

F.B. Hole

**Comments on
the Epistle to the
Ephesians**

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Introduction

AT THE CLOSE of the Epistle to the Romans we noticed that the Apostle Paul earnestly desired the establishment of the saints in a two-fold way; first, "according to my Gospel," and second, "according to the revelation of the mystery." Romans gives us a full unfolding of the former, while Ephesians more fully than any other epistle reveals to us the latter.

Romans moreover, while instructing us in the fulness of the grace of God, presents it to us as meeting in all particulars our need which has been created by sin. Ephesians, on the other hand, unfolds to us that grace of God which is according to His purpose. The words, "according as," or "according to," occur no less than six times in chapter 1, and always in connection with His will, His pleasure, His purpose, His power, rather than our need.

A benevolent man of wealth might show great kindness to a poor lad of the streets charged with some petty offence. He might for instance, not only deliver him from the clutch of the law by paying a fine but deliver him from ignorance by having him educated, and from poverty by paying for his keep. That

would be kindness in reference to his need. But if he formed designs to place him in a position of great nearness to himself and of great wealth and influence, that would be not according to his actual need but according to the pleasure and purpose of his own benevolent mind. This may serve as an illustration.

Chapter 1

AFTER THE OPENING words of salutation the Apostle goes straight to the heart of his theme in the spirit of a worshipper. We have been blessed in such rich fashion by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that He blesses God in return and carries our hearts with him in doing so. The blessings that are ours are characterized by three things. They are spiritual, not material as were Israel's blessings under the old covenant, in such matters as ample food and health and peace under divine rule. They are heavenly and not earthly, since the sphere where they are to be fully realized and consummated is heaven, and their present administration to us is from heaven. They are in Christ. He, as the risen One, and not Adam, the fallen one, is the Fountain-head of them all. If we are in Christ they all are ours.

But in blessing us after this wonderful fashion God has wrought in keeping with an act of His mind in a bygone eternity. Before the foundation of the world He chose us in Christ. Let those two words, "in Him," be noted, for again and again they, or their equivalents, occur in this chapter. As a matter of history we each were in Adam before we were in Christ, but before Adam was created, God saw us as in Christ, and on that basis we were chosen. What was in view in His choice was that we might be holy and blameless before Himself in love.

Such is the efficacy of the work of Christ that each believer today stands before God as holy and without blame, and is in the embrace of that divine love from which nothing can separate him. This we have seen in Romans 8. The full and ultimate application of these words in verse 4 must however, be carried on into a future eternity. It has been remarked that very little is said in the Bible in the way of a description of heaven; yet these words are practically just that. When the Spirit's work in us has reached its completion, including the quickening of our mortal bodies at the first resurrection, we shall be landed in heaven. We shall then be marked by perfect holiness of nature, and perfect freedom from all blame as to conduct. We shall be

for ever in the presence of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in an atmosphere of perfect love. That will be heaven indeed. Thus verse 4 begins in a past eternity and ends in a future eternity.

Verse 5 carries matters a step further. God had in His mind a certain relationship for us and He destined us to that relationship when He chose us, even the state and place of sons. Now this was not a need or necessity on our side. We should still have been very happy if, rescued from our sin, we had been appointed to a place amongst His servants. The relationship is not according to our need but "according to the good pleasure of His will." How thankful we should be that the pleasure of His will is as good as this! We are sons of God now but we are going to stand forth in the full dignity and glory of sonship when heaven is reached. Then indeed the real glory of His grace will be manifested, and result in eternal praise.

In working out this glorious purpose, certain steps have been taken and these are now detailed for us — acceptance, redemption, forgiveness. We are working downwards to that which is simplest and most fundamental. In our understanding of things we usually begin with the forgiveness of sins. Then perhaps we

apprehend the meaning of the redemption which we have in the blood of Christ, and begin to experience the freedom which that redemption has bought. Then on top of this comes the discovery of the fact that not only are we set free from slavery but that we stand in a positive acceptance before God, even in the acceptance of Christ, who is the Beloved One. His acceptance gives character to, and is the measure of, ours. In Colossians 3:12 the saints are spoken of as beloved of God, and that of course flows out of the fact that they are accepted in the Beloved.

All this, whether it be redemption or forgiveness, is ours "according to the riches of His grace." We were in the poverty of our sin, and this has become the occasion for the display of the wealth of His grace. If we read 1 Kings 10 we may see how Solomon gave to the Queen of Sheba all she desired, and then capped it by that which he gave her "of his royal bounty." He satisfied her large desires and then went beyond them in the superlative greatness of his kingly munificence. In this he acts as a type. God has acted according to His exceeding riches of grace. The very forgiveness of sins which He has accorded us

has been granted in a style and with a fulness worthy of the great and gracious God He is.

But there is more. Not only has He thus abounded to us in connection with His grace, but also in connection with His wisdom. Verse 8 speaks of "wisdom and prudence [or, intelligence]." The secrets of His wisdom He has made known in order that we may intelligently enter into and enjoy them. God has always acted according to His own will, though in the presence of sin and its ravages He chose for long ages to keep the main purpose of His will as a secret or mystery; and the pleasure of His will and purpose has always been good, for He is good. This is a great fact that we do well to lay hold of firmly. The "pleasure of His will" is good (ver. 5). The "pleasure which He has purposed in Himself" is good (ver. 9). God's pleasure and purpose is not connected with judgment, though that work, which He calls His "strange work," is necessary, and to be fulfilled in due season.

Verse 10 tells us what the real secret of His will and purpose is. In the coming age, spoken of here as "the fulness of times," He is going to gather together in one all things in Christ, both things earthly and things heavenly. No mention is made here of

things infernal, for this predicted gathering together is in connection with a world of blessing, and consequently things infernal lie outside it. By establishing Christ as the exalted and glorified Head of all things there will be established on earth as well as in heaven a divine system of unity and blessing. Sin is lawlessness: it makes of every man in effect a little unit on his own, finding his only centre in himself. Hence during all these ages in which sin has been reigning, no matter how skilfully men try to engineer their unities, disintegration has been the order of the day. God has His unity. He is working towards it. When Christ is publicly established in glory as Head, God's purpose as to unity will be reached, as far as His government of heavenly and earthly things is concerned.

The coming age is going to witness at last the fullest possible harmony between the heavens and the earth, and Christ Head in both spheres, producing the unity. All is in Him. But then through grace we are already in Him, and thus have obtained an inheritance in all this wealth of blessing. That to which we are destined has been settled beforehand, not according to our need, nor even according to our thoughts or wishes, but according to the purpose of God, who effects all things as He pleases.

We may be sure, as a consequence of this, that no possible slip can come between us and the inheritance to which we are destined.

The Apostle does not stop at this point to instruct us as to the particular character of this inheritance, but he does tell us that when all is consummated we shall be to the praise of God's glory. Angels and men will gaze at that which God has accomplished in regard to us, and they will see in it some fresh display of His glory and utter to Him their praise. We need not wait until that day. These things are made known to us so that instructed in them we may gain fresh glimpses of His glory and be filled with His praises now. We may enjoy communion with God about these purposes of His grace, and realizing that all centres in Christ and is for His glory, we find subject matter and material for our praise and worship.

As we pass from verse 12 to verse 13 we notice a change in the pronouns, from "we" to "ye." In writing, "we ... who first trusted in Christ," the Apostle's mind was dwelling on saints gathered out of Israel including himself, whereas the "ye" referred to saints gathered out from the Gentiles. The Jewish believers were a kind of firstfruits of their nation. By and by a re-

deemed and restored Israel will be for Jehovah's praise on earth. But those who trusted in Christ beforehand during this gospel age will have part in the heavenly calling and be to His praise in the heavenly places.

In all this however, the Gentile believers fully shared. They too, had heard the Gospel which brought them salvation, and having believed it they had been sealed with the Spirit, who is the earnest of the inheritance. In His character as the seal, the Spirit marked them out as belonging to God. As the earnest He is the pledge of the inheritance which lies before us, and also He gives the foretaste of the blessings attached to it.

Let us carefully note the order set before us in this verse. First, the hearing of the Gospel. Second, the believing of it. Third, the receiving of the Spirit. This order is quite invariable. We never believe before we hear. We never receive before we believe. If any enquire, Have I received the Spirit? we have to propound to them the previous question, Have you heard and believed the Gospel of your salvation? The one proceeds out of and flows from the other.

Again we shall do well to notice the fact that not only did we trust in Christ but we were sealed with the holy Spirit of promise in Christ. "In whom ... ye were sealed." All is found to be in Christ. The Holy Spirit is a divine Person in the Godhead and to be distinguished from Christ, yet we must not totally separate Him from Christ in our minds. This is the case with all the three sacred Persons. They are to be distinguished but not separated. The Spirit has been sent by Christ from the Father, and in Christ He has sealed us — sealed us, you see until the whole possession purchased by the death of the cross is redeemed from the last adverse power that tends to hold it in bondage; that is, until the coming of the Lord. The Spirit is given to abide with us for ever. We may grieve Him but we cannot grieve Him away.

