

## Studies in Ephesians

Eph. 1: 1-3; Eph. 2: 11-22; Eph. 3: 1-21; Eph. 4: 1-4; Eph. 5: 22, 32.

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Eph. 1: 1-3: — The apostle to the Gentiles salutes "the saints and faithful in Christ Jesus." To them he commends grace and peace, then he bursts into praise and worship, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." By the way, the revelation of God would carry with it the thought of nature and responsibility; that of Father, grace and privilege.

4-7: — Our place individually is that of sonship. The character of our acceptance is only properly understood as we appreciate Christ's acceptance as the Beloved. Beyond all thought of what is official is the sweetness of what He is to the Father. For in the unclouded intimacy of divine and holy love He is in abiding Manhood, and we are brought into the same affectionate acceptance in Himself.

All is the fruit entirely of the sovereign grace of God. We shall never be robbed of this rich blessing in time or eternity. The Father chose us in Christ before time had commenced, and has marked us out for sonship, not for anything which He saw as meritorious in us but absolutely according to the good pleasure of His will. His intention in so doing was that we might be before Him holy, and without blame in love. This is what Christ ever was, and is, and we shall be just like Him.

We are now free to receive the knowledge of the mystery of His will for the glory of Christ, for He is destined to be the gathering centre for a universe of bliss and glory. All, which in the course of the past ages has broken down in the hands of those to whom it had been committed, shall be gathered together in one in the competent hands of Christ. All shall then be administered to God's glory in the world to come.

Then too shall be realised the prayer of the Son to the Father, "And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast loved Me." Unity in glory — the third unity prayed for by our Lord — John 17: 22, 23. Because we then shall be with Him, sharing the inheritance with Him. This, too shall be "according to the purpose of Him Who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1: 11).

When our Lord takes up the inheritance He will not be alone as once upon the cross of shame, no! He shall have with Him His divinely formed and given companion, the Assembly, His body, even as Adam was given a suited wife (Gen. 2: 18-25). Eve was part of Adam — "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." The divine order is, "the woman is of the man, so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God" (1 Cor. 11: 12).

The Assembly, the Body and the Bride of Christ cannot come into the inheritance until He comes into His own. Nevertheless, those who form His body, being sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, receive the Spirit as the, "Earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory" (Eph. 1: 13, 14).

The elements of the Mystery are here in the end of our Scripture. Christ is exalted by the power "Which He (God) wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every

name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all " (Eph. 1: 20-23).

Note, we are not told that the "all things" over which He has been set include the Assembly. No! for in the day of His manifested supremacy it will be patent to all that the Assembly is distinct and distinguished. It will be as Asenath was to Joseph in the day of his exaltation.

Eph. 2: 11-22: — This presents to us the work of God in time by which the Assembly as the Body of Christ is formed. Jew and Gentile alike, dead in trespasses and sins have been the subjects of the life giving power of God. That same power which wrought in Christ (chapter 1: 20) has quickened us with Christ. The "together" of chapter 2: 5, 6 refers to these believers. The grand end of God's work with them was to unite them to Christ in glory. This is the unique feature of the present era. All believers, from Pentecost until the Rapture, are comprehended in it.

From verse 11 of chapter 2 we have the Assembly as an actual subsisting reality. The varied features of it are detailed here and are the fruit of divine work. In verses 1-10 we are taught that the mighty power of God has wrought for the implementation of the counsel of God to set man in union with Christ where He now is. It is good to be reminded of *What* and *How* we were. How blessed the contrast between "at the time" and "now" (verses 12 and 13). Thus is enhanced to us the grace and power of God in bringing us from the condition in which we were. Note the "you" — Gentiles — and the "we" — Jews. Our position now "in Christ" is fixed and unalterable, and shortly we shall be with Him. Spiritual and heavenly blessings will only be fully enjoyed in that sphere to which they belong.

