

# Ephesians

## Introduction

*Notes on Classes by Alfred D. Norris, August 15-23, 1953*

When we have become accustomed to taking seriously the idea of “contending earnestly for the faith”, sometimes it is difficult to see that the faith has other things than “contention” in its make-up. When “the Truth” is so often contrasted with the falsehood around, we may not always be able to appreciate the Truth in its own right, without aiming a stone at the falsehoods as we think of them. And the difficulty is not new. The Apostle Paul was compassed about with so many heresies, that he might have been pardoned if he had smelt a heresy whenever he thought about the Gospel. For if he preached a free salvation to all nations, a Jew would confront him with the proviso: “but only if they are circumcised”. If he proclaimed the grace of God as competent to forgive the worst of sinners, some lascivious person would interpret this to mean that the more he sinned, the more scope there would be for grace to operate. If he announced the vanity of flesh in the things of the Spirit, he would need to fight on two fronts: against those on the one hand who said, “In that case let us torment flesh so that it won’t assert itself;” and against those on the other who answered, “No! In that case let flesh do as it likes, for it makes no difference.”

And when we realise how easily Paul could find his work undone by Judaisers, or teachers of licence, or worldly men and competitors, who followed in his trail, we could scarcely have been surprised if all his letters had the temper of Galatians, or of some parts of the two Letters to the Corinthians. But they have not. 1 and 2 Thessalonians are full of robust confidence in the charitable and large-hearted faith of the Christians in Thessalonica (even though there is gentle counsel about false expectations of the Lord’s near coming, and thoughtful warning about the abomination called the Man of Sin). Romans is deeply conscious of the errors around, but finds it possible to proceed gravely and almost dispassionately along the course of its sublime reasoning; and the Epistles of the First Imprisonment are full of serene confidence and deep love for those to whom they are addressed. Scarcely anywhere, indeed, except in Galatians, is there a complete absence of some bright recollection of the faith of those who are addressed.

In Ephesians, however, we have something quite unequalled in Paul’s writings or out of them. There were presumably heresies in the city of Diana of the Ephesians, and the Letter perhaps shows that it is not quite unconscious of them: but it does not allow this to deflect it from its chosen course. There were doubtless doctrinal problems waiting to be unravelled: but nowhere does this Letter imitate the logical processes of Romans. And already there may have been traces of those errors so sternly rebuked in the Apocalypse, but no direct rebuke to them is offered here. There is, in fact, perhaps nothing so serene and so exalted in all the New Testament than the first three chapters of this letter, and if the more practical character of the three last chapters lowers the tone a little, it is due to this reason and to no other.

Here, then, if anywhere, we can learn of the sublime heights of the Gospel without arguing about it: and from this Letter if we can learn it from anywhere, we can be taught about the love of God so as to know it in our inward man.

It would be foreign to our intentions to start by attempting to analyse the Letter. Of course, the inspired writings of the Spirit are not in the same class as ordinary human letters, but it is surely not unimportant that 21 out of the New Testament’s 27 books are written in letter-form, a mode

that is quite unknown in the Old. It has been pointed out as typical of the new state of affairs that the profound but impersonal utterance of prophets should now be exchanged for the intimate and personal counsel of letters. And there is none of us who would not be faintly surprised to find his correspondence, however weighty, analysed in the way expositors are apt to do with the Letters of the New Testament.

We can reasonably suppose that those to whom this letter was read in the first instance - in Ephesus, and probably also in Laodicea and the other cities of Roman Asia - would have a good idea what it was about, without needing the assistance of a lecturer in theology to analyse for them what the Apostle's plan was, and to tell them the meanings of the theological concepts which he used: and it would be good to think that something of the same kind was possible to-day. Of course, this does not mean that either they or we can sound the apostle's profundity with a single probe: possibly we shall never do that, for the depths of the Spirit are unsearchable; and we in this day have the additional difficulty that we understand less easily both the language and the modes of thought which were so familiar to them.

Nevertheless, most of these difficulties can be overcome, and it will be our purpose to try to deal with them so that we can put ourselves back in the position of the ordinary men and women - who nevertheless were saints - to whom the letter was written, and read it with the freshness which comes to those who feel that it was also written to themselves. We shall move slowly towards that goal, starting at the beginning of the Letter and pausing from time to time as we meet matters which demand discussion, and then at the end trying to pull all that we have learned together and read the whole letter with instructed eyes.

## **Ephesians Chapter 1: "The will of God"**

We begin with the salutation: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God", and at once, though we may not immediately realise it, are brought up against one of the characteristics of the letter: "by the will of God". It is obvious, of course, for God worketh all things according to the counsel of His will, but it is not too obvious to be given constant stress.

Consider the following:

- "according to the good pleasure of His will" (1:5);
- "the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which he hath purposed in Himself" (1:9)
- "who worketh all things after the counsel of His will" (1:11).

Three times within the first chapter in addition to the address, Paul seems to be determined from the start to leave us in no doubt as to where the purpose lies. We were never really in doubt, but it was always possible to behave as though we were: it is never really easy for our minds to reconcile themselves to the thought that they have absolutely no say whatsoever in the destiny of the universe, but that it all was determined from outside, by the Creator, without whose will we should have no part nor lot in this matter. And therefore Paul, who is to stress this greatly so far as the saints in general are concerned, begins with a proper humility by stressing it about himself. He is a messenger of Jesus Christ, because it pleases God that he should be so: if it did not please God, he never could have become this, no matter how much he had wanted it. And all the three other occasions are universals: Paul, the saints in Ephesus and Asia, and all things in heaven and earth, play their part according to the purpose eternally conceived in the mind of God; or in the long run they play no part at all.

This, no doubt, is the same as the thought in John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word" [John 1:1], "The Word was with God" is perhaps almost identical with "He purposed in Himself": God was accountable to no one for what He did, and is accountable to no one for what He does.

The second verse is quite according to the ordinary pattern of Paul's letters: "Grace and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:2), for this salutation is rarely or never omitted. It would seem that it was to the Apostles unthinkable that they should send a message from themselves to their brethren, without sending first a message from the One who had called them. It could in no way better be brought out that they were not their own, and were not writing nor labouring in their own behalf. The people to whom they wrote were their friends, indeed, but not their personal friends, if we may put it so. God had not chosen them by themselves and for themselves, but for His own name primarily, and as fit companions for each other incidentally. Each stood where he stood by grace, and each therefore invoked grace upon the other when he wrote to him. From God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ they had obtained all, which was worthwhile which they possessed: from the same fountain they would seek these continued blessings on each other. Now comes the phrase, which sets the tone for the letter: "Blessed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:3) Paul does not usually begin like this, even though praise and thankfulness is never (except perhaps in Galatians) far from his opening thoughts. But elsewhere he is usually more restrained:

- “I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all” [Romans 1:8] (But the thankfulness is because their faith is spoken of throughout the world, a very different matter from that we are now to think of!)
- “I thank my God always on your behalf” [1 Corinthians 1:4] (Because God’s gifts were so richly manifest in their conduct)
- “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” [2 Corinthians 1:3] (who comforteth us in our tribulations; the nearest we have yet reached to the thought in Ephesians, but concerned with the particular comfort which Paul had reached in particular difficulties, rather than with the vast universals which we shall meet)
- “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you” [Philippians 1:3] (very like Romans in tone)
- “We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” [Colossians 1:33] (since we heard of your faith)

The same thought as this last is repeated in the two Letters to the Thessalonians, in 2 Timothy and in Philemon: and an abundant array of evidence is thus found that Paul had constantly in mind his appreciation of God’s work in the saints. But nowhere else does he rise to the heights which he reaches here:

- “who hath blessed us” [1:3]
- “according as He hath chosen us” [1:4]
- “having fore-ordained us” [1:5]
- “He made us accepted in the beloved” [1:6]
- “in whom we have redemption through his blood” [1:7]
- “having made known unto us the mystery of His will” [1:9]
- “in whom we have obtained an inheritance” [1:11]

This is a selection only, but it established the point. God is thanked, not for anything we have done (which would be a little unreasonable, even though the Pharisee in the parable- did not think so, [Luke 18:11]; not even for anything which we have been empowered to do through His might (as He is in so many of the other epistles); but purely and simply for what He has done and intended for us, utterly irrespective of the use we have made of it, or any fruits which it has borne in us. In other words, this is perhaps the only time, certainly the only time so early in a letter, in which the subject is absolutely fundamental: in which Paul goes right back to the beginning and origin of things. Nowhere else is man left so completely out of account, except as the recipient of all that God has done, by grace, in purpose and through power.

God hath blessed us “with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” [1:3]: in this phrase the Scriptural doctrine of heaven going is set out. It is comprehensive, embodying all spiritual blessings; but it has nothing to do with dead persons. Paul was so blessed as he wrote, and the same blessing was accessible to every saint who read his message. The “heavenly places” might be “the heavenly things” or “the heavenly realms”, for the scripture reads simply, “the heavnlies”; and the expression in this form appears only five times in the New Testament, each time in this Letter:

- “all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ” (1:3)
- “God raised Christ from the dead, and set him at His own right hand in heavenly places” (1:20)
- “God hath raised us up together, and made us to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (2:6)
- “to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in the heavenly places might be made known by the church the manifold wisdom of God” (3:10)
- “we wrestle against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in the heavenly places” (6:12)

The significance of this group of five passages may not be obvious at once, in its fulness, but there are points, which are clear from the start. For in 1:20 it is evidently the resurrection of the Lord, which is in issue. Yet it is not a mere bald statement of the Resurrection, for the working of God’s mighty power when He raised the Lord is a working which extends beyond Him, to the saints “which He wrought in us”! Of course the Lord was the first and the greatest, and he was also in some sense the only subject of that resurrection. But he was the first and greatest of a multitude, and he was the only because there is no salvation in any other.

We have here, in fact, the doctrine of the Priesthood of Christ, put in non-priestly terms. It is an interesting and profitable reflection that it is possible to talk about the death of Christ without mentioning the word “Sacrifice”, and about His activities at God’s right hand without mentioning the word “priest”. Sacrifice and priesthood are the oldest and the most complete pictures of what the Lord was to do for his saints, but they are not the only ones, and when the reality is achieved, it is possible to speak in other terms and this is what the apostle does here. God has taken the Lord Jesus to heaven, literally, and He takes the saints with Him thither, in spirit. 1:20 is thus the centre, which gives meaning to 1:3 and 2:6.

But when we say “in spirit”, we are far from meaning that this is something unreal, because it is not in the body. When the Lord said, “I am the way, the truth and the life: no-one cometh unto the Father but by me” it was not of a bodily approach to the Father’s throne that He spoke, but it was a real approach, in which the sinner for the first time found himself able to find access to God without the agency of human priest and animal sacrifice. The “mansion” of this passage is the “abode” of John 14:23, where God and the Lord make their home in the company of those who love them and keep their word. This approach is the special privilege of those who have made their covenant with their God, and so, in this dispensation, it comes to pass that the Lord “will show Himself unto them, and not unto the world” [John 14:22]

It is the same with the high priesthood of Jesus as expounded in the Letter to the Hebrews, Formally, the Holy Place was open only to the priesthood, and the Most Holy to the High Priest alone, and that but once a year. But now the whole heavenly structure has been thrown open by the death and ascension of the Lord, and, with the veil removed in His flesh, all who will have access to the Holiest of all by the blood of Christ, and are invited to draw near with boldness.

There is, as yet, nothing about invitation in our Letter, for it is concerned only with what God has done for us, and not with whether or not we will avail ourselves of its opportunities. God has worked, and worked successfully, and there for the time being is the end of the matter. His complete purpose is not for this moment to be weakened by the knowledge that men and women do not always appraise it at its full worth. Thus every circumstance of the life of the

saints is brought within the compass of God's operations in the heavenly places. He wrought all that was needed when He raised Jesus Christ from the dead, for this was the guarantee that all who are Christ's could come into God's presence through Him. Thus we also, if we are fully His, sit in the presence of God: while we walk on the earth. But it is not to be supposed that we do this only in our quiet moments, when no activity threatens our minds, and when contemplation only is asked of us. The same is true in our activities in the world. When we preach the Gospel to the unbeliever we do it, not as leaving the solace of God's companionship, and going into unfriendly company alone; but, rather, God brings the arena of exertion into His own presence, and "unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places there are made known by the Church the manifold witness of God." It is not as though these powers have any right in the heavenly places on their own account, or that they would be there in any case if they were not being preached to. But it is that they come within the reach of God's operations when they are being preached to, and the saints remain within the reach of God's helping hand while they carry out their work of witness. "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," covers this phase of their lives. But it covers another also, more threatening God is with them even when they do battle with the powers of evil.

We know, of course, that the Lord is of too pure eyes than to behold iniquity, and it might often be our thought that, when temptation comes to us, the very unworthy thoughts which trespass in our minds put us for the time being out of the society of God.. In a sense, the Old Covenant, which came to emphasise the consciousness of sin, said this very clearly, and until purification was carried out, there was no access again into God's company. But in this Book the superiority of the New Covenant is beautifully witnessed. "Are you going out into the presence of temptation?" says God in effect, "Then you must certainly go out properly equipped." and so:

"Take up the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil; that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day and, having done all, to stand. Gird your loins with truth, take on the breastplate of righteousness, and on your feet the readiness to preach which the Gospel gives." (6:10-17)

Our wrestling, that is to say, is constantly to be carried out with God at our side, around us, and within. It is not that we leave the presence of God in order to encounter evil, but rather that we bring the evil into God's company, and ask Him to help us in overcoming it. We remain at our Lord's side whenever we fight His battles: add in seeking to quench the fiery darts of the wicked we are fighting His battle, continuing the conflict which began in the days of His weakness: the days when the dragon sought to devour Him at His birth (Revelation 12:4), but was overcome, and from the presence of God was cast down the accuser of our brethren, the power of sin which said, "You cannot receive this man here, for he is a sinner" (Revelation 12:10). In the atoning death of Jesus sinners were made righteous, and might indeed come before God, in spite of the previously powerful complaints of sin against them. And the tables are turned now, for now heaven is with them in their fight against the sin, which formerly they served.