Having thus given an unfolding of the characteristic blessings of the individual Christian, Paul proceeds to tell the Ephesians of his thanks-givings and prayers on their behalf. He gave thanks for them as he thought of the wealth of spiritual blessing into which they had been introduced, and his prayer was that they might have an intelligent and spiritual understanding of all connected with the calling and inheritance which was theirs.

We may be very certain that what he desired for the Ephesians is just what is highly desirable for us today.

In these prayers the Apostle addressed himself to "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory." God is indeed the Originator and Source of all glory, and to Him our Lord Jesus, when here as the subject Man, looked up as His God, as we see prophetically expressed in Psalm 16. Our thoughts are thus fittingly directed to the place which the Lord Jesus took as Man, inasmuch as it is as Man that He takes His place as the exalted Head in the wide creation of blessing. Further it is in Him as Man that we see the Pattern and Fulness of all that which is ours in Him. Everything is expressed in Christ, and we have nothing apart from Christ. The thing so greatly to be desired is that we may have the full knowledge of all that is purposed in connection with Him.

We come to know the wonders of God's purposes and work in connection with the knowledge of Himself. As we know Him we know that which springs forth from Him. Hence the first request of the Apostle concerns "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him." We can only know Him by revelation, since by no amount of searching can we discover Him;

and again on our side wisdom is needed, that spirit of wisdom which comes from the Spirit of God.

The word, "understanding," in verse 18 should really be, "heart." It is not a matter of cold intellectual understanding but rather the understanding of warm affection. Can anything be cold which centres in Christ? And it does centre in Christ; for though the "Him" which closes verse 17 grammatically refers to God the Father, it cannot but also point to Christ, for He alone is the Revealer of the Father. To have the full knowledge of the Father we must know Christ, the Son.

In the first place, the prayer of the Apostle concerned itself with the spiritual state of his readers. The things of God can only be discerned by those who have the eyes of their heart enlightened. Many things there are, both in the world around us and the flesh within, which if permitted by us, inevitably form a kind of cataract film upon our spiritual eyes and hinder our understanding. This helps us to understand why in writing to Timothy Paul said, "Take heed to thyself and to the doctrine." Except he began by taking heed to himself he was not likely to obtain much good from the doctrine. Nor are we.

After that, the prayer divides itself into three parts, concerning respectively the calling, the inheritance and the power by which God brings to pass His purposes concerning us. The calling has been indicated in verses 3 to 7, and the inheritance in verses 10 to 14, whereas the power had not previously been mentioned, but is opened up to us in the closing verses of our chapter and in Eph. 2.

We might perhaps sum up "His calling," as expounded to us in those earlier verses, in the one word, sonship. The prayer however is not merely that we may know the calling, but rather what is the hope of His calling. Well, what is this hope? If He who calls is GOD; if the place to which we are called is that of SONS; if that place is ours "by Jesus Christ," and as — "IN CHRIST;" what are we to expect? What but heavenly glory?

This indeed was no small prayer. Are we disposed to regard it lightly — and say, Oh, but we all know that: we all expect to go to heaven when we die — we only thereby show that we do not really know as yet what the hope involves and signifies. Were the eyes of our hearts so enlightened that we really knew it, we should be thoroughly delivered from the ensnaring attractions of the world-system that surrounds us. We should be

wholly lifted above its unhallowed influences, and thus fitted to go through it in a way that glorifies God.

Nor are we only to know what is the inheritance. That knowledge might easily be arrived at in an intellectual way by reading the few verses that speak of it. But what are the riches of the glory of that inheritance? It is His inheritance, you notice, not ours: and it is "in the saints," which means, we understand, not so much that the saints form the inheritance — though they form part of it, no doubt — as that it is by and in the saints that He will take up His inheritance.

When God took Israel across the Jordan to conquer the land of Canaan, He took the initiative Himself by means of the ark. It was said, "The ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passes over before you into Jordan" (Joshua 3:11). The position was that God took possession of the land in His people Israel; that is, by putting them into possession. Presently He will make good His claim to the whole earth in Israel, and the glory of the millennial age will commence. It will be very great glory on earth. Now what will be the riches of that heavenly glory when Satan and his hosts are cast out of heaven, and the saints established in the heavens, and, as verse 10 has told us, Christ is the

supreme and unifying centre in those realms of blessedness? It will be riches beyond all our conceptions. Only the Father of glory can give us the spiritual eyesight to take it in.

Thirdly, we are to know the greatness of the power of God, which acts on behalf of us who have believed. That power has fully expressed itself in the raising of Christ from the dead and in His exaltation, and is now actively working towards us. We have only to think of the resurrection and exaltation of Christ to realize how appropriate is the adjective, "exceeding," or "surpassing." His power is characterized not merely by greatness but by surpassing greatness.

We do well to bear in mind that when the Lord Jesus went into death He put Himself, if we may so say, beneath all the weight of antagonistic human power, and also all the power of darkness wielded by Satan, and further beneath all the weight of the divine judgment due to sin. Out of all this and into resurrection He was lifted by the power of God. This emphasizes very clearly the greatness of the power of God.

But further, we have to consider all that into which He has been lifted, as detailed in the closing verses of chapter 1. Here we

see a greatness which is surpassing indeed. He is gone into the heavenly places and is seated at the right hand of God; that is, in the place of supreme administration. In that position He is above every other name and every other power, whether in this age or the age to come. And not merely above, but "far above." No comparison can be instituted between any other and Him. All things are put beneath His feet, and He is given to be Head over all things. All these things are facts, though as yet we do not see all things subjected to Him.

There is in all this something which very intimately concerns ourselves. In that place of extreme exaltation where He is Head over all things, He is Head to the church which is His body. To that church every true believer belongs. There is a great difference between the significance of these two prepositions, which may be illustrated by the case of Adam, who is "the figure of Him that was to come." Adam was created to be head over all other created things that filled the garden, but he was head to Eve, who was his body as well as his wife. The second headship is far more intimate and wonderful than the first.

Christ is not only Head over all things but He is to fill all things, so that all things are ultimately to take their character

from Him. The church is His body and consequently His fulness — the body in which He is adequately expressed. This passage evidently contemplates the church in its largest and widest aspect, as the sum total of the saints of this dispensation; that is, the saints called out between the coming of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost and the coming again of the Lord Jesus.

Chapter 2

THE CHURCH IS not yet completed, and the saints are here in weakness, but our Head is exalted far above all by the surpassing greatness of divine power, and this exhibits how great is the power that works toward us in life-giving energy. Hence chapter 2 simply opens with, "And you, who were dead in trespasses and sins." God's power has wrought, "in Christ ... and you." It wrought in Christ when He was dead on account of our trespasses and sins. It wrought in us when we were dead in our own trespasses and sins. His quickening power in us is according to that supreme display which took place in regard to Christ.

In verses 2 and 3 we again meet with the distinction between the Gentile "ye" and the Jewish "we." Yet both had their activit-

ies in that which was wholly evil. The walk of the Gentile is declared to have been particularly characterized by the world and the devil, inasmuch as they followed false gods, behind which lay the power of demons. The walk of the Jew was more particularly characterized by the lusts of the flesh, as verse 3 indicates. They were not worshipping demons, but they were by nature the children of wrath, just as others. Just the same indictments may be brought today against those who are openly irreligious and profane, and those who profess a form of piety, yet simply follow "the desires of the flesh and of the mind." The desires of the mind may have often a very attractive and even intellectual appearance, and yet be wholly astray from God.

Such were we, whether Jew or Gentile. At one and the same moment we were dead in trespasses and sins and yet active in all kinds of evil. Very much alive to everything wrong, yet wholly dead to God. Being dead towards God we were without any point of recovery in ourselves: our only hope lay in Him. Hence the great words with which verse 4 opens, "But God —"

What has God done? We were full of sins and were subject to the wrath that sins deserve. God is rich in mercy and toward

such as ourselves He had great love. Accordingly He has made us to live together with Christ. And not only have we been made to live but we have been raised up and made to sit in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Let us note three things in connection with this striking passage.

First, observe that since it is wholly a question of God, His purpose and His actings, we are carried clean outside all question of time. That which is not to us exists for Him. Hence our sitting in heavenly places is an accomplished thing to Him, and is so spoken of here.

Second, observe how the word "together," occurs. In our unconverted state, as Jews or Gentiles, as the case may have been, we were very different and very antagonistic. Now all that has been done has been done in regard to us together; all differences having been abolished.

Third, all that God has done He has wrought in connection with Christ. If we have been quickened, it has been together with Christ. If raised up and seated in heavenly places, it has been in Christ. Two prepositions are used, with and in. We have already been actually quickened in the sense of John 5:25, though we

wait for the quickening of our mortal bodies. As quickened we live in association with Christ, because living of His life. We have not yet been actually raised up and seated in the heavens, but Christ has and He is our exalted Head. We are in Him, and consequently raised up and seated in Him. Presently we shall actually be raised up and seated with Him.