Eph. 2:13. "Ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." Believers from among Gentiles are spoken of here in contrast with those from among the Jews who have believed, for such were ceremonially near. Christ is "our peace" for He has made us, naturally and religiously opposed as we were, to be in perfect amity together. That which distinguished the Jew and had given him advantage over the Gentile had ever existed as a barrier between them. Christ has made both one having broken down the middle wall of partition. This He has done through His sacrificial work upon the cross. He shed His blood and offered His flesh, entailing for Him the condemnation upon all that both had been, to which they both were righteously entitled. In consequence then of that which He has done we are made nigh — distance is gone; we are both one — His death has removed the enmity between us: instead of Jew and Gentile there is now — "one new man." We must needs view this truth abstractly — we must look away from what we are in our actual responsible condition and take account of what we are in Christ. There are no fleshly distinctions — "neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free" (Col. 3: 11). Galatians adds, "neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3: 28). Colossians says, "Christ is all, in all." There are then no natural, no racial, no religious, no cultural, no secular distinctions.

The "One New Man" embraces all saints of this present period, Pentecost to the Rapture. We would say just here, that Christ is not the New Man, while the New Man is Christ characteristically. The "new man" is a creation, Christ is not (see for this, Eph. 4: 24). Thus reconciliation is known and enjoyed — the blessedness of being in right relations one with the other (Jew and Gentile), and with God. The height of blessing is that "through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father."

We list here the blessings stated in Ephesians 2: 13-22 —

1. Made nigh by the blood of Christ.
2. Both made one.

3. Created in Himself of the twain one new man.
4. Reconciled to God in one body by the cross.
5. Access to the Father.
6. Fellow citizens with the saints.
7. Of the household of God.
8. Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.
9. Jesus Christ Himself, being the Chief Corner Stone of this spiritual edifice.
10. An holy temple in the Lord.
11. An habitation of God in the Spirit.

The unsearchable riches of Christ are announced among the Gentiles, preached in the Gospel. Forgiveness of sins, justification of life, redemption, reconciliation, sonship, eternal life, new creation. Christ is Lord of all and has peace for all. He is Priest, He is Minister of the Sanctuary, He is Mediator of the New Covenant — this last carries with it the administration of righteousness and the gift of the Spirit. Christ has "brought life and incorruptibility to light through the glad tidings" (2 Tim. 1: 10).

There is the "hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie, promised before the world began; but hath in due times manifested His word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour" (Titus 1: 2, 3). "This is the promise that He hath promised us, even eternal life" (1 John 2: 25). The promise is eternal life; it is in Christ Jesus; it belongs to the faith of God's elect; it was promised before the world began. The word of it has been manifested in preaching.

Ephesians 3: 1-21 (parenthesis): —

Verse 1 — intimates the interest of the apostle Paul in Gentile believers.

Verse 2 — there was a particular administration committed to Paul having the blessing of Gentile believers especially in view.

Verses 3, 4 — The mystery had been revealed to Paul. This would be one of "those things in the which I will appear unto thee," said to Paul in the day of his turning to the glorified Christ, by none other than Christ Himself.

Verse 5 — that this truth was also revealed by the Spirit to the "holy apostles and prophets." Paul seems to have received it directly from Christ.

The distinctive features of the Mystery are detailed in verse 6 —

1. That Gentile believers should be joint-heirs.
2. A joint body.
3. Joint partakers of His promise in Christ by the glad tidings.

"Joint" refers to such believers with believers for among the Jews.

1. Is individual blessing for sons of God. Sonship and heirship go together. The highest blessing is that of sonship. The thought of joint heirs introduces to collective blessing.

2. Joint body, is corporate. The body is an organism instinct with the life of its Head.

3. Joint partakers of His promise refers to the promise of life. For this, please read 2 Timothy 1: 1; Titus 1: 2 and 1 John 2: 25. Reference has already been made to these three joint blessings.