But this has taken us a long way from 1:3, where we made our last contact with the wording of this Epistle, and we must return. "He chose us in Him, before the foundation of the world". There is no need, and no profit in the exercise, to suppose that God, of predetermined and inflexible purpose, chose this man and that to be redeemed in Christ, but we can usefully expand on "before the foundation of the world", an expression which occurs some nine or ten times in the New Testament.

The occasions are:

- “I will open my mouth in parables. I will utter things kept secret from the foundations of the world” (Matthew 13:35)
- “Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:34)
- “The blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world” (Luke 11:90)
- “Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24)
- “The works were finished before the foundation of the world” (Hebrews 4:3)
- “Else must He often have suffered since the foundation of the world” (Hebrews 9:26)
- “He was foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world, but was manifest at the end of the times for your sake” (1 Peter 1:20)
- “All that dwell on the earth shall worship Him, every one whose name hath not been written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8)
- “And they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, they whose name hath not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world.” (Revelation 17:8)

No single group of passages could express better the eternal purpose of God. No single group is, perhaps, better fitted to remove misconceptions as to what is meant by predestination, and what by pre-existence. In accordance with the plan of this Epistle, we are being brought to recognise the utter dependence of all that occurs in the working out of the plan of salvation, upon the will of God; and we are being led to recognise how completely that Will had foreseen, and provided for, all that was necessary. Certainly we meet here again the essential idea behind the opening words of John’s Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word: without it was not anything made which hath been made.”

From the least to the greatest it was foreseen. The works of God, which are not finished yet, were finished before they were begun. The saints of God, who are not glorified yet, had places reserved for them in the Book of Life when as yet no name was penned. The Lamb of God, who was in the mind of God at least from the first fall, was slain before the Lamb whose skins clothed the transgressors, when as yet His death was millennia away. He was slain in purpose, and He was slain in type in all the prophets who died in anticipation. And the very kingdom which the blessed will inherit is there in all its essentials in the mind of Him who calleth the things which are not as though they were, and who bringeth again that which is past, long in advance of its bestowal: so that the New Jerusalem comes dawn ready made, just as God intended it to be, when the fulfilment of the ages produces it.

Here, therefore, a book which has so far shut out the thought of failure in individual cases, and worked only on the sublime success of God’s working, tells us that what was determined in the eternal purpose of God for those whom He would ultimately bring to glory. Nothing which was needed was left to chance: granted the needed response on our part, all is sure in the goodness of God:

“Whom He foreknew, He also foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren: and whom He foreordained, them He also called:

and whom He called them He also justified: and whom he justified, them He also glorified” (Romans 8:28-30).

Personal response is, however, beginning to creep into the development. It was God’s purpose that we should be “holy and without blemish before Him in love” (1:4). But it would be a serious mistake to suppose that this is as yet a call to action on our part. On the contrary, it is an indication of what God is able to do with the most unpromising material, if only it is willing to be confirmed to His purpose. The verse sets out what we are not, and assures us that it is possible to become it, if God’s purpose operates in us. Continuing unholiness and flaws are excluded indeed, and it is as clear already as if it had been said, that we may not now “continue in sin, that grace may abound”. Nevertheless, it is the abounding of grace, which is considered, and not our own achievement. This also is of God’s foreordination, and it leads to the sublime relationship of sonship (1:5).

The eternal purpose is powerful here also, and not for the first time we find ourselves echoing the teaching of the prologue to John’s Gospel: “The Word (by which the world was made) came into the world, and the world new him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, but of the will of the flesh, not of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:10-13). There is a birth that is not, in itself, according to God’s will: this is the birth of the flesh. There is another birth, which could not take place unless the will of God were so: this is the birth described to Nicodemus in his discussion with the Lord. “Except a man be born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God” (John 3:3-5). The inheritance of blood, the power of human will and lust, has no part in this birth. It takes place as the fruit of love, indeed, but the love is not of human art: it is the compassionate love of the creator, which begets us again by the Word of Truth, according to His will.

Now our sonship is like that of the Lord, but it is also different. It is like it in that it stems from the same source, and arises from the fulfilment of the same divine will; but it is different in that it is dependent. The Lord’s true, only-begotten, sonship comes first, and without it there would have been no other. “To them that receive” him, but only to them, is this power given. Now it is clear that children are brothers of each other, or sisters of each other, and so it is evident that “all we are brethren”. But when the Firstborn of the children is free-born, and the remainder are children by a lesser process, which can be called “adoption” (here, and in Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5); it by no means follows that the One will call the other “Brother”, or that the other has the right to use this name of the One.

And in fact, when we look at the scriptures with care, we do find a distinction made. The disciples never, to my knowledge, call their Lord their brother: they call him Master and Lord, and they say well, for so he is (John 13:13). They speak with bated breath of the exceeding exaltation to which he has been raised. They use his proper name, Jesus, or his kingly title, Christ. But they do not call him brother. They are too well aware of their humble and derived position to do that. The Lord, on the other hand, does use the title about them: those who do the will of his Father are his mother, and sister, and brother (Mark 3:35). He is not ashamed to call us brethren, since he, like the children, partook of flesh and blood (Hebrews 2:11ff). But this is his gracious condescension. From his mighty heights he stoops down and takes our hands and this is becoming in him. But from our lowly exaltation we may not go up to him and link arms: this would be presumptuous familiarity in us. Let us, therefore, with due humility, understand the title “Brethren in Christ” in the spirit in which it was first compiled, and think of ourselves as brethren one of another, because we are in Christ; and of him as our Lord and Master, who

nevertheless is willing to stoop down and exalt us into his family. He calls us brethren, but in our calling we are also “my little children”, and it is seemly in us to recall this and show him the high honour to which the angels also exalt him. For, as our own chapter goes on, it is God’s will, in the dispensation of the fulness of the times, “to sum up all things in Christ” (1:10), all things wherever they may be, so great is the dignity now reposing in him, and to such high office was he eternally called. This, also, we can too easily forget.

When we remember that the Lord was made with passions like our own, we can too easily think of him almost as a competitor. He and we start level, we might think, and all the advantages lie with him. He conquers, and so gains a prize altogether out of our reach. And a rebellious spirit might ask, complainingly, why he should be given such high exaltation over us. But this is grievously to misunderstand the situation. It is not the case that the Lord is in all respects comparable with us. None of us would dispute the lawful right of an earthly Father to leave his belongings to his own son, and none of us would feel that we had any cause to complain when this was done. The rights of the Eternal Father are not less. And although we may not speak of Him as “leaving His belongings”, we must still acknowledge that He has right to do what He wills with His own. The Lord Jesus is “the heir” (Hebrews 1:2 and throughout this chapter), and rebels in the days of his weakness resented the fact (Matthew 21:38). “He was born king of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2; see John 18:37), and Herod would have killed him for it. But there can be no talk of unfair privilege. Here we have the Creator of the Universe providing, in His purpose, for the one of His appointment, to come and redeem. He is not competing with us, so much as gaining for Himself a glory which would not be complete or possible at all without us: “When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin he shall see, his seed, He shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.” (Isaiah 53:10).