We have only to meditate a moment on these wonderful things to be assured that none of them has been accomplished according to our need, but according to the mind and heart and purpose of God. Hence, when all is brought to final fruition in the coming ages, the marvellous kindness shown in Christ Jesus towards us will display the surpassing riches of the grace of God. God is indeed the God of all grace. His dealings with Israel, blessing them ultimately in spite of all their unfaithfulness, will redound to the praise of His grace. But when we think of what and where we were, according to verses 1-3, and then contemplate the heights to which we are lifted, according to verses 4-6, we can see that His dealings with us set forth a richness of grace that surpasses anything seen in Israel or anywhere else.

The contemplation of it leads the Apostle to again emphasize the fact that our salvation is all of grace. He had stated this pre-

viously, in verse 5, in a parenthetical way. In verse 8 he enlarges upon this important fact, and adds that it is also through faith. The grace is God's: the faith is ours. Yet even our faith is not of ourselves. Faith is not a natural product of the human heart. The weeds that grow by nature in the heart of man are detailed for us in Romans 3:9-19. Faith is no weed at all, but rather a choice flower which once planted by the heavenly Father can never be rooted up. It is the gift of God.

Now this necessarily excludes works; that is, works done in order to obtain life and blessing. The only works of which we were capable were those detailed in verses 2 and 3, and in those works we were spiritually dead. God Himself is the Worker and we are His workmanship; a very different thing. Further, the work necessary was nothing short of creation. How obvious then that human works must be excluded.

God has created us, you observe, in Christ Jesus. This is new creation. We were in Adam according to the old creation, but the Adamic life has been wholly corrupted. We have now been created in Christ Jesus with a view to our walking in good works in the midst of this world of sin.

This brings us back to the point with which we started. The surpassing greatness of the power of God, which wrought in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, was needed to accomplish so mighty a work in us.

We have been newly created in Christ Jesus, as stated in verse 10. This is the work of God in us, but it is not to be dissociated from the work of God wrought for us by the blood and cross of Christ. From verse 11 to the end of the chapter we are bidden to remember three things: the depths from which we Gentiles have been brought; the heights to which we have been introduced; the basis upon which the mighty transference has been accomplished — the death of Christ.

The picture of the natural condition of Gentiles, drawn by the Apostle in verses 11 and 12, is a very dark one. Nor is it made any brighter for us today by reason of our living in the midst of a civilization which has been slightly christianized. It matters little that we should be called Uncircumcision by the Jew: but the other six items in the count against us matter very much indeed.

Being "in the flesh," means that the fallen Adamic nature characterized our state, and consequently controlled us. This alone would account for all the gross evil which fills the Gentile world.

But then we were "without Christ." Without, that is, the only One who could bring in any way of salvation from our lost estate.

Again, God had at an earlier date brought in certain very definite privileges. He established the commonwealth of Israel, making them the depositories of the covenants of promise, though putting them for the moment under the covenant of law. And further, inasmuch as they did have the covenants of promise they were the only people with definite hopes securely founded upon the Word of God. As regards all this the Gentiles were "aliens" and "strangers" and "without hope." Not a streak of light appeared upon their dark horizon.

Lastly they were "without God in the world." Idols they had without number, and the modern world has them too, though in a different form. God was, and is, unknown.

To sum it all up: they had the flesh and the world, but they had no Christ, no privilege, no hope and no God. We too were in exactly the same plight.

Now let us turn to survey that into which we have been brought, as detailed in verses 13 to 22. First of all we have been "made nigh" in Christ Jesus. Being made nigh means that we now have God. The blood of Christ has given us a righteous place in His presence, and the wonderful thing is that we are brought near as introduced into a wholly new relationship. This is indicated in verse 18. Our access to Him is not merely as God, but as Father.

In what way are we made nigh? Israel had a certain nearness under the old covenant. Are we to be a kind of duplicate of them? No, for according to verse 14 both have been made one. The word, "both" indicates believing Jews on the one hand, and believing Gentiles on the other. This oneness has been brought to pass by Christ. He has broken down the dividing wall and made peace between the warring factions. He has abolished the enmity in His flesh: that is, by the offering up of His body in death.

The enmity was connected with "the law of commandments contained in ordinances." The law of Moses contained great moral enactments, which are never abrogated, but there were also many ordinances of a ceremonial nature connected with it. These ceremonial rules separated Israel from the nations by making them a peculiar people in their habits; indeed, they were intended so to do. Such ordinances were annulled for believers in the death of Christ, and at once this great cause of hostility was removed. Acts 21:20-26, shows how little this was realized by the early believers in Jerusalem, and how even Paul himself seems to have been for the moment deflected from what he here lays down. We see in that passage also how great the hostility was on the part of Jews; an hostility which was fully reciprocated by the Gentiles.

Having thus abolished the enmity, the Christ has made the two into one in Himself. It is not that the Gentile is now one with the Jew, but that the Jew in Christ is now absolutely one with the Gentile in Christ. Both are found in a position and condition before God which is wholly fresh and original. They are no longer two men but one man, and that man is altogether new. This is a complete solution of the enmity difficulty — "so

making peace." Two men might quarrel. One man cannot very well do so. And he has no inclination to do so, for he is a new kind of man. In all this we are of course looking at what God has accomplished in an abstract way: that is, according to its essential character, and without introducing those modifications found in our practice, owing to the flesh still being found in us.

Verse 16 brings in an additional thought. Not only are believing Jews and Gentiles one new man — that expresses their new character — but they are formed into one body, and as such reconciled to God. Reconciliation was needed because they both were in a state of enmity Godward, as well as being in a state of enmity between themselves. Again, you notice, the death of Christ is introduced; this time as, "the cross." By it He slew the enmity — that enmity Godward, which was in the hearts of both, and not only the enmity they had cherished between each other.

Having done it, and thus effected the great basis of reconciliation, He has Himself acted as the Messenger of peace to both Gentile and Jew. The former were "afar off" in the old dispensation, and the latter were "nigh." This is a remarkable sentence.

Christ is presented as a Preacher to Gentiles and to Jews after the cross; that is, in resurrection. Yet, as far as we are told in Scripture, He has never been seen or heard by any unconverted person since He was hanging dead upon the cross. He did appear in resurrection to His disciples and speak peace to them, but when did He preach peace to either Jews or Gentiles? The only answer we can give is — Never at all in Person. He only did it by means of the apostolic preaching, or in other words, by proxy.

This mode of speaking may seem to us somewhat strange, but it is found elsewhere in the Bible. 1 Peter 3:19, is a striking example, and 1 Peter 1:11 furnishes us with something very similar. If the verse in 1 Peter 3 had been read in the light of Ephesians 2:17, we should have been spared many mistaken explanations of the former passage, for there can be no doubt that the preaching alluded to here was that of the apostles and other servants of Christ, who in the earliest years of Christianity carried the tidings of peace far and wide.

The word, one, occurs for the fourth time in verse 18. It is evident that special emphasis is laid upon the word. Verse 14 states the fact that we are one. Verse 15 adds the fact that it is as one

new man. Verse 16 shows that we are one body. Verse 18 completes the story by showing that we both are given to possess one Spirit, whereby we have access to the Father. How evident it is then that in the Christian circle all distinction between Jew and Gentile is completely gone.

These glorious facts being established, Paul introduces these Gentile believers to the height of their spiritual privilege. They were no longer strangers and foreigners, nor are we: rather we are fellow-citizens with the saints and of the Divine household, and built into the structure that God is rearing. Three figures are laid under contribution in these closing four verses — the city, the household, the building. It would seem as if we are introduced step by step to that which is more intimate.

We are fellow-citizens with the saints. This is rather a general thought. God has prepared a heavenly city for believers of Old Testament days, who are to enjoy a heavenly portion. This is stated in Hebrews 11:16. In all that heavenly portion believers of this day are to share. Its privileges are ours, for our names have been written in heaven (see, Luke 10:20); inscribed upon its rolls we can say that our citizenship is there.

An household is a place of greater intimacy than a city. The Lord Mayor of London, for instance, appears in greater splendour when he acts in that capacity as the head of the City, but he is known more intimately when he has laid aside the proud trappings of his high office and acts simply as the head of his own household. Now we are not merely citizens but are also of God's household. Thus it is that we are brought near and have such liberty of access; but thus also it is that we are responsible to wear the character of that One to whose household we belong.

When we come to the thought of the building we have to consider ourselves as stones — as suitable material for the structure — and God Himself as the Builder on the one hand, and as the One who dwells within the shrine when constructed, on the other. The house of the Lord is where one may behold "the beauty of the Lord" (Ps. 27:4). In the temple of God, "doth every one speak of His glory" (Ps. 29:9), or as the margin has it, "every whit of it utters glory." That we should be thus "fitted together" on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone, and all speaking forth the glory of God is a matter of extraordinary intimacy in-

deed. The wonder of it is increased when we remember that we were nothing but Gentiles by nature.