The Mystery then is the bringing in of Gentiles who have believed the gospel of our salvation, with those from among Jews who have believed the same blessed testimony, and together they have been united to Christ in glory. The Assembly, as the body, was brought into being on the day of Pentecost by the descent of the Holy Spirit. The personnel were Jews, the door for the reception of Gentiles was opened in Acts 10 by the apostle Peter who, because of his Jewish scruples, was given the vision of the sheet let down from heaven. The formal truth of this Mystery awaited the conversion of Gentiles, and the revelation of it, as we have seen, to Paul. The administration of it was also committed to Paul. That was the putting into operation of the truth in the ordering of the saints in their local settings. Hence we read of him teaching everywhere in every Assembly — see 1 Cor. 1: 2; 1 Cor. 4: 17; 1 Cor. 7: 17; 1 Cor. 10: 16, 17; 1 Cor. 11: 16; 1 Cor. 14: 33.

Eph. 3: 8: — The effect of the revelation was to make Paul appreciate his nothingness, yet again in 1 Cor. 15: 9 where he said, "For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God." His great aim, henceforth, was to "enlighten all with the knowledge of what is the administration of the mystery hidden throughout the ages in God . . ." The Assembly is the vessel, as united with Christ, in which the all-varied wisdom of God is witnessed by heavenly beings. Eternal power and divinity (Romans 1: 20) were to be seen in creation, yet, the Assembly in union with the glorified Christ is the masterpiece of God. The creation had been brought into being to afford God a platform whereon could be worked out His eternal purpose in Christ Jesus our Lord. "In Whom we have boldness and access by faith of Him," access into the knowledge of this great secret of God, that Christ and the Assembly are one.

The apostle then bowed his knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that the needed state be wrought in them to enable them to lay hold of, and practically to answer to, these blessed things. He requested of the Father that we might be, according to the riches of His glory, "Strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith."

The entire range of the divine purpose would be opened out to us — "the breadth, and length, and depth, and height." In case we should be staggered by such a heart-filling knowledge he also asked that the Father would provide us a pillow on which to rest, "the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled unto all the fulness of God." We shall surely join with the apostle in the ascription of praise, "Now unto Him Who is able to do above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto Him be glory in the Assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages. Amen."

Eph. 4: 1-4 and Eph. 5: 22-32: — The apostle here urgently entreats saints to walk worthy of the calling wherewith they have been called. This calling has been detailed for us in Eph. 2. The truth of the Assembly being the vessel for administration in the coming kingdom is implicit in the teaching that those who form it are "fellow citizens." Coupled with this is the intimacy of their inside place, "and of the household of God."

The growing "unto an holy temple in the Lord" — the stones even now coming to Christ, the Living Stone, being put into their place in view of the coming day of display; and the present fact of being "builded together for an habitation of God in the Spirit" with the fact of their forming the one body all is urged upon us in order to our being practically affected by it. There is nothing ethereal, nor theoretical in the calling. To ignore its vital application will sorely affect our relations with one another.

"With all lowliness" — not having high thoughts of self: "And meekness" — no self-assertion; "with longsuffering" — that quality of patience which waits upon brethren, while they grow in truth; "forbearing one another in love" — the needed atmosphere in which we may "use diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace."

We are not enjoined to keep the unity of the Body, that is a unity that has been made once for all. It comprehends all who believe and who have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. That which we are enjoined to keep is exemplified in Philippians 2: 1-5, "think the same thing, having the same love, thinking one thing." Thus the evidence of being indwelt by the One Spirit will be plain to any.

Keeping the unity of the Spirit is practical indeed. The truth of the Mystery as we enjoy it together will certainly affect us in our relations with each other. How sad to find those who form the one body and who know that they are members one of another, at variance doctrinally or personally. Often this latter is on account of some antipathy or coldness which has come in. The condition of a Euodias and a Syntyche, whatever the cause, implies that there are a thousand and one spirits in the Christian profession instead of One. Do we not read in Eph. 4: 4, "There is one Body, and ONE Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling." The one hope is twice referred to in this epistle, once as "the hope of his calling" (Eph. 1: 18), again, as here, Eph. 4: 4, "the hope of your calling." This will eventuate in glory with Christ above. Ephesians is one of five epistles which do not speak of the rapture, the coming of our Lord for His own. The others are, Galatians, Philemon, and 2nd and 3rd epistles of John.