In this immense consummation each saint has his part. When heavens and earth are united in allegiance to the Lord, we also, if we are His saints, have received in him a heritage (1:11). Our present hope in Christ leads to that glorious lot in the future time, and in the meanwhile there has been an assurance that trust is not in vain. It was the constant experience of the saints of the first century to have known some inward satisfaction from their fellowship with the Lord was to them the guarantee of the fulfilment of what had been offered them (1:12). “Ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of Promise, which is an earnest of our inheritance, unto the redemption of God’s own possession, unto the praise of His glory.” (1:13-14).

It is true, of course, that the miraculous gifts of Pentecost were such an earnest. Many of those who heard Peter’s words at Pentecost, concerning the promise to them and their children, and all that were afar off (Acts 2:39), partook of one or other of the open manifestations of the Spirit’s power, as in tongues, or prophecies, or interpretations, or healings. Yet it is surely not primarily of such things that Paul is writing here. He refers to a sealing, a guarantee or undertaking on God’s part that what He has promised is real and shall not fail. For such a purpose, the spiritual revelation of the Mount of Transfiguration was much more to the point than any possession of powers which could be openly displayed (Mark 9:1-8; 2 Peter 1:16-18). The Comforter promised in John 14 and later chapters was much more concerned with assuring the disciples’ hearts than with giving power to their physical witness. It was the assurance that the Father and the Son would make their abode with them. When Paul welcomed tribulation, on the basis that patience, experience and hope that spring from it owe their strength to the “love of God which is shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto them” (Romans 5:5). It cannot be imagined that he is speaking about what men call miracles at all.

It must in fact be recognised that, if the Christian hope is a true hope, it is not limited to the future. The abundant riches, “now in this time” (Mark 10:30), which the Lord promises to His disciples, bear witness to this. The serenity which we often had occasion to admire in those who seem to have approached nearest to the realisation of the power of God in bringing them to salvation, serve to persuade us of the reality of the undertaking that, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” The Lord’s promise that he “stands at the door and knocks, and if any man opens unto him will come in” (Revelation 3:20), is realised in the days of opportunity. The precious gift of communion with him in prayer which is known to ascend before the throne of grace, when we approach with that boldness which means certainty, is a profound indication that the earnest of the inheritance is not now in all its forms withheld from those who are receptive of it.

Now at last, Paul allows himself to breathe from his spiritual exertions. Our normal punctuation of the first paragraph of his letter shows a stop after the greeting in v. 2, and then no other until the section ends. The piling up of one aspect of God’s causeless will upon another did not permit of the work to be interrupted until the edifice was complete. And with this picture of God’s purpose in front of him, Paul can pause to pray. Let us sum up what he has said before we consider his prayer:

Blessed be God for all his heavenly blessings upon us in Christ, dating from all eternity in His purpose, accomplishing all that is needful without contribution from man, revealing to man what he could never have found out for himself, leading on to the consummation in which Christ will achieve all that has been promised through him, and the saints themselves receive that which has already been confirmed to them by their confidence in God’s present fellowship with them (1:1-14).

If so much is already done, what then can there remain to pray for? Much, and, not least, a thanksgiving of another kind. God has done all the needful, indeed, but what would this have availed if the readers of this letter had been unreceptive. It is possible to frustrate the grace of God, even though we have so far ignored it. Paul looks, almost as it were with anxiety, to find out whether this could perhaps be true of those to whom he writes. From this contemplation he turns with satisfaction. He had heard of their faith and of their fellowship with one another, and for that he can give thanks (1:15-16). The time would come when anything so far-reaching would no longer be possible of Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7), but for the time being it was true, and Paul could give thanks. Give thanks and not congratulate them. What God had done came from Him, not from them, and the praise must go to Him.

But Paul has reached great heights in this chapter, and it is not to be expected that lesser men will at once have reached so far. A real supplication is to follow. For he can understand what he has written about: his long experience of the goodness and longsuffering of God; his frequent witness of the grace which added to the church daily those that were being saved (Acts 2:47), and, perhaps above all, the vision of Paradise which it was not lawful for him to utter (2 Corinthians 12:4). All these have worked in him a clear consciousness of the riches of what God has done. But with those to whom this letter is written it is otherwise. He has learned more than they, and they, for all their faith and love, are now for the first time seen as mere beginners on the path of spiritual progress:

“I make mention of you in my prayers, that God may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know.” (1:16-18).

They did not know what Paul knew. They were, perhaps, in much the same position as us during very many years of our pilgrimage, knowing the rudiments of their faith, but not having attained to its heights. These could be reached only by constant climbing, aided by the hand of God: and they would not be attained at all unless such a prayer as this were answered. They were to learn, if God were gracious to them:

- the hope of His calling (1:18)
- the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints (1:18)
- the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe (1:19)

It is not impossible that they might have claimed to know all of these already. For the hope is that of immortality, the inheritance of the Kingdom, the power of resurrection. What more is there to know? There is nothing more, perhaps, but there are different ways of knowing. I can know that the sun will rise to-morrow, and be utterly indifferent to my knowledge; I can know that there is One God, and be even less moved by this than the “devils, which believe and tremble” (James 2:19); and I can know the elementary first principles here set out, and feel and live as though my life was just the same as before. What Paul is asking for on our behalf is real knowledge: an inward fellowship with the things we believe; he wants his readers to have a living friendship with their faith, and to receive from God the spirit of wisdom, of power, and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7).

For this Power is the same as that which was wrought in Jesus, for what God wrought in Jesus was done for all His saints. We do not contemplate the successful course of the Lord’s life, death, resurrection and ascension from the outside, but from within. So that when he was raised from the dead (1:20), he was raised for our justification (Romans 4:27). When he was ascended on high, he led captive the saints in the perfect freedom of the Gospel into the presence of God (2:6). When he received power over every created thing (1:21), with the promise that all things shall be put under his feet (1:22) - this also was with the promise that he should become the head of the body which is his church (1:23).

And this kind of headship is not the headship of tyranny. The Lord is not appointed as ruler over unwilling subjects, who must be obliged to do his will. Even in the fulness of time, the period during which there will be mortal men upon the earth who must be compelled to obedience (Zechariah 14:16ff) is limited. The ideal towards which this period reaches is the time when all shall obey in gladness of heart, do God’s will because it is their delight, and serving Him day and night in His temple. In His present relationship to His church, this is the essential relationship. Just as Paul has hitherto refused to consider the possibility of failure in God’s working, so now he refuses to entertain the idea of compulsion in the relationship between the Lord and his Church. The Lord is the head, and we the body. The head wills, and the body automatically and harmoniously moves in response. The head is crowned, and the body shares in its rejoicing. It is “the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (1:23).