The third figure, that of the building, sub-divides itself under two heads. There is first the building viewed as a progressive work all through the present age and only reaching its completion in glory, though each stone that is added is fitly framed together. Completed, it will indeed speak forth the glory of God.

Secondly there is the building viewed as an habitation of God all through the present age — a complete thing at any given moment, though those who constitute it change. All along from the Day of Pentecost God has dwelt in the church through the Spirit — that church which is composed of every Spirit-indwelt believer on earth at any given moment. He does not dwell in temples made with hands, but in this house He does dwell by His Spirit.

Let us not overlook the two words with which both verses 21 and 22 open — "in whom." When we were considering the blessing into which we are brought as individuals we saw all was ours in Christ. It is just the same when we consider the blessing in which we stand in a collective or corporate way. All

is in Christ. The church is builded together in Christ, and God dwells in it in Spirit.

All these things are not just ideas, but rather great realities. If perchance they sound strange in our ears, is it not because we are more familiar with what men have made of the church, largely perverting it according to their own ideas, than with what the church really is according to God? And remember, all men's perversions and adaptations will pass, and God's handiwork will remain. So we had better make haste to acquaint ourselves with what God has made the church to be, otherwise all too much of our service may be lost, and we ourselves be sadly unprepared for what will be revealed when the Lord comes, and in the twinkling of an eye the church comes forth altogether according to divine workmanship and not at all according to man's organization.

Chapter 3

HAVING PRESENTED US with this great unfolding of truth, Paul commences to exhort us to walk in a way that shall be worthy of such an exalted vocation. This may be seen if the first verses of chapters 3 and 4 are read together. The whole of

chapter 3 excepting verse 1, is a parenthesis, in which he points out how definitely the Lord had entrusted to him the ministry of all this truth — which he calls, "the mystery" — and in which he again puts on record that which he prayed for the Ephesian believers.

He evidently felt that his exhortation to walk worthy would come with greater force if we realised how fully the authority of the Lord was behind it. A "dispensation" or "administration," of the grace of God towards such as ourselves had been committed to him, inasmuch as "the mystery" had been specially revealed to him, and he had just previously written concerning it in brief fashion. He alludes evidently to what he had written in Eph. 1:19 — Eph. 2:22. An even briefer summary of it is given in Eph. 3:6 where again the wonderful place given to Gentiles is emphasized. The three words in that verse have been translated, "Joint-heirs, a joint-body and joint-partakers." This may be clumsy English, but it has the merit of making us see the main thought of the Spirit of God in the verse. Now that was a feature, of God's purpose in blessing, wholly unknown in earlier ages: necessarily unknown, of course; for once known the order of things established in connection with the law and

Israel was destroyed. It was therefore a secret hid in God until Christ was exalted on high and the Holy Spirit given below.

Now however it is revealed, and the apostle Paul was made the minister of it. It was not only revealed to him but to the other apostles and prophets also. Thus the fact of it was placed beyond all doubt or dispute. Yet the ministry of it was given to Paul, as verse 7 clearly states. In keeping with this we do not find any allusion to the mystery in any of the epistles save Paul's.

How great a theme it is, we can realize if we have at all taken in the things we have just been superficially surveying. Paul himself was so impressed with its greatness that he alludes to his ministry of it as, evangelizing "the unsearchable riches of Christ."

If we read this expression, "the unsearchable riches of Christ," in its context, we perceive that it refers, not to all the wealth that is personally His, but rather to all that which is in Him for His saints. Scanning Eph. 1, we find that the term, "in Christ," (or its equivalents, "in the Beloved," "in Him," "in whom") occurs about twelve times. In Eph. 2, it occurs about six times,

and in Eph. 3, about three. Let us take one item only, "Blessed ... with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." Can we search or trace those blessings out, so that we are thoroughly masters of the whole subject? We can do no such thing. They are too big for our little grasp. They are unsearchable; and so too is all that which we have in Christ. Yet though unsearchable they may be known by us, and so they were the subject of the Apostle's ministry.

A second thing was covered by his ministry. He was commissioned to make all see, not only what the mystery is, but what is the "fellowship of the mystery," or, "the administration of the mystery." (N. Tr.). The mystery is concerning Christ and the church, and particularly concerning the place that Gentiles occupy in it, as has already been explained by Paul. The administration concerns the practical arrangements for assembly life and order and testimony, which Paul everywhere established. These arrangements were ordered by the Lord that there might be a representation, even today in the church's time condition, of those things which are true and established concerning it in God's eternal counsel.

The mystery itself was something entirely new, for from the beginning of the world up to that moment it had been hid in God. Consequently the administration of the mystery was entirely new. Previously God had been dealing with one special nation on the basis of law. Now God was calling out an election from all nations according to grace, and that which was merely national was submerged in this larger and fuller purpose. In the church of God everything has to be ordered or administrated according to these present purposes of God. The Apostle does not stop in this epistle to instruct us in the details of this divinely ordered administration; he does this in writing his first epistle to the Corinthians.

The assembly at Corinth was not walking in an orderly way, as were those at Ephesus and Colosse. There was a good deal of ignorance, error and disorder in their midst, and this furnished the occasion for the Spirit of God to enforce upon them the administration of the mystery, at least in a good many of its details, dealing with matters of a public nature which an ordinary onlooker might observe. That the point of this may not be missed we take up one detail out of the many, to serve as an illustration.

Our epistle lays it down that we, whether Jews or Gentiles, "are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." This is one of the great items included in the mystery. We turn to the Corinthian epistle and we discover that this is not a mere doctrine, an idea divorced from any practical effect in the present ordering of church life and behaviour. The very opposite. Paul declares that consequently the Spirit is supreme in that house where He dwells. He dwells there in order that He may operate to the glory of God — "All these works that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will" (1 Cor. 12:11). In 1 Cor. 14 of the same epistle we find the Spirit ordering and energizing in the exercise of the various gifts, and we are bidden to acknowledge that the instructions given are "the commandments of the Lord." The Lord, you see, is the great Administrator in the church of God, and Paul was the chosen servant to make known His administration to us.

The administration of the mystery is, we fear, very lightly brushed aside by many Christians today, even by good and earnest ones, but we are assured that they do so to their own great loss, both now and in the coming age. If we neglect any part of the truth we become undeveloped as to that part and like

"a cake not turned," as Hosea puts it. Also we have to take into consideration verses 10 and 11 of our chapter, which tell us that the administration of the mystery, as worked out in the assembly, is a kind of lesson book before the eyes of angels. The lesson book of today on which the eyes of angels look down, is very sadly blotted and obscured. Yet, since angels do not die, those same eyes once looked down and saw the beauty of the manifold wisdom of God, when the excellence of the Divine administration, ministered through Paul, was first seen in the church's earliest days.

Then for a brief moment things were "according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." Now for many a long day they have mainly been according to the disconnected desires and arrangements of men, though many of the men who made the arrangements were doubtless godly and well-meaning people. May we have grace to adhere, as far as in us lies, to the administration as ordered by God, for it is evidently intended that what was "hid in God" should now be made "known by the church." At the same time let us not expect to do so without opposition and trouble, for Paul was face to face with tribulation enough, as he hints in verse 13.

Moreover we do not very easily or speedily enter into the power and enjoyment of these things. Hence again at this point the Apostle betakes himself to prayer, and is led to record his prayer that we may be stirred up by it. The prayer is addressed to the Father, and it is concerned with the operations of the Spirit with a view to Christ having His due place in our hearts. Father, Son and Holy Ghost are thus involved in it.

The Father is addressed as imparting His own Name and character to every family that will ultimately fill the heavens and the earth. The Lord Jesus is our Head, and He is also in some sense the Head and Leader of every one of these different families. It should be "every family" and not "the whole family." God will have many families, some for heaven and some for earth. Amongst the heavenly families will be the church and "the spirits of just men made perfect," i.e. Old Testament saints. For the earth there will be Israel, redeemed Gentiles, and so on. Now amongst men every family takes its name from the one who is father to it, the one from whom it derives its origin. But fatherhood amongst men is only a reflection of the divine Fatherhood.

The main burden of the prayer is that Christ may dwell by faith in our hearts, that He may be abidingly the controlling centre of our deepest affections. This can only be as we are strengthened by the Spirit's mighty power in the inner man, for naturally that which is selfish controls us, and we are fickle and uncertain. Christ dwelling in our hearts, we become rooted and grounded in love, His love not ours. Only as rooted and grounded in love can we proceed to know the love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge.

