

Christ: Head over all things

Ephesians 1: 10-11, 19-23; Ephesians 5: 22-32.

Notes of address No. 2 by W. H. Westcott, 1929.

There are three things that may now occupy us, and can be easily remembered. (1) the purpose of God; (2) the Person Who is the centre of that purpose; (3) the partner associated with that Person. Ephesians 1, opens out a very wonderful presentation of Christianity, because it conducts us beyond this present scene. In our time history we are brought to realise our sins, and the need of a Saviour; we realise that God has provided One in the riches of His grace; we obtain redemption and the forgiveness of our sins, and we are sealed by the Spirit. But, in the first of Ephesians, we are carried outside of things here, of this world of time, back into eternity. We find that the blessing which we enjoy as individual believers was thought out, and planned in Christ before the foundation of the world. It is astonishing that we should have had a place in the thoughts of God from all eternity; according as He has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world.

In verse 3 the Apostle, speaking on behalf of Christians, says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Jesus has been here, rejected, slain, and in His death has wrought the glory of God, and for the accomplishment of His purpose; and He is now made both Lord and Christ at God's right hand. You have His full name and title here, our Lord Jesus Christ. Now God, Whom we realise to be our God and our Father, sets before us what He thinks of Christ, makes us cognizant of His enjoyment of, and delight in our Lord Jesus Christ. He takes this name and title as connected with all that He has to say to us. The Apostle in the sense of it says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," and then brings in a view of all His favour. "Blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." It is stupendous! Every believer is in view; you have been blessed in this way, according to the thought that our God and Father has of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is no longer addressing Himself to man as the God of Abraham, or Isaac, or Jacob; but, with His eyes upon this glorious Person, He seems to say, "Now I will tell you what I am prepared to do, and what I have purposed."

He goes on to speak of the nature of believers, in which they will be found when all the purposes of God are completed, when the last trace of flesh in us has been left behind. When God has carried out what He will carry out, we shall then be holy, and without blame before Him in love. "That we should be holy": when the purpose of God is completed, we shall be entirely agreeable to God in that respect; holy because He is holy. There will be no trace of defilement in us then. If we learn what we are to be in that coming day, then we learn correspondingly to regulate our conduct now. "Holy and without blame," not a single blot or flaw under His holy eye, as it says, "before Him." What a scene it will be when every saint all over the universe will be holy and without blame before Him in love. We shall be formed in the divine nature, and placed before His eye, where His love shall rest upon us with delight eternally. That refers to our *nature!*

Then in verse 5 we read, "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto Himself."

There you find the mind of God that we should be in all the dignity and intelligence and power of sonship. It refers, not so much to the moral nature in which we are to be formed, as to the *relationship* in which we stand before His face — by Jesus Christ. It is in each case for the gratification of His own heart. We are predestinated to sonship by Jesus Christ to Himself, in that near and holy relationship, to be enjoyed for ever. Again, in verse 6, "To the praise of the glory of His grace wherein He has made us

accepted in the Beloved." "In the beloved," what does that mean? If you can understand in any degree how much God loves this wonderful Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, of Whom He speaks here so prominently as "the Beloved" you can see what a stupendous revelation it is to us that we are taken into favour in the Beloved. Every Christian is verily beloved of God, the love of God rests upon him, and he can be rightly designated as one of the beloved of God. But while that is true, and true of all saints equally and alike, there is One Who is pre-eminently the Beloved. You who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are said to be accepted in the Beloved. That is the power of it; it is not simply to have that acceptance in the Lord, but *in the Beloved*. God would stress it, that you might understand how greatly you are loved, and that you are taken into favour in the measure of love that He has for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then, in the 7th verse, "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." Notice these two first words, "In Whom." God has not simply given you a document saying, "Here is the forgiveness of your sins," but, He says, "I have worked out that question in a Person. There He was with your sins upon Him, and upon Him fell all the just judgment in view of My claims in righteousness and holiness; He bore it all, and the sins that He bore were yours. They are all gone, and the very Person who bore them is risen from the dead, enthroned in glory. It is in Him you have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." That is the measure of the redemption that He has wrought out *for us*: the question is never to be reopened. And so He acts *according to the riches of His grace*. I know some people have the idea, "Yes my sins are all forgiven up to the time of my conversion; but what about the sins that I may commit after my conversion?" But from this standpoint in Ephesians, God would have you to understand that when He did take up that matter, He did not divide your life into two or three sections — your past, present, and future sins; but undertook the settlement of that question according to the wealth of His grace, taking it all up at one and the same time, and settling it all in that One Person, so that every believer can say, "In Whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the wealth of His grace." God took into account all our history from start to finish; at that moment knowing all the sins beforehand, and dealing with them according to His own glory.

