

The Calling and Hope of the Christian

Ephesians 1: 3-14.

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The right application of the truth of the Church in both its calling and its hopes depends, more than many Christians are aware, upon the spiritual condition of the soul. I doubt not, indeed, that spiritual condition has much to do with all apprehension of divine truth, but of this beyond all others, for the simple reason that the Church's privileges are so boundless and so special that the mind of man and even the heart of the believer find no small difficulty in accepting them simply in their integrity. The very conscience of the believer makes a difficulty unless there be a child-like acceptance of the word and grace of God. We can easily understand this; for it is natural even to the believer to mingle the question of his own feelings of acceptance with the reception of the truth of God. He examines himself, but finds only unworthiness; he feels painfully, humiliatingly, day by day, his own shortcomings and positive faults. Such being the fact, it looks a hard thing to receive the astonishing truth that grace has given even him oneness with Christ.

Yet the great distinctive feature of the Christian's calling is found in these very words, "Together with Christ." Sovereign grace can alone account for it. As God claimed and exercised the title, at all times, to bless according to His good pleasure, so now He puts the members of Christ's body in the place that seems good to Him. He looks for unqualified sub. mission in our hearts. And in proportion as we are simple in bowing to God, His grace and truth open far more largely and more distinctly on our souls. Now the bearing of this will soon be seen as I make a few remarks upon the scripture just read. The subject is the Church's calling and hopes — the latter, of course, in connection with the coming of the Lord. The Holy Ghost opens the subject with a kind of allusion to Israel's place. They were the chosen people, but it was on earth and for the earth. I do not deny that there were elect men in Israel, upon whose hearts brighter hopes dawned. No doubt Abraham was but a sample of the faithful. And indeed in the dealings of God, before there was a people called, there were those who looked by faith beyond the earth, who saw what is brighter than earthly hopes. But here we have a different character of blessing: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." The heavenly places are clearly in contrast with Israel's earthly place. Now Israel looked, and rightly looked, to be thus blessed here below; indeed, it is to disparage the word of God to lose sight of this: God will make it good to them in a future day.

But we ourselves are in the same place as these believers, addressed by the Apostle Paul, — "Blessed with all spiritual blessings . . . in Christ." That little word, "in Christ," is the key to it all. In one sense a Christian is nothing in himself; in Christ he has everything. Let my heart only get hold of this precious truth. Christ now shows what a Christian is in the presence of God. No doubt, besides being the risen man, He is also God, the object of worship, equal with the Father. He has a divine right to all, yet is He pleased to possess all as the glorified man by right of redemption. He came into this world. He had the only claim as man, for He alone had accomplished God's will. He was the perfect manifestation of what man ought to be to God under law, and He was the perfect manifestation of what God is to man in love, he was above law — it was grace. If the law dealt with evil, it must destroy. Grace takes the supremacy. It shows grace to those who do not deserve it. Christ as under law showed perfectly what God's will was. Then He manifested what God is to man. It was His place to manifest perfect grace and truth. Christ takes the inheritance neither as man or God only, but as Redeemer. He

suffered on the cross that He might have others to share it, others to say, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." It was only in resurrection that the Lord Jesus took all things. When upon earth He did not take the inheritance; He took sorrow, He took shame, He took suffering—every kind of hatred from man. He took God's judgment about sin. In this He was alone upon the cross, because there the wonderful problem was being solved, how sin could be put away. Christ abolished sin that God might justly justify, that God might manifest all His character.

Here, however, it is a larger measure than merely justifying. God blesses with all spiritual blessings in Christ. He had never uttered such language before. In the Old Testament there is not such a thought as Christ having members. You have a king reigning in righteousness, and nations blest through Christ that blessed One who will take all things from God. What we have here is quite different. It is God not only pardoning, and not merely justifying, but making Christians to be the members of Christ, of His flesh, and of His bones. Here we have language rising above everything that believers had before redemption. There is no disparagement of the privileges of saints before, but what I am anxious to show is that Christians are not generally alive to their own privileges.

The first thing to point out is this, "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Mark the language. It is God acting in this especial manner of relationship. He means to bless the believer as He blesses Christ. That is, not as Christ is blest as a divine person — that would be blasphemy. Here we have what is bestowed upon Him as man in heaven. "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them" is a kindred truth. Christ as the risen man is exalted on high, having glory conferred on Him as the risen man that by the grace of God had died. The risen man is also God, but we must never confound His deity with His humanity. As thus risen He said, "I ascend unto my God and your God, unto my Father and your Father." Here we have His and our God and Father, and the apostle shows that we reap infinite blessing from each of these relationships. As God of our Lord Jesus, He gives us to partake in the divine nature, holy and blameless before Him in love. He means to have men in heaven along with Jesus. To have that blessed glorified man there is not enough. He gives Jesus companions. These companions of His must have, of course, the divine nature morally. (2 Peter 1.)