Verse 17 speaks of that which lies at the very centre of all, the indwelling Christ and the consequent rooting and grounding in love. Verses 18 and 19 pass on to the widest possible circle of blessing, love and glory. A pair of compasses may serve as an illustration. It is not easy to draw a circle except one leg be firmly fixed. With one leg fixed the circle can easily be described. So it is here. Fixed and rooted in love, the mighty sweep of verse 18 becomes possible.

If verse 19 tells us we are to know that which passes all knowledge, verse 18 infers we are to apprehend that which eludes all proper definition.

Four dimensions are enumerated, but we are not told to what they refer. The dimensions of what? Doubtless of all the great truth which Paul had been unfolding, the dimensions of the unsearchable riches of Christ. These things are only to be apprehended with all saints. We need one another as we begin to learn them. All saints should be keen to apprehend them, and they are only to be apprehended as all saints are kept in view. In these days of brokenness and division in the church of God we cannot bring all saints together, nor can we incite all saints to apprehend these things, but we can cling very tenaciously to the divine thought of all saints, and, as far as in us lies, live and act in view of all saints. They who do this are more likely than others to apprehend the mighty scope of the unsearchable riches of Christ, to know His love which is centred upon all saints, and to be filled with all the fulness of God.

The contemplation, in prayer, of such heights of spiritual light and affections and blessing moved the heart of the Apostle to worship, and the chapter closes with a doxology ascribing glory to the Father. That which he had desired in his prayer would be impossible of accomplishment were it not that there is power that works in us, the Holy Spirit of God. By that

Power the Father can accomplish that which overwhelmingly surpasses all our thoughts or desires. Many of us, reading the Apostle's desires for us, may have said to ourselves — Very wonderful, but altogether beyond me. Yet, be it remembered, not beyond the Power that works in us. All this blessing may be really and consciously ours: ours in present possession.

The glory which the last verse ascribes to God will certainly be His. Throughout all ages the church will irradiate His glory. As the bride, the Lamb's wife, it will be said of her, "Having the glory of God: and her light was like to a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal" (Rev. 21:11). And all that the church is, and all that she ever will be, is by and in Christ Jesus. Christ Jesus is the most glorious Minister of the glory of God. He has wrought out the glory, and covered Himself with glory in doing it. Thus it is that we can so happily sing,

There Christ the Centre of the throng,
Shall in His glory shine,
But not an eye those hosts among,
But sees His glory Thine.

Chapter 4

As we open chapter 4 we pick up the thread which Paul dropped at the end of the first verse of chapter 3. In comparatively few words we have had brought before us the Christian calling in its height and fulness according to the thoughts and purposes of God. Moreover that calling has been unfolded to us, not only as it relates to us each individually, but also as it concerns us all together in our corporate or church capacity. Now comes the exhortation of a general character, and it covers all the more detailed exhortations with which the main part of the remaining chapters is filled. Still the Apostle knew right well that it is not enough to give general instructions, but that very intimate and pointed details are necessary, such as may get home to every heart and conscience. Let those who minister today take heed to this and be as wise and courageous as he.

The exhortations comprised in the first section of chapter 4 down to verse 16, have evidently in view our calling, not as individuals but rather as members of the body of Christ, the church. In the assemblies of the saints how often friction occurs! A little experience of assembly life will suffice to convince us that this is so. Here then is an immense field for the

cultivation of the beautiful graces enumerated in verse 2. The lowly mind thinks nothing of itself. Meekness, the opposite of self-assertiveness, is of course the direct outcome of lowliness. Longsuffering, the opposite of the hasty spirit so critical of others, is the child of lowliness and meekness. When all these three are in operation how simply and happily do we bear with one another in love. Let us connect the love also with what we have just been seeing in chapter 3. Rooted and grounded in love, and knowing at least something of the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, we ourselves are enabled with eyes of love, to look out on all saints, even those amongst them who according to nature are least lovable.

Amongst men we see the tendency for love to degenerate into a kind of soft amiability, which ends with condoning all kinds of things which are far from right. Thus it is not to be amongst saints, inasmuch as a very definite standard is set before us. We are to aim, not merely at agreement, for we might all be of one mind and in the sweetest agreement in favour of something entirely wrong! We are to give all diligence to keeping the unity of the Spirit — not Paul's unity, not Peter's, not yours nor mine, but rather that unity which the Spirit has produced. We did not

make the unity, and we cannot break the unity. The Spirit made it and we are to keep it in a practical way in the uniting bond of peace. That is to be our constant endeavour. Our success in that endeavour will depend upon the measure in which we are marked by the beautiful features mentioned in verse 2.

If verse 2 of our chapter gives us the characteristics which, being developed in us, will lead to the keeping of the unity of the Spirit, verses 4-6 give us a series of unities which strongly support the exhortation of verse 3. The word "one" occurs seven times in these three verses.

First we have the oneness of the body of Christ, which is composed of all the saints of the present dispensation. This body has been formed by the baptism and indwelling of the one Spirit, and every member of that body shares in a common calling, which has one hope in view. Nothing that is unreal enters into this body. All is vital here in the life and energy of the Spirit.

Next we have the Lord, and the faith and the baptism that are connected with Him. Oneness is stamped upon these things connected with the Lord, equally with all that is connected with

the Spirit; though the faith may be professed and baptism be accepted by some, who afterwards turn out to be nothing more than mere professors.

Then we come to God the Father, and here again oneness is pressed upon us since we all find our origin in Him. And further, though He is above all and through all, He is in all of us.

In these seven unities is found the foundation and support of the unity of the Spirit, which we are responsible to keep. It is buttressed in this sevenfold way, which is a definite testimony to its importance, as also to our frailty in keeping it. We are one, and that by the presence and action of the Spirit of God. We may fail to keep the unity, yet the unity will not thereby cease to exist, since it stands in the energy of God.

On the other hand we are great losers, and the testimony of God suffers, as we fail to keep it. The very divided state of the people of God proclaims how grievously we have failed in this respect, and it accounts very largely for the weakness, the lack of spiritual insight and vigour, which prevails. We cannot rectify the present divided state of things, but we can make it our aim to pursue the unity which is of the Spirit of God with all

lowliness, meekness, longsuffering and forbearance. Only it must be the Spirit's unity. To aim at keeping any other unity, yours, mine or any one else's, is to miss the unity of the Spirit.

Moreover unity does not mean a dead uniformity. Verse 7 is plain testimony to this. We all are one, yet to each of us is given both gift and grace that is peculiar to ourselves. This thought leads the Apostle to refer to those gifts of a special yet abiding nature, which have been bestowed by the ascended Christ in proof and manifestation of His victory.

The quotation in verse 8 is from Psalm 68, a Psalm which celebrates prophetically the Divine victory over rebellious kings and all His enemies, which will usher in the glorious millennial age. The Apostle knew that the victory, to be publicly manifested then, had been already accomplished in the death, the resurrection, the ascension of Christ. Hence he appropriates these words from the Psalm and applies them to the ascended Christ before the day of millennial victory arrives. Having conquered Satan in death, his last stronghold, He has gone on high, having brought into subjection to Himself those who had been the slaves of Satan. Then He signaled His victory by bestowing on those, who are now captivated by Him, spiritual powers

which should suffice for the carrying on of His work, even while they are yet in the place where Satan is permitted still to exercise his wiles.

Verses 9 and 10, as we notice, are parenthetical. They emphasize two things. First, that ere He ascended He had first to go down to death, where He vanquished the power of the enemy, and even the grave. Second, that having achieved victory He is supreme in exaltation, with a view to the filling of all things.

"Far above all heavens," is a remarkable expression. In Mark 16 we have the Divine Servant "received up into heaven." In Hebrews 4 the great High Priest is "passed through the heavens." Here the victorious Man is "ascended up far above all heavens." The very heaven of heavens is His, and it is His that He may "fill all things;" another remarkable word. Even today each believer should be filled with the Spirit as we see a little further on in this epistle. Each believer who is filled with the Spirit is necessarily filled with Christ, and consequently Christ comes out of him. If filled with Christ we display His character. The day is coming when Christ will fill all things, and consequently all things will display Him and His glory. The "all things" spoken of here is of course all things that in any way

come under His headship — all things within the universe of blessing.

Verse 11 reads straight on from verse 8. The four great gifts are specified. Apostles, the men sent forth for the establishment of the church, through whom in the main the inspired Scriptures have reached us. Prophets, men raised up to speak on God's behalf, conveying His mind; whether doing so by inspiration, as in the earliest days of the church, or not. Evangelists, who carry forth into the world that great message which avails when received, to rescue men from the enemy's power. Pastors and teachers, those qualified to instruct believers in the truth revealed, and to apply it to their actual state, so that they may be fed and maintained in growth and spiritual health.

The simple meaning of the word translated, "pastor," is "shepherd," and the words, "shepherds and teachers," describe not two gifts but one. Let this be taken to heart by any who are gifted in this direction. No one can very well act as shepherd without doing a little teaching, but it is possible for a very gifted man so to concentrate on teaching that he never concerns himself to act as a shepherd; and this in practice proves very hurtful both to himself and to his hearers.