With these things in view — our future assured, and the sins question settled — we may think what more could there be? There is a great deal more. Believers, whom God has so wonderfully blessed, are taken into confidence by the blessed God. They are drawn into His presence to receive the most intimate communication as to what He is doing. What is God's object? He appears to say, "I want to take you into my confidence, I have constituted you my redeemed people, and I have given you a nature, relationship, and acceptance in which you can be in undisturbed possession in quiet and rest; every anxiety removed. Now, with your heart at rest, I want you to understand that My blessing and your blessing is really part of a larger plan," viz., He has made known to us the Mystery of His will according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself. It is hid from other people, but made known to the believer. Let us remember that the will of God is supreme; He counsels, and it must be accomplished. When we read of the will of God in this sense — the will of His counsel — we know that it is going to be accomplished. What is behind it all? "His good pleasure which He has purposed in Himself." What then is that? Is it not that God is working out a wonderful scheme, headed up in Christ, in which He will be able to find eternal pleasure. When it is all brought into being and accomplished, God will be able to rest in His love, in supreme satisfaction, because He has brought about a system for His own pleasure. He purposed it in Himself, He has made it to depend upon His own omnipotence and omniscience: upon His own wisdom and power. He has brought it about, and will bring it about for reasons of His own. Truly we can say:-

"Father, Spring and Source of blessing."

What is this purpose? He is going to bring everything under one control. He has purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might head up all things in Christ. There are a great many discussions that take place amongst the nations, and amongst men, as to what is really the best form of government in a properly constituted state. Some would advise aristocracy, some autocracy, others democracy; but what is God's good pleasure? The fact is that all these schemes of men fail, because the state of men in their fallen condition sets them one against another. Supposing you had a community where there was no authority, but all did their own wills, it would be every man against his fellow. It is all very well to talk about dividing things up equally, but anybody would know that very soon one man would want more than he had, and he would feel that he could only get it from his neighbour, and so there would be one set against the other. But God is sovereign; and the most wonderful order of things will be brought about, when there will be absolute autocracy or theocracy, combined with absolute justice and absolute consideration for every creature. The blessed God alone is capable of it, and He will vindicate His *will*, and He will entrust — He has entrusted — the fulfilment of it to this wonderful Person — it is purposed to head up all things in Christ. It is God's plan to bring everything under Christ; everything will centre in Christ, He will be the great Head, the great source of authority; He will rule and order and govern according to the will of God.

Now turn to the end of Ephesians 1, and there we read more about the Person. The Apostle prays in verse 17 of the first chapter, "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your heart being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of your calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead." Attention is drawn to this Person already named in the 10th verse. But He was found in death. Every power that is adverse to God had been put into movement to place Him there; all the power of Satan, all the judgment of sin, — all the hatred of man, all the hidden forces of evil, had been brought to bear upon His holy Person. He had gone down into death. You can see the power that was against Christ. But while in grace He submitted to those conflicting powers, and when they had done their worst, and Christ had gone down to the very bottom, when sin had risen to its greatest height, God raised Him from the dead. We who believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ can also trace in that death the removal of our sins and our sinful state in Adam; but we can see also all the working of the power of evil against Christ and its seeming success in putting Him in death and the grave. But then God in the might of His power raised Him from the dead. There is a power greater than all the power of evil, greater than death, and greater than the grave, seen in God.

Then in verse 20 we read, "He set Him down at His right hand in the heavenlies" (N. T.). It is not only that He rose superior to the powers of evil, and triumphed over death and the grave, but God has proved the might of His power by setting the Man of His purpose, the Person Who is the centre of His plan, at His own right hand in the heavenly places. "At His own right hand" implies that in Christ God has vested all His power. The right hand signifies the strength, and the power, and the authority of God. In setting Him at His own right hand He has constituted Him the great administrator of His own authority, and His own mind, as well as His own blessing. He has set Him thus "in the heavenly places", away from this earth. The true source of power is not here, the executive that will give effect to the purpose of God is not now resident here; the Holy Ghost truly is come from the right hand of God, from Christ there, and is here provisionally; but the power that is going to set the earth right, and put the whole universe in harmony with God, comes from the right hand of God. "He set Him at His own

right hand in heavenly places, far above all principality and power."

They are not to be named in the same breath: Christ is supreme, above every other name, above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named. "God hath put all things under His feet," everything is subjected to Christ in the plan of God, and will be effectually put beneath Him according to God's mighty power. It may be said, "How is it that everything is not put under Christ now?" There is a reason for this. The saints, redeemed by Christ and formed into one body, the church, are the only people that have this wonderful secret communicated to them at the moment. God has made known the plan (verse 10), but He has also disclosed to us who are believers, the Person, the One destined to be both Head and Centre of His plan. I love to think that God has so far proceeded with the plan; He has already displayed the smash up of the power of evil in the cross, and He has exalted the Person Who overthrew sin and Satan, to His own right hand. You can see the Person to whom God has entrusted this high place of dignity and glory is in position, Head over all things, and all things put underneath His feet. God is not inactive; He has already seated Christ at His own right hand in heavenly places, He has exalted Him, and He has put the church into the knowledge of it. The rest of the world does not yet acknowledge it, but the redeemed ones do who form the assembly. When it says the assembly it means all Christians from the descent of the Holy Ghost to the Rapture. The whole church of God is in the secret of God as to the Person to Whom God has entrusted the fulfilment of the plan. We acknowledge Him in the meantime as Head, but for the moment we Christians are the only ones who really do so. Let us be consistent in our subjection to Him.