If we could see the Lord’s exaltation always in this light, and hear the angelic obeisance’s to the Lord Jesus as they are given to our Saviour; then would Paul’s prayer be answered for us also, and the fulness which dwells in the Lord would be reflected also in the body which serves Him upon earth. Let us therefore pray the prayer again:

“Because we have heard of the mighty purpose which thou hast wrought from all ages, O God, and our minds are persuaded of the truth of thy Word; give us wisdom to perceive inwardly the

present substance of our hope, the present wealth of our calling, and the present power which can operate in us, as it did in the raising of the Lord from the dead. Help us to look to Him as the head of our lives and the determiner of our every motion; and give us the confidence that thy fulness dwells in us, because it dwells without limit in Him. Amen.”

## **Ephesians Chapter 2: "You were dead in sins"**

### "YOU DID HE QUICKEN"

Paul leads us gradually nearer to exhortation in this letter. He has passed beyond the general survey of what God has accomplished for all the saints, now, and in this chapter sets out what he has achieved, in particular, for each one of the readers. He told us before that our sins were forgiven (1:7), but the exaltation of his theme did not permit him to tell us exactly how low we were before the Lord raised us up. This he does now:

- "Ye were dead in trespasses and sins" (2:1)
- "Ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience:, among whom we also all once lived" (2:2-3)
- "Ye lived in the lusts of the flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind" (2:3)
- "Ye were by nature the children of wrath, even as the rest" (2:3)

There is little ground left for pride here. We were dead: as truly as the Prodigal Son was dead (Luke 15:24, 32); as truly as they were dead who heard the preaching of Jesus but had not yet received it (John 5:24, 25); as truly as those who put off the period of their following him (Luke 9:60). We were born dead by the very nature of our fleshly heritage, for death hath passed upon all men (Romans 5:12). This is what we were by nature, the children of wrath. By nature we could be nothing different: only a new nature, given by a new birth, could set that matter right.

We walked, too, according to the course of this world. It is possible that those who read this letter first would have a particularly guilty conscience on this matter. Ephesus may, like Corinth, have been distinguished for its shameless vice, and it might have been possible to say of these men also, "Such were some of you" (1 Corinthians 6:11.). The warning which follows later against lasciviousness, uncleanness and greediness (4:19) suggests as much. But it makes little difference. The real advantage of having lived in open profligacy is that there is no possible defense of the former manner of life: it was obviously wrong, and repentance is the only way to be rid of it. That, no doubt, is why the Lord's word had easier progress among the publicans and harlots than among the Pharisees: their sins, which were many, were forgiven, for they loved much (Luke 7:47). The real peril of having lived a good life (as men count goodness) is that we may either refuse the message of the Gospel altogether on the ground that we do not need it, or accept it without any real sense of repentance or indebtedness. It is therefore right that here, the Apostle should concentrate on the mere fact of living "according to the course of this world", and leave it to his readers to decide in what respect this was true of them. For it certainly was true of them all: the Pharisees are as much a worldling as the publican, for so long as he concentrates on his own righteousness, and neither the one nor the other can be saved unless he recognizes the essentially dead character of his former trust and life. "The World" here is the same word as that used in John's Gospel, and in the latter it is evident that the World which was made by the Word, which rejected and hated the Lord, is a world made up, amongst other, of those Jews who turned away from Him and had Him crucified.

It is striking, in passing, to notice the different attitudes to the world that the Gospel of John displays. In the beginning there is a warning that all is not well with the world, yet God's purpose with it is wholly one of kindness:

“God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16).

The world as a whole will not respond, yet its condemnation will be due to itself:

“For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved: but this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and man loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:17, 19).

As the Gospel proceeds, the world which Jesus met makes its decision, “The world hateth me” (John 17:7). So it comes about that Jesus considers the disciples and the world as separate things: the one for him, and the other against. “I pray not for the world, but for those whom thou hast given me” (John 17:9). In the truest sense, thereafter, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). This is the spirit, which is maintained in the First Letter of John, where the same hope of salvation is held out for the world. “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). But, where it is set out again that the world and the will of God are opposites:

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15).

And “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life” (1 John 2:16) cover respectable sin as well as the open kind. They are as true of the law-abiding self-esteem of the Pharisee as they are of the criminal self-indulgence of the dissolute. All this is the course of this world and from all this they are redeemed who forsake their self-confidence or their self-indulgence, and come to the Lord through Christ.

And yet again we are obliged to stress that this salvation is due to no virtuous act of ours, for this letter demands it of us. It comes from “God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us” (2:4). It is a raising to life by God - and who is so helpless to do any-thing for himself as a dead man? - And it is “by grace that we are saved” (2:8), coming “not of ourselves” but given by God. Nothing could so effectively cause us to abandon any credit for what has been done for us. Nor was anyone so well-equipped as Paul to teach us the lesson. For he had formerly believed that he had much to boast of “circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; as touching zeal, persecuting the church; as touching the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless.” (Philippians 3:5-6). But these things he came to appreciate at their true worthlessness. They were of the flesh, and to trust in the flesh was to deny the power of the workings of God. What he had boasted of, he now became ashamed of; what he had prized, he now counted but dung (v.9). His virtues he forgot, and that he had been “a blasphemer, and a persecutor and injurious” he remembered (1 Timothy 1:13). And he shared with all other true believers the knowledge that redemption came in spite of their unfitness, and not because of their worth: “We also were aforetime foolish, disobedient deceived, serving divers lust and pleasures, living in malice *and* envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Saviour, and His love toward man, appeared, not by works done in righteousness which we did ourselves, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, which He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.” (Titus 3:3-5).

Certainly our salvation is not of works, lest any man should boast (2:9), and certainly, if there is anything worthwhile in us when the last judgment shall reveal us, it will be because we are “His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God had afore prepared that we

should walk in them.” (2:10) The first man was made in God’s image, but the sin of men deface the image implanted in them. The second man was made in the form of God (Philippians 2:6), and maintained that form unimpaired by crucifying the flesh, which might have resisted it. And the perfect man in Christ Jesus must also be recreated according to the same image. Thus the new beginning of those who receive the way of salvation can be described as a re-birth (as in John 3:3, 5; Titus 3:3-5; 1 Peter 1:23, 2:2); or a new creation (as here). The creation is the thought in Romans 6:5ff also even though it comes about through the dying of the old Adam in baptism, and the spiritual resurrection of one who is to live in the way of righteousness.

“That we should walk in them” (2:10). This is by no means a statement that God decided beforehand that we should have no choice but to walk in them. On the contrary, it is a statement that God of old prepared a way in which we could walk, if we would choose. It is not so much a matter of saying that we will walk in these ways or we will not. It is one of saying whether we are willing to have Him direct us in His ways. Otherwise we shall assuredly walk in our own. “It is not in man to direct his steps”.