The objects in view in the giving of the gifts are stated in verses 12-15. The saints are to be perfected, qualified each to take their due place in the body of Christ. The work of the ministry is to be carried on, and thus the body be built up. And all this is to proceed until God's purpose as to the body is carried to its completion. Until then the gifts abide. The gifts in this passage, be it remembered, are not exactly certain powers conferred; but rather the men who possess these powers, who are conferred as gifts upon the church. Apostles and inspired prophets remain in the Scriptures that came from their pens. Uninspired prophets, together with evangelists and also pastors and teachers, are found in the church even to this day.

The ultimate objective contemplated in the bestowal of the gifts is stated in verse 13. We are to arrive at "a full-grown man," and that according to the measure of that which is God's purpose for us. As the body of Christ we are to be His fulness (see Eph. 1:23) and up to the measure of the stature of that fulness we are to come. We shall arrive there in oneness — that oneness which springs from the faith fully apprehended and the Son of God really known.

Again, God's objective in connection with the gifts is set before us in verses 14 and 15, but this time not the ultimate but the immediate objective. It is that we may be marked by spiritual growth, so that instead of being tossed about, like a boat without an anchor, and at the mercy of false teachers, we may be holding the truth in love and growing up increasingly into conformity to Him who is our Head.

These objectives, whether we consider the ultimate or the immediate, are very great, very worthy of God. If we take them in we shall not wonder that with a view to them special gifts have flowed from the ascended Christ. But verse 16 completes the story by showing that the increase and growth of the body, which is the present objective, is not to be reached only by the ministry of these special gifts, but that every member of the body, however obscure, has a part to play. Just as the human body has many parts and joints, each of which supply something to the general upkeep and growth and well-being, so is it in the body of Christ.

It is very important that we bear this in mind, otherwise we easily fall into the way of thinking that the general good and spiritual prosperity of the church altogether depends upon the

actions and service of gifted men. Consequently when things are poor and feeble, or altogether wrong, we can conveniently absolve ourselves from all responsibility and blame, laying all at the door of the gifts. The fact is that the healthy action of every part, down to the smallest and most unnoticed, is needful for the welfare of the whole. Let us all aim at so going forward ourselves that there may be increase of the body, to the building up of itself in love. Truly intelligence is necessary; but love, Divine love, is the great building force. God help us all to be filled with divine love.

With verse 17 we come face to face with detailed injunctions. The general exhortation occurs in the first verse of our chapter, and is of a positive character. Here the first injunction is of a negative sort: we are not to walk as do men of the world. Verses 18 and 19 give us a glimpse into the dark cesspool of Gentile iniquity which surrounded these saints at Ephesus. We see enough to discern the same hideous features as are exposed more fully in Romans 1. Is the Gentile world of the twentieth century any better? We fear not; though the evil may be more skilfully hidden from the public eye. Still there is vanity,

coupled with darkness, ignorance, blindness, and consequent alienation from all life which is of God.

Now we have learned Christ. Not only have we heard Him, and as a result believed in Him, but we have been "taught by Him," or as it may be read, "instructed in Him." He is not only our Teacher but our Lesson Book. He is not only our Lesson Book but our Example. The truth is in Jesus: that is, He Himself when here on earth was the perfect setting forth of all that is enjoined upon us. He perfectly manifested the "righteousness and holiness of truth," of which verse 24 (marginal reading) speaks.

What we have learned, then, concerns three things. First, as to our having put off the old man, which is utterly corrupt. Second, as to a complete renewal in the very spirit of our mind. Third, as to our having put on the new man, which is wholly according to God. The putting off and the putting on are not something which we are to do, as the Authorized translation would infer, but something which the true believer has done. "Your having put off... and having put on" (N. Tr.).

The "old man" is not Adam personally, but rather the Adamic nature and character. So too the "new man" is not Christ personally, but the nature and character which are His. The righteousness and holiness, which spring forth from, and are in entire consonance with truth, were altogether proper to Him, and like a native growth. With us they are not native but foreign, and consequently as regards us the new man is spoken of as created. Nothing short of creation would do, and nothing less than complete renewal in the spirit of our minds.

But let us not miss the point that all this is what has been arrived at in the case of the true believer. It is of the very essence of true Christianity. We are to be characterized by a walk wholly different from the rest of the Gentiles because this great transaction has taken place, if indeed we have heard and learned of Christ; which is equivalent to saying, if indeed we are really His.

The Apostle proceeds to lay his finger upon particular manifestations of the old man that we are to put off. Because the old man has been put off we are to put off all his features in detail. He begins with lying which is to be put off in favour of truth. The previous verse had mentioned holiness of truth as marking

the new man, so we must be off with the lying which marks the old. Moreover, anger, theft, corrupt speech, and all similar evil use of the tongue, are to be put away, and kindness and forgiveness are to characterize us. We are to forgive others as we have been forgiven ourselves.

In these closing verses of the chapter we have not only what we are to put away but what we are to put on. Not lying, but truth. Not stealing, but toiling so as to have the wherewithal to give to others. Not corrupt talk, but words of grace and edification. Not anger and bitterness and heated clamour, but kind forgiveness. And all this in view of the grace which God has shown us for Christ's sake, and in view of the indwelling of the Spirit of God.

We are sealed by that Holy Spirit until the day of the redemption of our bodies and of the whole inheritance purchased by the blood of Christ. He will not leave us, but He is very sensitive as to holiness. We may easily grieve Him, and in consequence lose for the time the happy experiences that result from His presence. So may God help us to lay these practical instructions very much to heart, that we may walk not as the world, but in righteousness, holiness and truth.

Chapter 5

THE CLOSING WORDS of chapter 4 enforce upon us the obligation to kindness and forgiveness which rests upon all saints, inasmuch as we have been forgiven of God for Christ's sake. The opening words of chapter 5 carry this thought a step further and a step higher. Not only have we been forgiven but we have been introduced into the Divine family. We are children of God and beloved by Him. Hence as dear children we are to be followers, or imitators, of God.

The imitation enjoined is not artificial but natural. Here are children playing in the market-place. They hold an imaginary court. This little maiden, arrayed in cheap finery, is impersonating a queen. She imitates queenly manners as best she can, but it is all very crude and artificial. There however is a small lad, minutely observing his father. Presently friends are smiling at him and observing how very like his father he is. His imitation is largely unconscious and wholly natural, for he is the son of his father, possessing his life and nature. Now it is as children of God that we are called upon to be imitators of God.

We are to walk in love. This is not natural to us as the children of Adam, but it is natural to us as born of God, for God is love.

Walking in love is thus simply the manifesting in practice of the Divine nature. Hence it adds, "as Christ also has loved us," since in Christ the Divine nature was seen in all its fulness and perfection. In His case moreover love led to action. He gave Himself for us in sacrifice to God. In this of course He stands alone, though we are to love even as He loved. He was the true burnt offering, the Antitype of Leviticus 1.

Now love of the true and divine sort is altogether exclusive of the evils that spring from the flesh. Hence these things are to have no place amongst saints, indeed they are not to be even named among them. Things like those specified in verse 3 appeal to instincts deeply rooted in man's fallen nature, and we do well not only to avoid the things but also the contamination that is induced by thinking about them. We cannot talk about them without thinking of them, even if we condemn them in our talking. Therefore let us not talk about them. Nor let us allow our talk to descend to the level of foolishness or jesting. A Christian is neither a fool nor a jester, so let us not appear either in our conversation. Thanksgiving is what becomes the lips of those who are forgiven and become children of God.

The firm and decisive way in which the Apostle draws the line in verses 5 and 6 is very remarkable. The kingdom of Christ and of God is characterized by holiness. The unholy are outside that kingdom and subject to the wrath of God. There was to be no mistake about this, for evidently then as now there were those who wished to blur this sharp distinction and to excuse unholiness. Other scriptures indicate that one who is a true believer may fall into any of these sins, but no true believer is characterized by any of them. No one characterized by such sins is to be regarded as a true Christian whatever they may say or profess.

The true believer's attitude towards such is to be regulated by this. Whatever be their profession they have no part in the kingdom of God, and therefore we who have an inheritance in the kingdom can have no part with them. This is what verse 7 so plainly states. Notice too that the last word of that verse is them. We are not only to avoid the sins, but also to avoid all participation with the sinners. The persons as well as the evils are to be avoided. The difference between us and them is as great and distinct as that between light and darkness.

Once we were darkness ourselves. In this fact lies our danger, for as a consequence of it there is that in us which answers to the appeal of the darkness. Therefore the less we have to do with the darkness the better — whether as regards the practices of darkness, or as regards the people who themselves are darkness and consequently practice it. We who believe are light in the Lord and as a result intolerant of darkness; for as it is in nature so it is in grace. Light and darkness cannot exist together. If light comes in darkness vanishes. Light and darkness mutually exclude each other.