So there is to be but one mind among the saints of God, and that is the mind of the Spirit. The particular sphere of His activity is the first of the three circles spoken of in verses 4-6, and they are worthy of attention.

#### 1. "There is One Body"

This was formed by the baptism of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost (1 Cor. 12: 13). This baptism with the Spirit, despite what so-called Pentecostalists proclaim, will never be repeated. Acts 2 gives the historical descent of the Holy Spirit. He has united all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ into one living organism of which Christ in glory is the life and Head. The hope also is one, having the certain prospect that the members of the one body are destined for glory above with Christ the Head. The calling is Sonship (1: 4, 5); while in 1: 18 it is designated God's calling, for its height and blessedness is before us there. In chapter 4 it is our calling to the intent that we be practically affected by it here and now.

#### 2. "One Lord, One faith, One baptism"

This is the circle of profession, vital or otherwise not being the question. The centre and administrator of the faith is the One Lord. The door of entry to it being baptism by water.

#### 3. "One God and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

This is the widest of the three being universal in extent. God is spoken of as Father of all, the Originator of all in the sense of Creatorship. He is supreme for He is over all and works through all, but He is only "in us all" — the believing company. This company is in all three circles. By reason of natural birth they are in circle 3. By reason of their having owned Jesus as Lord and having been baptised they are in circle 2. In virtue of being sealed with the Spirit they are members of the One Body, thus they are in circle 1. Only those who are of the same life and nature of God are in the first circle.

From verse 7 in the chapter, we have the resources of the Head for the sustenance of His own in the truth and power of their calling. Every saint has some ability, and the supply of grace for its exercise is given from Christ the ascended Head. There are a variety of functions to be performed — all service is not platform work such as preaching or teaching. Gifts for ministry according to Ephesians 4 are persons — "He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints; with a view to the work of the ministry; with a view to the edifying of the Body of Christ; until we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, at the full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ."

Being still in the world where the enemy is at work to oppose God and Christ our only safety lies in the acceptance of that which is divinely afforded, and that is the ministry which flows down to us via the gifts from the ascended Head in heaven. Should we be unable to avail ourselves of that, there is the constant downflow from the Head reaching the members through that which every joint supplieth. This indisputably leads to the self-building up in love.

This truth of the Mystery has only been possible because of the love of Christ. So we read, Ephesians 5: 25-32, which gives force to the exhortation to wives and husbands, "Husbands love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Assembly, and gave Himself for it." His was a sacrificial love. As we read in Matthew 13 of the merchant man seeking goodly pearls, who when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it. Here, He not only sold all that He had; the crown and throne of Israel, but He gave Himself. All that He was in the grace of His impeccable humanity was given that he might buy the Assembly for Himself. This meant for Him the Cross with "all its suffering, shame, and loss." Not only has He purchased it by His dying but He is preparing it for the day of His presenting it to Himself. He is not making the Assembly fit to be loved, for His love for the Assembly brought Him here in Manhood's lowly fashion. Having found it with that which clung to it from its past history in a world gone far from God, He acts to remove every mark. This He is doing by sanctifying and cleansing it with the washing of water by the Word. The Word has cleansing property not only to remove what is contrary but also to form what is pleasurable. This is by presenting to His saints those attractive moral features which will be used to form His beauty in them. When the day of presentation arrives His Assembly will be seen in all the suitability which He has brought about by His present service — "glorious, having no spot, or wrinkle, or of any such things, but that it might be holy and blameless" — spotless, ageless, blameless, just like Himself. For this He ever was and is. The Assembly shall, united with Him in glory, share with Him the administration of His coming kingdom. The union of man and woman is a great mystery, but this union of Christ and the Assembly is greater.

The devil who has ever opposed what is of God employs varied tactics. Sometimes he adopts the "roaring lion" character, at others he adopts the employment of wiles. We can well understand that he will do his utmost to hinder any from the enjoyment of these heavenly things which we have looked at. Let us then, "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 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 heavenly places." The necessary armour is available, let us take it to ourselves, for what we have is well worth our fighting to retain.