#### “WHEREFORE REMEMBER!”

This was bound to come sooner or later. It is part of Paul’s method to develop a profound truth, almost. It might sometime seem without reference to his readers, and then suddenly remind them of the consequences which the truth holds for them. It is an instructive exercise to look up in the Concordance. Paul’s use of “therefore” and “wherefore”, and see how he says, in effect, many times: “This is true, therefore do that!” We might note these as illustrative examples:

- God has worked out his purpose of salvation by faith, “I beseech you **therefore** that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1).
- The Lord Jesus is assuredly risen from the dead, and so our hope is not vain: “**Therefore** be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58).
- The Lord Jesus has been exalted on our behalf to the highest positions, “As **therefore** ye received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him” (Colossians 2:6).

This is what we might call the Scriptural doctrine of ‘cause’ and ‘effect’: the ‘cause’ being the divine goodness; and the ‘effect’ the human response. It is not necessary ‘cause’ and ‘effect’, such as scientists are used to, but the ‘effect’ follows with moral necessity from the ‘cause’ if the disciple is truly moved by what is done for him.

In our verse it is not much which is asked. “Wherefore, remember that aforesaid, ye, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called Circumcision in the flesh, made by hands; that ye were at that time separate from Christ (2:11-12). We are only bidden to remember, and it is but a moment before Paul’s revived spiritual activity takes us away from ourselves again into the boundless grace of God, as it is revealed in Jesus Christ. But it is much, indeed, that we must recall. For the first time the insufferable pretensions of natural Israel are brought into the picture, but with a delicate hand that we might scarcely recognise it, were we not aware of Paul’s own Jewish background. “Ye are called uncircumcision: they are called circumcision.” But they take this title to themselves, these Jews. The name is claimed on the strength of that which is wrought with hands, and it is falsely claimed. It is denied to the Gentile believers because they have not submitted themselves to this outmoded Jewish right: but it is unlawfully denied. In another passage Paul heaps their contempt dreadfully back upon them describing them merely as the “concision”, the ones who cut without purpose or the right

spirit, and claiming for the believers the title: "We are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God, and glory in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Philippians 3:2-3). This was a dramatic change for Paul, but it was a profound honour for those who came out of Gentile darkness to rejoice in the light of the Gospel.

Ye were then separate from Christ, and as such aliens from the Commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise (2:12). All who are separate from Christ are these things, be they Jews or Gentiles. For the Commonwealth of Israel is made up of the members of the Seed, and the Covenants of Promise find every one their fulfilment in the One Seed, which is Christ (Galatians 3:16). Natural Israel has no claim to the title when it rejects the counsel of God against itself: the kingdom of God was taken away from them and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof (Matthew 21:43); and those who are now the people of God are those who have accepted the Lord Christ as the foundation stone of their faith (1 Peter 2:1-10).

All the taunts of the Judaisers against the gentile Christians were unsound, for the tables had been turned upon Israel according to the flesh. Yet the new Israel must not be high-minded, but fear. Therefore comes this gentle reminder, "Wherefore, remember."

For here, as in the more logically developed Romans passage (chapters 9 to 11), we are left in no doubt that the privilege which the Gentile believer now finds to be his is not his by right, but by grace. It has been given, and it could be withdrawn, but no threat of withdrawal is here implied. We are simply being reminded again of our indebtedness; and the method used to do it is a representation of the doctrine of the Cross. We may not, perhaps, realise at once to what extent this doctrine is Paul's own. Of course the events of the crucifixion are set out in the Gospels, but the discussion of them in these terms is more often found in Paul's writing, by far, than anywhere else. It gives the deepest significance to baptism in Romans 6. It is the process whereby Paul acquired his new life in Christ, and whereby the Christian subdues the lusts of the flesh in Galatians 2: 20 and 5:24. It is the centre of the Christian's glorying and the prime offence of the gospel in the eyes of the Jews in 1 Corinthians 1:17-18, 23. It is the means of the removal of the handwriting of ordinances which was against us in Colossians 2:14. And here, it is the breaching of the barriers which separate both Jew and Gentile from full communion with God (2:13-18).

The barrier concerned the law. The commandments, which were against the Jew because he followed Moses and could not follow him perfectly (2:15), were also formerly against the Gentile because he could not be saved without becoming a Jew. The barrier could only be removed by putting both categories outside the scope of the law of works, and this had the double effect of making them one with each other, as well as making them one with God (1:15, 17-18). It then comes to pass that the enmity that God must feel against sin is dissolved in the love, which God can extend to those who receive the righteousness, which is in Christ. The curse that the Law imposes upon its every breach (Galatians 3:10) is abolished when the Lord himself takes the curse upon his flesh, and displays to all who trust in him that, by passing out of the Law's clutches through joining him upon the cross, they can enter into the Law of Grace and be judged according to their trust and love.

Thus the Lord preached peace to both categories. It is important to know that the peace of the New Testament is only exceptionally what the world means by the term. It is true that, in the prophets, the time will come when peace shall flow like a river, and when, through the work of the King who rules in righteousness and the princes who reign in judgement, there shall come peace, quietness and assurance for ever. The New Testament does nothing at all to weaken this

idea, but it does extend it. The peace, which it principally offers, is the peace of God, the peace of the God of Peace. It can be enjoyed in the midst of tribulation: "In the world ye shall have tribulation; in me ye shall have peace" (John 16:35). It fills the hearts and minds of those who dwell upon the holy things of God (Philippians 4:7-9). The peace here in our Epistle which the Lord brings, to those who are near (natural Israel) and to those who are afar off (the Gentiles), all together in close unity with God in Christ. Where there is neither Jew nor Greek. Out of many disordered creatures there comes into existence one new man (2:15), and so, as we would expect, arises peace.

If this represents the "Prince of Peace" to us in a somewhat unfamiliar light, it is a light, which is more fundamental than merely to think of Him as the one who will bring abolition of war to the earth. He will do this, of course, but the mere conquest of rebellious nations, and compelling them to beat their sword into ploughshares, would mean nothing if there were not provided also obedient men and women, at peace with God. Who could take over the dominion of the earth from them. The peace of the world ("not as the world giveth, give I unto you") is the mere interval between wars, the breathing space where the defeated lick their wounds and the conquerors prepare for the next advance. But the peace of God, which the world cannot understand, commences in reconciliation with Him, in the subjection of all rebellious impulses, and blossoms in unbreakable unity with Him. This sweetens the entry into the sleep of death, and awakens in the morning of resurrection of abundance of peace, so long as the moon endureth.

We both – converted Jews and redeemed Gentiles – "have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (1:18). The access is both "in one spirit" – in that all approach God in the same mind; and "by one Spirit", in that our Lord by the Spirit maketh intercession for us with groaning that cannot be uttered (Romans 8:26-27). The access is real and unhindered: the throne of grace stands bare for all who have liberty to approach within the veil (Hebrews 4:16; 10:19-20). The suppliants enter themselves into the fabric of the house, too, in the spiritual metaphor, for they are "builded together upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (1:20).

