearing the garments of vengeance for clothing, and clad with zeal as a cloak (Isa. 59: 17). Before He comes, He puts His own into His place here to meet the enemy clothed in the whole armour of God (Eph. 6: 10-20). The whole vast inheritance is His both by Creatorial and Redemption rights. These rights are refused and faith and affection are permitted, however weak, to stand for them till He comes again.

"Our struggle is not," says the Apostle, "against blood and flesh, but against principalities, against spiritual powers of wickedness in the heavenlies" (Eph. 6: 12). These hostile powers are at work today in the Christian profession and there can be no quarter given. Joshua fought not for supremacy only but for the complete extermination of the foe, and that conflict in the land was the foreshadowing of what is ours under the Captain of the Lord's host today. May the Lord raise up men for this, "able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness, men whose faces are like the face of a lion, and are as swift as roes upon the mountains" (Ex. 18: 21, and 1 Chr. 12: 8).

May we remember that we are dealing with the high and holy things of our God, "the precious things of heaven," at the moment when the coming of our Lord is just at hand, and when alas there is but little heart for such things, as indeed is evidenced among those to whom much has been given. Yet there are, thank God, many hearts that beat true to the Lord at this moment. May the spirit of grace and of supplication be upon His people that God our Father may be praised according to His name and the revelation of Himself, and bridal affections be stirred up in all our hearts in view of meeting Him to Whom we owe our all for time and eternity.

"Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which Thou hast given Me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17: 24).

"Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