Then it says that the church is His body, the complement, "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." In further explanation of this we may turn to Ephesians 5 and there we find the unique position in which the church is placed. When the earth was first formed for man's habitation, you get an indication that God had this in His mind. After this world had been started, all free of sin, in its beauty, its productiveness, and its serviceability, man was created and specially formed according to the counsel of God. It was said, Let us make man after our image and in our likeness. He then put man at the head of all this lower creation. After He had been constituted the head to have dominion, God brought the animals before him. God had endowed him with such qualities that he knew exactly in what language to describe each animal; and whatever he designated each animal, that was its name. He was truly the head of this lower creation. But of all the creation of which he was head, for the moment it was just nothing but a splendid isolation? because there was not anyone with whom he could share it, to whom he could communicate his thoughts, or with whom he could enjoy the privileges that the Creator had placed upon him. He was alone in it, head but alone. Then in His goodness God crowned the position or him. He said, It is not good for the man to be alone, I will make him an help-meet," and He did. He gave Eve to be the partner with him in this place and scene of glory. It is so plain that we ought easily to grasp it; and yet it can only be by the Spirit of God.

Come now to the anti-type, and we find that God raised Christ from the dead, and set Him over all, Christ personally; but is Christ to be alone? That is where the counsel of God comes in regard to the church. For the church, composed as it is of all believers in this present dispensation is to be with Him in His place of dignity and glory — even as Eve was given to Adam — to be His partner in His greatness. In Ephesians 5, we find that the model, the example, is set before us of marriage; in Ephesians 5: 22, we read, "Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord." It is often commented upon that it does not say, "Wives *obey* your husbands" as though they were children or servants. In Ephesians 6 you have "Children *obey* your parents" that is a question of authority, and rightly so, and then in Ephesians 5, "Servants *be obedient* to your masters" comes in again; but with the wives — "*Submit* yourselves unto your own husbands." In this chapter the husband is looked at as

being the representative of the fulness and authority of God for his wife; all that Christ is to the church the husband should be to the wife. We are obliged to think of these things in a somewhat abstract way, for what husband is there amongst us but must feel how far he comes short of it. But the wife is to submit herself to her own husband as unto the Lord, finding in the husband the one who directs and leads. It is not a question of obeying exactly, but the husband regards the wife as given to him of God to be his helpmeet in the partnership; and that loving her as Christ loves the Assembly he may be the supplier of all that the wife needs; giving guidance, direction and help, in every matter; the wife meanwhile submitting herself unto her husband as unto the Lord.

Then in verse 23, we read, "For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the Head of the church." Let us humbly seek to take it in. Christ is the Head, and we gladly bow before Him owning His supremacy and glory; we can say, "How rightly crowned is Jesus, Who once atonement made." Is it not wonderful that you and I, and all the redeemed of this dispensation, are to be with Christ, and to be to Christ what the wife is to the husband? In verse 25, we read, "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word." It is not the individual saint that is in view, but *the church*; that he might sanctify and cleanse it. "That He might present it to Himself a church glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing"; that it might be in every sense suitable and compatible with Himself. A true wife will always seek to enter intelligently into the responsibilities in the midst of which her husband is Placed, she will not regard herself apart from him, walking in a spirit of independence, but will freely enter into her husband's concerns; not to disown his leadership, but to be sympathetic and intelligently able to enter into all the circles of his interests.

What a wonderful thing it is that we Christians should be made meet companions even for Christ. What a wonderful thought that we are to be such in the midst of all the stupendous glory that He will enjoy, able to enter into His interests, and be sympathetically and intelligently companionable to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not exactly like an earthly prince who may place his affection on a partner very much below him in station, and then have to feel how difficult it is for her to share his dignities and glories, because she is unable to look at things from the prince's point of view. God has given us the same life and nature as our risen Lord, and brought us into the same relationship as He; we are really His kinsfolk, His brethren, and can enter into the whole range of His interests. The Christian even down here is acquiring competency in view of that coming union with Him. Whatever we can learn of Christ's interests today let us give ourselves very heartily to them, so as to be more and more qualified to take our place intelligently in that wonderful day, when we shall be with Christ and like Him, and associated with Him; sharing His administration in all that vast scene of glory. There is (1) *the Purpose or Plan of God* in Eph. 1, (2) the *Person Who* is the centre and Head of all that Purpose, and (3) the church looked at in Eph. 5 as the *Partner* in that wonderful position To that church, by the grace of God, you and I belong at present It is our privilege to study all we can learn of His love, His greatness, and His will, in order that we may be more intelligent and qualified to share with our Lord Jesus Christ when the day of display and glory comes!