It would be profitable to consider the use made in the New Testament of the Corner Stone predictions of the old (Psalms 118:22; Isaiah 28:16). In the first of these, the stone which the builders rejected is made the head of the corner; in the second, those who believe on him shall not be confounded. In the Lord's answer to the Pharisees after the parable of the Husbandmen, the first of these compared with Isaiah 8:14-15 for the discomfiture of unbelieving Israel (Matthew 21:42-44): the nation rejects the heir in the interests of its own independence, and finds itself crushed as it stumbles in its way. The Kingdom of God is taken from it. In our passage, it is difficult to believe that Paul has not in mind the use which the Lord has already made of such passages, for he also implies "that which is called circumcision has failed through its unwillingness to build upon the Lord", and goes on to establish the confidence with which they can build who lay such a foundation. And in 1 Peter 2 we have what amounts to direct commentary and quotation of the Lord's own words, as we should expect from a disciple who had certainly heard the words from Jesus' lips. Those who taste that the Lord is gracious come unto that Stone, but lately rejected by the Jewish builders (v. 3), and are built upon it as God's holy house; those who reject this foundation stumble, fall, and are replaced. From the fact that the Apostles so rarely say anything like "Thus saith the Lord", when they are referring to the words of Jesus, we might sometimes be led to suppose that they made little use of his words in their thinking and writing. But the artless way in which Peter in this chapter captures the entire thought of the Lord, and uses it for the edification of his readers, shows the case to be

otherwise. They did not so much quote the Lord's words, as have them living in their hearts, so that they came out naturally and unconstrained when circumstances called them forth.

The structure, which is built upon this foundation, is not merely God's home: it is God's temple. It is difficult to adjust our minds to understand the continuity between the temple of God which was prefigured in the Ark of the Covenant, and erected by Solomon in Jerusalem; and the spiritual temple which is here described. When we say, "The Lord dwelleth not in temples made with hands" (Acts 7:48; 17:24), we are perhaps disposed to connect the words with those of the Lord Jesus, "Neither in this place nor yet in Jerusalem shall men worship the Father, but they that worship must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:21-25), and the connection is obviously intended. But it would be wrong to draw from this the conclusion that God once did dwell in temples made with hands, and now does so no longer, as though some change had taken place in the divine indwelling. The plain fact is that God never did dwell in temples made with hands; if by "made with hands" we mean, "devised and executed or inhabited by sinful man". The tabernacle had to be made according to the pattern showed Moses in the mount, and every defilement of human hands must be removed by atonement before it was fit for God's habitation. And into the space where God revealed His glory between the cherubim there might come none except the cleansed, anointed and sanctified high priest, at the appointed time. It was essentially the same with Solomon's temple, too; and the most vivid demonstration that God could not dwell there when it was defiled by man is shown in Ezekiel, where the glory of God first forsakes the stricken temple, then hovers for a moment on the threshold, and then departs altogether, not to return until the appointed Prince shall come to erect and glorify the new structure (Ezekiel 1:4; 10:3; 11:21-25; 43:4).

When men turn the temple of God to their own uses, and then it becomes the temple of idols, or, as in the days of the Lord's weakness, a den of robbers (John 2:16; Mark 11:17). And in either case it becomes unfit for the Lord's habitation, and he will not dwell there. The Lord's sorrowful lament over Israel was "Your house is left unto you desolate", for it was no longer possible to speak of the house of gain and oppression as though it were the house of God. Israel of old "set up their idols in their hearts" and might not therefore enquire of God. It has in all ages been the same as it is now. There never was a time when men who would come to God did not need to worship in spirit and truth. Jesus, in making this known to the woman of Samaria, was not telling her anything that was not known before. He was merely preparing her for the fact that a visible temple of any kind would soon be dispensed with.

This is our situation now. Yet it is not true that God is without a temple. Israel was deprived of its national temple because it resisted the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51): the temple as it is, is made up of those who are suited to be a habitation of God through the spirit (2:22). Elsewhere Paul couples this with warnings against those who destroy the temple of God. He denies us the liberty of choosing for ourselves whether God shall dwell in us or not, for that we decided in His favour when we heard His invitation, and so warns us that, if our members are turned aside from God's purposes to the uses of evil desire, then we stand to be judged for misuse of God's premises (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). The temple of God has no agreement with idols, and this is the reason why, in face of the evils and alliances of the world, we are commanded to "come out from among them and be separate, touching not the unclean thing" (2 Corinthians 6:14-17). It is unreasonable to expect God to enter into part tenancy of a house largely given over to Mammon, and He will not do it.

In this letter, however, Paul is content to let the positive lesson speak for itself. It is characteristic of the gentle appeal of reason and love by which the Epistle is marked out.

### **Ephesians Chapter 3: That Christ might dwell in our hearts by faith**

And now we come to one of the greatest problems Paul's irresistible progress forces upon us. His grammar has been difficult before, and we have already worked through a sentence twelve verses long. But in the third chapter we come across a remarkable example of the prolixity of his thought. In the first verse he says, "for this cause" (3:1), and we know what this means. Because of what he has already said, about the eternal purpose of God, His undeserved love towards us, and our reception into His family through the Cross of Christ, then - what? For this cause something must be said, or something must be done. But, whatever it is, we have to wait for thirteen verses before we find it. For as soon as he has said, "for this cause," Paul, in order to give personal point to what he will now add, mentions his own name, "I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles" (3:1) and is so struck with the immensity of what that title and office implies, that he spends the next twelve verses telling us about that.

We must therefore postpone for a little finding out what Paul does "for this cause", and contemplate what his thoughts lead him to as concerning his own ministry. He brings out the following points:

- that a dispensation of the grace of God was given to him on behalf of the believers (3:2)
- that what he knew about the gospel he knew by revelation, not by reasoning or at second hand (3:3) (and he has just told them about this in the preceding few words, that is, the last two chapters)
- that what he knows was not formerly known to the sons of men, but has now been made known to the apostles and prophets by the spirit (3:5); and that the supreme content of this is the participation of the Gentiles in the hope of the gospel on equal terms (3:6)
- that he is utterly unworthy of the grace and high office of preaching which he has had committed to him (3:8) - accompanied by yet another summary of what the content of that preaching is, including its gift of free access to God on the part of all who obey him (3:12)
- and that the advantages of his position so far outweigh the trifling disability of being imprisoned, and in danger of death on the gospel's behalf, that the Ephesians must be pleaded with not to be troubled by his sufferings, which the Gospel has brought upon him, and which therefore were entered upon with a view to securing their glory. (3:13).

Even a summary of the verses is subject to the same difficulty. The thoughts run so much into one another that it is next to impossible to separate them. And yet, from the rich confusion in which we are involved, it is impossible to miss the generous and overflowing happiness of a man who knows himself to be a prisoner, but knows that the Lord is glorified by his captivity. He knows that he is an ambassador for the Gospel, and gasps with wonder that the Lord should have chosen for the purpose one who is "less than the least of all saints", on account of his former persecuting activities (2 Timothy 1:15-16). He knows that an apprehension of the gospel has been given him far exceeding that previously offered to men (for had not the Lord said that "many prophets and righteous men had desired to see the things that they saw, but had not seen them"), yet is aware that it comes by revelation, and not as the fruit of his own cleverness. And all those thoughts crowd upon him and demand expression before he can go on to explain what it is he has to say "for this cause".

