

The Gift and the Grace

Ephesians 4: 7, 15, 17.

W. H. Westcott.

Extracted from Scripture Truth magazine, Volume 28, 1936, page 225.

Many of you who are accustomed to speaking will feel sympathy for the one having to follow on after the important address to which we have just listened. I would continue on the same line, only in a different setting. I will speak of the setting in a moment or two, but you will notice in the first verse I read, you have the *gift* of Christ, and the *grace* of Christ. The first gives us the *position* that we have in regard to the truths of this chapter; the second gives us the provision that is to enable us to support the position. Then the third speaks of the *progress* that we may make, growing up unto Him in all things, and, finally, the *practice* that flows from these exercises. To put them into the language of the epistle itself, you have first of all the *gift*, secondly the *grace*, thirdly the *growth*, and then the *good works* that follow (see Eph. 2: 10).

Now as to the situation that is presented to us in this chapter. It is, of course, based upon what has been stated before in the first three chapters. God has a wonderful project in view, and He knows how urgent it is to have material that is suitable for the project. As to man, as to ourselves naturally, we are written off as dead in trespasses and sins. If you wanted to have a plantation, you would not go into the forest and look out for some tree that had long been laid low by the tempest and was rotting on the ground. You would want young saplings, young trees, in which is life; and the energy of life, to assimilate food from the soil in which it grows. But certainly you would never take a piece of rotten wood to build up anything on which you wanted to rely for strength, to make use of it. That is the lesson that is first of all set before us, that God, in looking over the race of men from top to bottom has found nothing but material He cannot use. It is a good lesson to learn as preparatory for true service.

God must create the material that He is going to use. We were dead in trespasses and sins, just living to ourselves, doing the will of the prince of this present world, and not available in any sense for God's purpose. Now it was into that world and into the midst of that race of men that God gave His Son. The Lord Jesus came in order to give effect to this project, this purpose of God. But to do so it was necessary for Him to go down into death. We do not find the pathway indicated here by which He went, but we do find this, that God raised Him from the dead. He went down there in order to close up all our sinful history under the eye of God and inaugurate a new life, a new race of men associated with Himself and deriving from Himself in resurrection. The service then that one has to speak of is in this setting; it is the service of those who are associated with the Lord Jesus Christ raised from the dead. He is now seated in glory. In looking up to Him where He is we have the definition of the place to which God destines us.

I will try to show in a word or two the setting which will indicate our position while here on earth. You will find the apostle in Ephesians 4: 1 urges upon Christians, that they walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called. And then you will find the spirit in which alone that walk can be sustained, "with all lowliness, and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love." Anything like an overbearing attitude is altogether out of place in connection with this new life and new service, this walking worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called. Instead of being proud of ourselves, asking people to observe how beautiful our order, how gracious our lives, and how wonderful our testimony, there is lowliness and meekness; readiness to take affront and never turn a hair. Look at the Lord Jesus, meek and lowly of heart. People spoke and acted against Him; people

discredited, defamed Him, injured Him physically; they smote Him, buffeted Him, spat on Him; yet mark all the way through this meekness. If we are going to answer in any way to the vocation wherewith we are called we have to be prepared to face trial, to submit instead of asserting our rights (as people speak), or standing on our dignity, or defending ourselves in the spirit of the world. He was meek and lowly in heart.

Then forbearing one another. We all know how we have to put up with a lot from each other. It is necessary to speak of that in the pursuit of this service. You will find that this new character, this new life, this new generation, is one—that is marked by the presence and the power of the Spirit of God. The life that we have is associated with the Lord Jesus Christ raised from the dead, but the power by which that life is worked out in us is, of course, the Spirit. So in this wonderful epistle you find many mentions of the Spirit of God.

Beloved friends, if we are going to take up service as presented in this chapter we have to recognise that God has set aside every energy every thought, every activity that emanates from the flesh; and that He has brought in a new power, a new character of life answering to the life that is seen in all its perfection up there in glory. What He has saved us for is to set us down here in the very world from which Christ has been rejected in order to reproduce the fulness which is in Christ while He is absent. I do not think it has struck me with such force before, as of late, that the Christian economy is on this line, that the Lord Jesus Christ is rejected here but is set in honour and glory in the heavens by God, and unseen by the world. But God has formed this new race of men associated with Christ risen, yet *in this world*, and energised by the Spirit of God; in order to be here a community that corresponds with and is a reproduction of Christ in glory. In other words, as it goes on to say, we are to use diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit. That comes into our third verse, the endeavouring — using diligence — to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We are to use every energy, all diligence, in *this* aspect of service, refusing among ourselves everything that emanates from the flesh. As we have seen in the earlier part of the epistle, man after the flesh is set aside, or written off, as a thing that is absolutely useless for God. Dead in trespasses and sins.

It says that people corrupted themselves after their deceitful lusts, going from bad to worse, but, on the contrary to that, we, having this new life, energised in harmony with the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, are collectively to reproduce Christ here on earth. That, briefly, is the position.