Being light in the Lord we are to walk as children of light. We are to be in practice what we are in actual reality. Let us carefully note this for it is a feature of the exhortations of the Gospel. The Law demanded of men that they should be what they were not. The Gospel exhorts believers to be what they are. Yet the fact that we are so exhorted shows that a contrary principle is in existence. It infers that the flesh with its tendencies is still within the believer. As the flesh is held in check and quiescent, what we really are as God's workmanship shines out.

Verse 9 explains what will shine out, for the correct reading is not, "the fruit of the Spirit," but, "the fruit of the light." Three

words sum up that fruit — goodness, righteousness, truth. The opposites — evil, iniquity, unreality — should be entirely shut out of our lives. Walking thus as children of light we prove what is pleasing to God: prove, that is, not by a process of reasoning, but by experience of a practical sort. We put things to the test, and thus learn experimentally for ourselves.

The believer's life therefore may be summed up as bringing forth the fruits of the light, since he is a child of the light, while maintaining complete separation from the unfruitful works of darkness, for he is no longer of the darkness. Indeed he is to go even further and reprove them. This word, reprove, occurs again you will notice in verse 13. The meaning of it is not exactly, admonish or rebuke, but rather, expose. It is to expose, as by light, the true character of the works in question. If a believer shines out in his true character, his whole life will have that effect, just as in supreme measure his Master's did. Nevertheless of course there may be many occasions when words of rebuke are needful.

The passage we are considering puts a very solemn responsibility upon us. It is just here that friction and trouble with the world begin. People do not usually object to the kindly side of

Christianity: gracious words and gracious actions meet with their approval. The trouble begins when holiness is maintained. And holiness, as these verses show, demands no fellowship with evil — neither the evil-doers (v. 7), nor their works (v. 11). When a believer walks the separated path which is here enjoined, and manifests himself as a child of light, then he must expect storms. It was thus in superlative degree with our Lord and Master. "God is Love" has always been a far more popular text than "God is light."

The peculiar quality of light is that it makes manifest all things that come under its rays. The truth of things becomes plain, and hence the one who does truth naturally welcomes the light, whilst he who does evil hates the light and avoids it. God is light in Himself; believers are only "light in the Lord," just as the moon is only light to us, in as far as its face is in the light of the sun. Therefore it is that we, like the moon, must abide in the light of our great Luminary, Christ Himself. This is very plainly indicated in verse 14.

This verse is not a quotation from the Old Testament, though it is probably an allusion to Isaiah 60:1. We very easily fall victims to spiritual sleepiness, since the influences of the world

are so soporific. Then we become like men sleeping amongst those dead in trespasses and sins. We are the living and they are the dead, and there should normally be the sharpest distinction between us. If we sleep amongst the dead we all appear very much alike. The call is to awake and arise that we may be in the sunshine of the Christ. Then it is that we are clear of all fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness and, being luminous ourselves, the fruit of the light is manifested in us.

Our walk and behaviour then is to be marked by wisdom — the wisdom that seizes every opportunity of serving the Lord on the one hand, and of gaining an understanding of His will and pleasure on the other. The very essence of good service is, not merely that we accomplish work, but that what we do is according to the will of the One, whom we serve. The fact is that for this, as for all else enjoined upon us here, we need to be filled with the Spirit.

Each of us, who have believed the Gospel of our salvation, has received the gift of the Holy Spirit, as we saw when considering Eph. 1. It is another thing however to be filled with the Spirit, and the responsibility as to it is left with us. We are ex-

horted to be filled, which plainly infers that we are not filled — at all events at the moment when the exhortation is given.

The Spirit-filled believer is the subject of an extraordinary uplift. He is carried clean outside himself, centred in Christ, and enabled for the service of God in a power which is more than human. The man who is drunk with wine is carried outside himself in a way that is wholly evil. By the Spirit of God we may be carried outside ourselves in a way that is wholly good.

We get instances of the disciples being filled with the Spirit in Acts 2:4; Acts 4:8; Acts 4:31; Acts 7:55; Acts 13:9. These references lead us to think that the filling with the Spirit was an experience of rather an exceptional nature even in the earliest apostolic time. Still it is most evidently set before us in our chapter as something to be desired and aimed at by every Christian.

It is not only an obligation but also a very wonderful privilege. To be filled with One who is a divine Person, can that be a negligible thing? It means that He has a complete control. If we take the exhortation to heart we shall naturally ask — How may I be filled? What have I to do in order that I may be?

That is no small question. We may at least say this; that it is ours to remove out of the way all that hinders. The Spirit of God is holy. Moreover, He is sensitive. We may easily grieve Him, even by things that we allow without a bad conscience. Correspondingly we may easily be preoccupied with things that we consider quite harmless, and yet being pre-occupied there is not the room for Him to occupy us. A good many "harmless" things will have to go out of my life and yours too, if we are to be filled with the Spirit.

The fruits of being filled with the Spirit follow in verses 19 to 21. The heart is filled with gladness which finds a spiritual outlet in song. There is a glad acceptance of all things — even adverse circumstances — with thanks-giving to the Father, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ; and as to our relations with one another the spirit of yieldingness and submission, whilst always maintaining the fear of God. Our submission to one another must not be at the expense of true subjection to Him.

All these detailed exhortations, which have continued from Eph. 4:17, have been applicable to all believers. Now we have the special exhortations, and with verse 22 the apostle turns to the wives. To them the exhortation is comprised in the one

word, Submit. This flows naturally out of the general exhortation to submission in verse 21. The difficulty about submission is that it entails the non-assertion of one's own will. But clearly enough in the economy of things, divinely established, for this world, the subject place is allotted to the wife. Her place is typical of the position in which the church stands to Christ. Just as Christ is "Head of the church," all authority and directing ability and power being vested in Him, so the husband is "head of the wife."

Alas! in practice through the centuries, the church (as a professing body) has got far away from its true position. The church "is subject to Christ," according to the Divine plan: it has been very insubject in its actual behaviour. It has acted for itself, and legislated as though it were the Head and not the body. Hence the confusion in church circles, so manifest on every hand. When the wife, even the Christian wife, sets aside the authority of her own husband, trouble ensues in a similar way.

The wife may however urge that she has a very awkward and incompetent husband! Too often indeed so it is. But the remedy for that is not the overturning of the Divine order. The church

certainly has no such excuse, for it has an absolutely perfect Head; who is not only Head to the body but Saviour also.

Because the human husband, even the believing one, is frequently very imperfect, and always somewhat imperfect, an even lengthier exhortation is addressed to him. In one word his duty is love. It is easy to see that if the husband yields to his wife the love which is her due, she will not have much difficulty in yielding to him the submission which is his due. Obviously the greater responsibility is placed upon the shoulders of the husband. He is to love, and she is to submit; but the initiative rests with him.

When we turn from the responsibility resting upon the husband, which is the type, to the antitype, which as ever is seen in Christ, we find ourselves in the presence of perfection. The initiative indeed was with Him, and He has taken it in a most wonderful way. He not only loved the church but gave Himself for it. Moreover He has undertaken its practical sanctification and cleansing, and ultimately He will present it to Himself in glory in a perfection which is absolutely suitable to Himself.

The giving of Himself for the church took place in the past: it involved His death and resurrection. The sanctifying and purifying, of which verse 26 speaks, is proceeding in the present by means of the Word. The cleansing here spoken of is by water, be it noted, not by blood. The distinction is an important one. The Blood indeed cleanses, as 1 John 1:7 declares but that is in a judicial sense. The Blood absolves us from guilt, and thus cleanses us in the eyes of the great Judge of all. The water of the Word cleanses us morally; that is, in heart and in character, and consequently in all our ways. This present washing of the church by the Word is taking place of course in the hearts and lives of the saints, of whom the church is composed.

The presentation of the perfected church will take place in the future glory. It will be Christ's own gift to Himself! It will be all His own workmanship; for He loved, He gave Himself, He sanctified, He cleansed, and, as verse 29 adds, He nourished, He cherished, and finally He presented to Himself. A most wonderful work, and a most wonderful triumph, surely! Let us keep this aspect of things well in view, especially when cast down by present difficulties in the church, and painfully conscious of its sorrowful plight.

Now all these facts as to Christ and the church are to shed their light upon the relations between the Christian husband and wife. The marriage relationship is consequently set forth in the highest possible light; in a light altogether unknown to believers of Old Testament days, which accounts for the fact that many of them freely practised things which are wholly disallowed for us today. We are to walk in this light, and consequently the Christian husband is to love his wife as he loves himself — no mean standard that! — and the wife to reverence her husband.

Briefly observe three further points. First, this mystery concerns Christ and the church Not a church; no thought here of a local church, nor of any number of local assemblies. It is the church, one glorious body, and the church not viewed as a professing body, but rather as that elect body which is the fruit of Divine workmanship.