Again, angels are servants: they never rise above the nature of servants. The archangel even never rises above the place of a servant. The angels are called the sons of God in a certain sense, as all men are by virtue of creation. Angels are a spiritual class of beings, but they have not the intimacy of those born of God, the place of children, the Spirit of adoption, etc. Now I call your attention to this, because it is but feebly understood by Christians in general. It is not presumption to know that our sins are forgiven. I would ask any person who knows the name of Christ, who loves Him, On what ground is it that you take the place of a believer? On what ground have you received favour from God? Do you believe in Jesus as One that suffered for sins? I ask you, Has He done the work perfectly or has He not? There is no believer who would not at once answer, Yes — perfectly. Then as surely as you are a believer, you have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins. If you have not this forgiveness, *when* can you have it? Christ will not suffer again. Suffering and offering go together. They must go together in the mind of God. Once purged is the word for a Christian — once, because it has been done perfectly, done for ever. Now I maintain that it is done for every Christian. Every Christian owes it to Christ to believe unhesitatingly that He has done *perfectly* the work of putting away sin. There may be failures. Far would I be from saying that a believer should not confess failure always. Daily failure calls for daily humbling before God. Still the fact of redemption remains unchanged. Take the case of a child: he may offend and offend grievously, but he remains your child all the same. The more you enforce on him that he is your child, the more is his failure felt, as it is the worse in itself. In the same way, instead of the holding fast our relationship, really weakening the sense

of sin, it is the very and only ground of judging it aright. It is that which makes sin to be most exceedingly sinful.

We have here the full roll of christian privilege. How striking it is in all this passage there is not a word said about our original condition as sinners. In the Epistle to the Romans it is quite another method. In Ephesians 2 we have a deeper character of sin than we have even in Romans — "*dead in trespasses and sins,*" etc. But first we find God unfolding His counsels which refer to the Christian. It was a purpose of God in Christ before the foundation of the world, entirely from man's condition upon earth. We find here the very blessed truth that redemption is no mere remedy, it was the first choice of God. God counselled and determined in Himself, before there were any creatures at all; He determined to have beings in heaven capable of fellowship with Himself and with His Son. Then He allowed man to be *tried* upon earth. This took place with Israel, etc. When the wickedness of the world rose to its height in the cross of Christ, at that very moment when Jew and Gentile united to kill the Lord of glory. God answered their awful conspiracy by bringing out His richest grace. God showed through and in His Son a salvation that not only meets man ruined upon earth, but that would give man an everlasting portion with Christ in the presence of God. The Church consists not merely of persons pardoned and saved, of people looking to heaven; it has a deeper character of relationship; it implies union with Christ in heaven. This is what God imparts to believers now.

The next thing taken up here is that God not only brings us into this astonishing place of blessing, but opens His secrets: "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will." Thus, first of all, He makes us holy in Christ; next, He gives us the place of sons to Himself; and then He makes known to us what He is going to do. And what is that? To put the entire universe under Christ, to have all in heaven, all on earth, put under the glorified man. This is the first part of the secret of God's will; the next is, that the believers now — all believers in Christ — are made joint-heirs with Christ over this inheritance. Not that we are the inheritance the Jewish people will be a part of the inheritance but the peculiar character of Christians, that is, they are *heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ*.

As to this, the simple question is, What does scripture say? What is the teaching of God on this head? It is said to be a mystery, which means that which could not be found out by the wit of man, but what can be understood when revealed. "The mystery of Christ" consisted in this — Christ, the centre of all God's dealings, and believers now united to Him. There is nothing wonderful in the Son of God being over all things. God the Father could not be said to confer anything upon God the Son as such: it would deny His supreme deity. But yet it is perfectly certain from scripture that Jesus now receives all from God the Father. A man is at the right hand of God! — a man is the object of heaven's delight and adoration! But more. By the Holy Ghost the Church is united with this glorified man, the spiritual Eve of the last Adam. The Church is the bride, the Lamb's wife, as it is the body of the glorified Christ who is Head over all things. Thus it is written at the end of this chapter. Christ is said to be "Head over all things to the church, which is his body." The Church is really associated with Christ over all things, "the fulness of him that filleth all in all."

The wonderful mystery is here made known — the Church called into oneness with Christ. Into this one body we are baptized by the Spirit now; and now is the time that the believer is responsible to receive it into his soul, and to manifest it in his ways. Of course it is a matter of faith; for, as to his body, He is the same as any other man. He can only triumph through Christ; but he has Christ in glory not only as his righteousness but his life, yea, one with Him. All that God confers upon Christ, Christ shares with the Church. The effect is immediate and immense. Suppose a person were to wake up to the fact that he was the queen's son, would it not have a mighty influence practically on him? So, to be given now to know not merely that a person is saved, but that he shares with Christ all that He

possesses, that he is a member of His body, that he is viewed now as perfect by God in Christ such is the position of a Christian. It is not that one does not take into account a Christian's failure: I do, but the way to feel our failure most is to hold fast our relationship to Christ. Upon christian doctrine is founded christian practice.