Now will you please notice carefully, it is in verse 3 that you read of the unity of the Spirit. Then in verse 4 there are two words in italics which I want you to leave out. As printed it looks like a statement of fact, a statement of doctrine, but that is not quite the point. Anybody might well ask, what is this unity of the Spirit which we are to endeavour to keep? The reply is — "One body, one spirit, one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, and in us all." In other words, that sevenfold unity is not three circles, it is the unity of the Spirit. Verses 4, 5, and 6 are explanatory of the unity of the Spirit in verse 3; it is the unfolding of what the unity of the Spirit really is.

The gospel of God's grace is going out into all the world, and this work is carried on in different nationalities, different countries, people with different tastes, dispositions, and environment; and instead of leaving them where they are, to continue to be part of that nation, or association, or order of things, they are brought out from all that. In their identification with the death of Christ and they form one body; that is where the unity of the Spirit begins. We now look out over all the world and think of multitudes, who like ourselves have come as poor sinners to the Lord Jesus Christ; we have put our confidence in Him, owning Him as our Lord, and we find ourselves not saved individuals only, but

baptised by one Spirit into one body. It is a tremendous thought that here on earth and scattered all over the earth amongst the nations, are individuals whom it has pleased God to bless in order to make them a vessel in which He may display collectively the life of Christ. It is grace indeed on God's part that He not only saves us as individuals and sets us to individual service, but He has formed this one body and it is energised by the Spirit of God. There is one Spirit. It is not that in England we have one Spirit and in Ireland they should have another, or in Germany another. There is one Spirit and one hope of your calling. There are efforts to divide even the church into separate societies or groups as though a certain class had one calling, and a certain other class another calling different from the first. There is one hope of our calling. God is gathering out of the nations a people for His Name and they form this one body.

It is in that condition that we find this gift of Christ presented. I trust God may enable one to show your position in regard to it. I am speaking specially to those who are Christians. Of course, if a man be unconverted he has no part nor lot in this matter. But to speak of every Christian in Bangor and every Christian in this hall, you have a special place in this one body *which no one else can fill*. It is the gift of Christ, the living Head in glory. His design is to produce here on earth a number of people who in the aggregate will be able to act as the vehicle of His own life down here. He saves you individually, and in His infinite wisdom as Head of the church, He *gives you* your position in the body that no one else can fill. If God creates me with a little finger He intends it to do its own function; and it is not intended that that member, small as it be, should be inactive or inert. There is one activity of life operating through the body. You individually are set in your place by the living Head in glory. His object is that your life with that of your fellow Christian may be the vehicle by which we live out His life while He is absent, and while we are left here.

Secondly, there is not only the position but the provision for the maintenance of it. Some say, I am such a poor thing, I am not worth taking any notice of. But look at that verse again, verse 7. "Unto every one of us is given *grace* according to the measure of the gift of Christ." Whatever may be your place in the body, that living Head in glory, Christ, is always rolling down the grace to enable you to function according to your place in the body. To *every one* of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. One feels that this is a splendid position, that we are put in touch with a living Head whose resources are all infinite; and if He sets you in your place in the "body," whether it be in this locality or in that from which you come, and in your particular environment, the local assembly, the family, the business, and so on, whatever may be the position He has given you as a member of His body, He is everlastingly engaged with you and rolling down grace to support you in it. Unto *every one*. Should you say, I know so little, look to the Lord and He will give you whatever knowledge He knows you need. You need patience and grace. There is grace rolling down from the Head in glory, and in your direction, to support you.

There is not only *position* given to us, determined for us by the Head in glory, and for the express purpose of setting out His life in the place of His absence, but there is this rich *provision*, grace from Himself alone. One has often sought for an illustration, but it occurs to me that when the children of Israel came out of Egypt, they lacked water. Moses was told to smite the rock in Horeb, and there came water flowing forth, and they drank of that rock. That rock was Christ. I think we must draw the conclusion that, in ordinary circumstances, wherever they went under the direction of God, they always had that water flowing alongside of them. It never failed, they drank of the rock that followed them. Wherever they were led of God there was this resource available from the smitten rock. Whatever they required, it might be a drink, water for cooking, for washing, for various uses, there it was, flowing, flowing, and available for every call, every camp. And there was no other resource in the wilderness. That river received no tributary, it never ran dry. It was always full and available for them in whatever

position they found themselves. Beloved friends, the Lord Jesus Christ is up there in glory the unfailing source of everything God has for Christians, taking account of all the environment through which they are passing, and the desert which they are crossing. May the Spirit of God direct us to the Lord Jesus Christ as God's fulness for every requirement.

Whether yours be a large position in the body or whether it be a small position, it has been determined for you by the Lord. This would preserve us from jealousy. Sometimes one has to confess to a great danger of jealousy. I hear a person ministering Christ and I feel a wish that I could speak like that. I wish I could touch people's hearts as I see others do it. Well, each one has his own place; and whatever be the his functions in the body, the source is Christ; the unfailing, ever rolling, ever abounding supply of grace for *every one* of us. Will you take that home with you? You may desire to serve in the gospel or to serve the Lord's people; in some simple way you want to serve your Master; and above all to serve the living Head in glory, and His members on earth. Whatever may be the character of your service there is always grace for you from the Lord to enable you to carry it out.