Second, the thought of the body comes in here; for we, who constitute the church, are spoken of as "members of His body." Yet the main thought of the passage is that of the wife, for the church's place is set forth as the pattern for Christian wives. We point this out because sometimes the fact of the church being

the body of Christ is emphasized in order to maintain that it therefore cannot be in the place of the bride or wife. The fact is, as this passage indicates, that the church holds both positions.

This is made yet more plain by the third thing we point out. God's original creation of Adam and Eve was ordered in view of Christ and the church, as verses 28 to 32 show. Now Eve was Adam's wife, but she was also his body, being built up from one of his ribs. Adam's rib has no doubt provoked a good deal of sarcastic merriment amongst unbelieving modernists, who call themselves Christians. Yet here the fact concerning it clearly underlies the argument. It is nearly always thus. There is a new Testament allusion to the ridiculed Old Testament story. You cannot scrap the one without scrapping the other, if you add mental honesty and integrity to your modernism. We whole-heartedly accept both.

Chapter 6

WE PASS FROM the relationship of husband and wife to those of children and fathers, servants and masters, as we open chapter 6. Obedience is to mark the child, and careful nurture and admonition the father. But all is to be as under the Lord, as

indicated in verses 1 and 4. This sets everything on a very high level. So also it is with the servant and the master. Their relations are to be regulated as before the Lord, as verses 7, 8 and 9 show.

All these exhortations are very important today for strong Satanic influences are sweeping through Christendom, to the denying and disturbing of all that should characterize these relationships. But the very fact that this is so presents to the believer a great opportunity for witness to the truth, by carefully maintaining the relationships in their integrity according to God's word. The opportunity for witness as servants or masters is very pronounced, inasmuch as that relationship is much in the public eye. The sight of a Christian servant marked by obedience and service with all good will, as rendered to the Lord, is a very fine one. So also is that of a Christian master marked by an equal good will and care, in the sight of the great Master of both in heaven.

Thus far the epistle has given us a very wonderful unfolding of truth as to Christ and the church, followed by exhortations to life of a very exalted character. Now in verse 10 we come to his final word. It concerns the adversaries and the armour that we

need, if we are to maintain the truth and live the life that has been set before us. We are not left at our own charges. The power of the Lord is at our disposal and we are to be strong in His might.

The adversaries that are contemplated here are not human but Satanic. They exist in the world of spirits and not in flesh and blood. Satan is their chief, but they are spoken of as principalities and powers, and also as "world-rulers of this darkness" (R.V.). We know very little about them, and do not need to know. It is enough for us that their evil design is unmasked. They are "world-rulers" for the whole world system is controlled and dominated by them, little as the human actors on the world stage may suspect it. The effect of their domination is darkness. Here is the explanation of the gross spiritual darkness which fills the earth. How often after the Gospel has been very clearly preached have we heard people express their wonder that unconverted folk have listened to it all without a ray of light entering their hearts. In this scripture, and also in 2 Corinthians 4:4, is an explanation which removes all element of wonder from the phenomenon.

The point here however is that these great antagonistic powers exert all their wiles and energy against believers. They cannot rob them of their soul's salvation, but they can divert them from an understanding of their heavenly calling, and from a life which is really in keeping with it; and this is what they aim at doing. Now it stands to reason that we cannot meet such powers as these in our own strength. Thank God we need not attempt any such thing for all the armour that we need is freely provided of God. But we have to take it. Otherwise we shall not experience its value.

We are to take to us the whole armour of God, and also we are to put it on. Then we shall be able to withstand, and to stand. The conflict here is viewed mainly as being defensive. We are set in an exalted and heavenly position by the grace of our God, and there we are to stand in spite of every attempt to dislodge us. In keeping with this the various parts of the armour specified are, with one exception, of a defensive nature. Girdle, breastplate, shoes, shield and helmet are none of them weapons of offence; only the sword is that.

The Apostle is speaking figuratively of course, for we find that each item of the armour is something of a moral and spiritual

sort which is to be taken up by us: things which though given to us by God, and hence to be taken by us, are also to be put on in a practical and experimental way. The first item is truth. That is to be as a girdle to our loins. The girding up of the loins expresses a preparing for activity. All our activities are to be circumscribed by truth. The truth is to govern us. The truth is given to us by God, but we are to put it on, so that it may govern us. God's word is truth; but it is not truth in the Bible which is going to defend us, but rather truth applied in a practical way to all our activities.

The breastplate is righteousness. We are the very righteousness of God in Christ, but it is when we as a consequence walk in practical righteousness that it acts as a breastplate, covering all our vital parts from the blows directed by our powerful foes. How many a Christian warrior has fallen sorely wounded in the fight because there were grievous flaws in matters of practical righteousness. Chinks in the breastplate offer an opening to the arrows of the enemy.

In a normal way we hardly think of shoes as being in the nature of armour, yet inasmuch as it is with our shoes that we continually come into contact with the earth, they take on that charac-

ter from the Christian standpoint. If our contact with earth is not right we shall be vulnerable indeed. What does "the preparation of the gospel of peace," mean? Not that we should be preparing the way of the gospel in an evangelistic sense (though to do that is of course very desirable) but that we ourselves should come under the preparation which the gospel of peace effects. If our feet are shod in this way we shall carry the peace of the Gospel into all our dealings with men of this world, and be protected ourselves in so doing.

Then besides all this there is faith to act as a shield; that faith which means a practical and living confidence in God; that faith which keeps the eye on Him and His Word, and not on the circumstances nor on the foes. With the shield protecting us, outside our other armour, the darts of fiery doubt flung by the wicked are averted and quenched.

The helmet protects the head, which next to the heart is the most vulnerable point in man. Salvation, known, realized, enjoyed and worked out in practice, is that helmet for us. When Paul wrote to the Philippians, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which works in you both

to will and to do of His good pleasure," (Phil. 2:12-13) he was really exhorting them to take and wear the helmet of salvation.

Lastly comes, "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." This may be used both defensively and offensively. The Word of God will parry every thrust which our adversary may make; it will also put him to flight with one well directed blow. It is spoken of as the Spirit's sword, for He indited it at the outset, and He it is who gives skill and understanding in its use. Our great Example in the use of this sword is the Lord Himself, as recorded in Matthew 4 and Luke 4.

Our Lord is also our Example as to the prayer which is enjoined upon us in verse 18. Luke's gospel specially emphasizes this feature of His life. Having assumed Manhood, He took the dependent place which is proper to man, and carried it through in the fullest perfection. Hence prayer characterized His life, and it is to characterize ours. Prayer is always to be our resource, and especially so in connection with the conflict of which we have just been reading. The Word of God is indeed the sword of the Spirit. But just because it is we shall only wield it effectively if we are praying always in the Spirit.

Without continued and abiding dependence on God we shall not wear any piece of the armour aright.

Our prayers are to reach that earnestness which is indicated by the word, supplication; they are also to be accompanied by watching. We are to be on the look-out to avoid all that would be inconsistent with our requests on the one hand, and to welcome the answer to our requests on the other. This indicates intensity and reality in our praying, so that our prayers are indeed a force and not a farce.

We are not to be circumscribed in our prayers. We have to begin with ourselves doubtless, but we do not stop there. We enlarge our requests to include "all saints." Just as all saints are needed for the apprehension of the truth (Eph. 3:18), so the scope of our prayers is not to be less than all saints. The scope of our prayers is enlarged to "all men" in 1 Timothy 2:1. Ephesians is however pre-eminently the church epistle and hence "all saints" is the circumference contemplated here.

Yet we are not to be so occupied with all that we wander off into indefiniteness. So the Apostle adds, "and for me." Great servant of God though he was, he desired to be supported by

the prayers of others not so great as he. Only he desired prayer, not that he might be released from prison, and his circumstances eased, but that he might be able to fully accomplish his ministry though a captive. He was in bonds, yet as much an ambassador as when he was free (See 2 Corinthians 5:20).

When free he thought of himself more as an ambassador of the Gospel, beseeching men to be reconciled. Now in captivity he regards himself as an ambassador of the mystery — that mystery which he has briefly unfolded in the earlier part of the epistle. It is "the mystery of the Gospel," inasmuch as the one springs out of the other and is its appropriate sequel. If we do not understand the Gospel we cannot understand the mystery. The mystery, for instance, must be as a closed book to those who imagine that the Gospel is intended to Christianize the earth and thus introduce the millennium.

Paul's closing desires for the brethren though simple are very full. How happy must the brethren be when peace, love and faith, all proceeding from a Divine source, have free course in their midst. Then indeed grace rests upon them. Only there must be purity of heart and motive. The last words of verse 24, "in sincerity," or, "in incorruption" are a reminder to us that

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even in such early days, as those in which Paul was writing, that which was corrupt had found an entrance amongst those who professed to be Christian. To love the Lord Jesus Christ in incorruption is the hallmark of reality, the fruit of the genuine work of God.