As the believer even now is set in this blessed place of enjoyment, God has sent down the Holy Ghost to dwell in him, in such a sort as never was before. There never was a time when the Holy Ghost did not work; He beyond all doubt is the active agent in all the dealings of God from creation downwards. There could be no power of God at work in man without the Spirit of God. But not the less do I maintain along with this, that the Lord Jesus Christ prepared the disciples for a greater blessing than either they or others had ever known before. He told them "it is expedient for you that I go away," etc. What could make up for such a loss? The answer is, "if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." It is contrary to Scripture or even sense to suppose that it was merely prolonging something they possessed before. Nay, there was a deeper blessing. It was the same Spirit that had made them born anew, but He was now for the first time sent down from heaven to dwell in the saints.

Who had ever been thus blessed before? Yes, there was One who had enjoyed Him thus. Who was that One person who had been the temple of God upon earth? It was Jesus. Upon Him the Holy Ghost came not as a flame of fire, but as a dove, the witness of the perfect spotlessness of Jesus. The humanity of Jesus being absolutely pure and holy (Luke 1), there was not the least hindrance to the dwelling of the Holy Ghost in Him. We can understand Jesus being bodily the temple or habitation of the Holy Ghost; but how could it be true of us, evil and defiled as we are by nature? Christ has so perfectly put away the sin and sins of a believer, that it is as though the evil, root, branch, and fruit, had never been. Hence the Holy Ghost has come down from heaven, and actually now dwells in the believer, as the proof and result of the perfect putting away of sin by Christ's sacrifice.

The saints of old were waiting for what was coming; they knew there were good things to come. "Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven." (1 Peter 1: 12.)

Manifestly then there is a special blessing in the gift of the Spirit consequent upon redemption. When we know and weigh what redemption is, there will be less difficulty. It is a poor partial notion of redemption as an accomplished fact that makes people ask, Why should not God always act in the same way? The right understanding of its infinite work teaches us, that God sees such virtue in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ that He reserves a special blessing for that hour. The believer now is blessed with, and will share, His supremacy over all things.

What makes us members of the body of Christ? We are made so by the Spirit, and not by faith only. Of course, no one but a believer has this place; but it is nowhere said to be by faith, but by the baptism of the Holy Ghost. (1 Cor. 12.) The saints of old time were not baptized into this one body. There was nothing of the kind. The Jew preserved his separate place; the Gentile might come in (as a proselyte), but there was no identity: still less was either one or other made one with Christ. In Christianity these distinctions disappear. There was faith among the Old Testament saints, but there was no "one body" yet; not even when our Lord was upon earth. He told the disciples that He was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. The cross of Christ, on man's side of it, was a joining of all men (Jew and Gentile) in wickedness; on God's side it led to a joining of Jew and Gentile in common blessing by grace. In Matthew 16, Peter answers Christ's demand with the confession, "Thou

art the Christ the Son of the living God." Christ says, "Upon this rock I will build my Church." What does He mean by this? Peter confesses His glory not only as Messiah or the Christ, but as Son of the living God. He was marked out the Son of God by resurrection from the dead." He is the head of the body, the Church: who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead.

What hope is suited to such a calling? Jesus says, "Let not your heart be troubled. I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go, I will come again and receive you unto myself." The portion that Christ has is the portion of a Christian. Even now He is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. As He took our portion on the cross, so we have His portion in glory. He will bless the Jews on earth. God promised to do so. Whereas, He has in title blessed us with Christ in heaven. Some think the mystery was that the Gentiles were to be called, but this is plainly referred to in the Old Testament. The mystery goes much farther, namely, that all who now believe, Jews and Gentiles, should be united together as the one body of Christ, head over all things.

Our hope is for Christ to come and take us to be with Himself in the Father's house. This implies the highest scene of enjoyment even in heaven. Can any place there be too high for Christ? Assuredly not. The Father manifests His love for His Son thus. If God gives us such a place in Christ we ought to believe it; and this is not merely for ourselves, but for every believer, for every Christian. This, and nothing less than this, is the portion of all who believe the gospel. Christ will come Himself, that where He is, there we may be also. We shall be with Himself, in that glory which is entirely above the world. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come." (Rev. 22: 17.) To say "Come," depends not on great knowledge, but on His great salvation and love.

It cannot be too much insisted on that there is no difference between the standing of one believer and another. When you come to a question of faithfulness, there are degrees; but to suppose a difference in the whiteness of the robe, or the righteousness we are made, is to suppose a various value in the blood of Christ, or uncertainty in the power of His resurrection. There is no difference as to sin in one sense, all being equally dead in trespasses and sins. So there is no Such thing as one saint being brought nearer to God by redemption than another; it denies the work of Christ. All believers now are equally, *i.e.*, perfectly, made nigh as to standing, though bad teaching does much to darken the truth, and lack of spirituality hinders holy enjoyment, even where the truth may have entered. Besides, we are made one with Christ, but for this the gift of the Spirit was requisite.