You might think if we lived in the days of Pentecost we could understand it; but that in Laodicean days we cannot expect the fulness to be the same. But it is, it goes on. It says in the eighth verse, He gave gifts unto men. The victory, the overthrow of Satan's power, the defeat of everything that stood in the way of the fulfilment of God's project, have entitled me to this position in grace; and now He is up there in glory devoted to the service of the saints who form His body, and He is the Giver of gifts. It is He who gave — mark — some apostles some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers. They were given from the Head in glory. We have their ministry of the eternal truths they unfolded; Christianity has been inaugurated on earth; and we have the advantage of the ministry of these early servants in the Scriptures. There are some that carry on. We have still evangelists and pastors and teachers who have all come from Him. It is not that they are trained in colleges, or formed in meetings; the gifts are every one of them set in his or her place according to the wisdom and grace of the Head in glory.

We have the ministry of pastors, evangelists and teachers, and of saints less prominent, all given according to the grace of the Head in His wisdom, where He knows they are needed. And it goes on as you see until we all come in the unity of the faith. It is not intended there should be dissensions, parties, sectarian ideas, schisms. Till we all come *in the unity of the faith* and the knowledge of the Son of God. It is in proportion as we know Him and get into living touch with Him that by the power of the Spirit of God we are enabled to represent Him down here, and *until* we all come unto a perfect man. I do not think that means till every individual is perfect. It is not a question of my becoming a perfect man in an individual sense, but it is the full grown man, the one body composed of all its living members, developed to the fullest extent in order that there should be an adequate and well proportioned representation of the life of Christ. Such is the design of God in forming the one body, giving us the Spirit as the power, and the grace of Christ for our provision; that there might be the working out of the fulness, the full stature of the fulness of Christ.

Thus we should be no more children tossed about by every wind of doctrine. We are made conscious that man may use cunning, crafty ways in order to divert us from this wonderful vocation; but nevertheless speaking the truth in love we may grow up unto Him in all things. This is a collective growing as I understand; the all of verse 13 growing together up to Christ. How harmonious! You can understand if a man grows on one side only he will be called a hideous object, a monstrosity. If in some way or other the growth of my hand had been arrested when I was a boy it would be called out of proportion. Every Christian contributes to the expression of the fulness that is in Christ and it is for us to see that we are not stunted in our growth. The Lord help us, because so many things appeal to us on

the right hand and on the left, and our minds get entangled; and very often our interests get merged in the things of the world so that we lose the blessedness of this vocation. But holding the truth in love we are to grow unto Him in *all* things, till we come under the influence of the Head in every direction. Secret life with God, service in the church, family life, business life; in every circle learning to acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as the directing intelligence.

The Christ is the anointed One. As those who have received of the Spirit we partake of the anointing, and by the power of that Spirit of God are enabled to get everything under the control of Christ. The grace of Christ, the very life of Christ flows out to His members. "From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." Here you find not only the *progress* but the *practice*. It is developed very fully in the remaining chapters, the practice that flows from this new position in which we have been set, in the enjoyment of this rich provision flowing from the living Head in glory and ourselves making progress in acquaintance with Christ. There comes the practice, and the consequence of it that there is the effectual working in its measure of every part. I would that I knew how to convey to you the comfort of that phrase. Of course, we are supposed to be growing together mutually, jointly, but it is according to the effectual working in its measure of every part. There are some who seem to be dormant Christians, some who seem to be dumb Christians. You wonder whether it could be said of them that every one is functioning according to the measure of his part. So much depends on your fulfilling the function that is assigned to you by the Head in glory. We were reminded in regard to our personal service it is not *man* who sets us on, but if you ascertain that you are a member of the one body energised by the one Spirit sharing in the one hope of your calling, you will remember that much depends upon your effectual working in your measure. If you are idle, if you are irresponsive to the grace and glory of Christ you cannot contribute to the prosperity of the whole. As it says, when it is the case that there is the effectual working in its measure of every part, it makes increase; of the body unto the building of itself in love, in the very nature of God; wrought out in the saints, but: it depends on the effectual working *in its measure of every part*.

To put the four things together, we have this position given to us in relation to the vocation of the calling of God. In regard to this project that God has in view we are to learn that the material God uses is not the energy, the notions, the ideas that emanate from the flesh, from fallen man. He is regarded in this epistle as *dead* in trespasses and sins. God has set him aside, as it goes on to teach in the remainder of the chapter. You are regarded as having put off the old man and being renewed in the spirit of your mind, you have put on the new man, and the character of Christ grows up with no contribution from the mind or crafts of man; all derives from Christ whose grace is unfailing. The Lord Jesus Christ in the glory rains grace upon you — as though He would say to each one, young or old — I have redeemed you, brought you to Myself, given you a new life, set My Spirit in you and given grace that you may act in this capacity. What we heard from the preceding speaker is service of the greatest importance for us as individuals, but there is also *this* service in relation to the calling of God. May God give us each one in his measure to seek to answer to it, so that as far as we can contribute to that which every joint supplieth, the effectual working in its measure of every part we can give expression to the life of Christ among those that have rejected and turned from Him.