But at last he arrives at this point, and repeats his introduction, and what emerges, again, is another prayer. It is similar in spirit to the one we have reached already (1:16-23), in that he realises how far in advance of their own attainment he has travelled, and asks God to help them to go forward to his level. What he asks for is breathtaking:

- that the Father of whom every family in heaven and in earth is named (3:15)
- would strengthen them with power through His Spirit in their inward man (3:16)
- that Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith (3:17)
- that they, being rooted and grounded in love, might be able to apprehend with all saints the dimensions of the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge (3:18)
- and be filled with all the fulness of God (3:19).

He could scarcely ask for more, and, humanly speaking, he is asking for the impossible. For he wants the saints to know the unknowable (3:19), and it this is not quite the paradox it seems, it is at least enough to awake our attention. Knowing the love that passeth knowledge must mean either knowing something you cannot find out for yourself, but must have revealed to you; or knowing inside something which cannot be expressed in logical terms. Or it may mean both, and probably does. For once again the Apostle is not thinking of what we can do for ourselves, but of what God can do for us, if we will let Him. He desires Christ to find His home within our hearts, so that love may be the foundation of our lives. He wants us to hear the knock of him that stands at the door and open unto Him (Revelation 3:20), and from experience of His company learn the limitless scope of the divine affection.

“Rooted and grounded in love” is something, which we may aspire to, but many of us would be unwilling to claim. Yet it is, ultimately, the only absolutely sure basis for a continuing Christian life. There are many of us who serve God (in measure) from a sense of duty, coupled with a sense of indebtedness, but would be unable to say that we truly love Him. “O, for grace to love thee more!” would be heartily echoed by us, Now we can be persuaded that God will not despise the dutiful service of those who want to please Him, but we must also recognise that “rooted and grounded in love” is the better way. The tremendous peril attaching to mere dutifulness is, that if the dutiful person should really fall in love - the wrong way - that might be the end of all his service. There is no more tragic case than that of Solomon, who served the Lord with wisdom, if not with devotion: until he fell in love, with many strange women, who turned away his heart. “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength” is the only real safeguard against such apostacy. If we are vouchsafed thus, then we are “rooted and grounded”, established and settled: and he whose basis is of this kind shall never be moved.

It comes, writes the Apostle, through Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith. But this it comes, according to John 14:23, by a man loving Him. It would seem, therefore - and surely this answers to experience - that we have here an ascending spiral. God first loved us, and so we love Him, with a feeble, flickering affection not entirely divorce from self-interest. It has the flavour of what we call in Britain “cupboard love”: affection bestowed in return for favours expected or received. But as the knowledge that the love of God was deep and unselfish: “Hereby know we love, that He laid down his life for us” (1 John 3:16) matures, so does the heart become opened to receive the Lord as he is. And, so the argument runs, the companionship, which then develops, ripens

into a truer love, and ultimately leads to that foundation-love, rooted and grounded, which is invincible.

And at this point Paul gives thanks, for the third time, now “to him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly, above all that we ask or think” (3:20). This, I feel, is a consolation. “Above all that we ask or think” recognises that we may not know exactly what we ought to ask for, and puts the matter into the hands of God. We ask for - we know not what (Romans 8:26-27) - save that we want and need a heightened affinity with the love of God. And the promise is that what we get, if we ask in faith and humility, will surprise and delight us. It will go beyond all that we could have imagined. Glory and praise are what Paul offers to the God who he knows will not fail him in the church in all its ages, both among the disciples of the first century who knew the apostles face to face, and among those of the twentieth, who receive their counsel from the written Word (3:21).

## Ephesians Chapter 4: One Body, One Spirit, One Hope

Now at last we come to the field of exhortation and prayer. With another “therefore” (4:1) to encourage us in doing what we ought because of what God has done for us, Paul addresses himself to setting his readers to rights. Whatever we might have thought before, it now becomes quite plain that the predestinate purpose of God left the believer with a choice, whether he would do the will of Him who had called him, or not.

“I therefore the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called” (4:1). There is something pathetically beautiful that Paul, who in prison has now no power to command compellingly, should allow himself to “beseech”. It is true that the ordinary word for “exhort” is here used, but the reference to his imprisoned condition seems to justify the translation. He is not seeking to exercise apostolic authority upon us, and tell us that it is our duty to live a certain way. He is rather saying that, with absolutely no power to command on his part, he is relying on the compulsion of the glories he has revealed, to persuade us that a faithful walk is the only reasonable course.

“Walk worthy of your calling” is our counterpart to God’s deeds. He called not merely to future reward, but to a way of life. He laid down how that way of life might be successfully lived, and now it is the business of his children to respond. But it is not easy at once to put a finger upon exactly what we are to do. The advice remains still of a very general and subjective character:

- with all lowliness and meekness with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love (4:2).

Thus far this is purely passive counsel. And it might seem that the Apostle is asking three times for the same thing: for meekness, lowliness, and longsuffering are not sharply distinguished qualities in our minds. But there are shades of meaning: “lowliness” -, which is what Paul himself, showed at Ephesus (Acts 20:19) means setting a low estimate upon yourself without affectation. It is not the pride that apes humility, inwardly setting a high value on itself while outwardly it affects a shamefaced demeanor. “Meekness” can be looked upon as meaning the spirit, which accepts the sufferings and humiliations of this world without repining or blaming God; and “longsuffering” that which continues to endure all that comes upon us without losing patience with it, or refusing to be profited by it. All this concerns primarily our attitude to what God provides for us, even though it may be needful to be meek in face of the arrogance of others (each esteeming his brother to be better than himself), and long-suffering is enduring troubles which come upon us owing to the wrong headed behaviour of our fellows. And these are certainly true of the “forbearing one another in love”. For in these words there is put upon us the responsibility of dealing with our brethren as the Lord has dealt with us. We are to forgive men their trespasses in the measure, which we expect and hope to be forgiven by God. But again there are no threats here. It is true, of course, that if we refrain from doing this there are penalties to be feared and endured, but the apostle’s purpose here is not to threaten us. Here he is appealing to our better nature. **Note:** “Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”. See how wonderful the Spirit’s unity is, says Paul to us. Do your part then not to divide it. Behave towards your God and towards your brethren in such a manner that the Spirit’s work will not be frustrated in earthy disunity.

And to make the appeal more eloquent, he recited the unities which exist in the purpose of God:

- There is One Body (4:4)

- and One Spirit (4:4)
- one hope of your calling (4:4)
- one Lord,
- one faith,
- one baptism (4:5),
- One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (4:6).

No one would doubt that there is One God and Father of all, nor that there is one Lord, nor that there is one Spirit. No one can question that, if we are baptised acceptable into the same Lord, there is but one baptism, and no one schooled in the scriptures would question that there is but one true faith, and one true goal which can be called the hope of our calling. And as to the One Body, the apostle affirms that there is one of these also: as we might reasonably expect from the fact that there is but one head, and there is none other name under heaven given among men wherein we may be saved.

But the nature of this body is a matter of dispute. There are those, such as the Roman Catholic church, which claim that the body must be a visible one, and that outside that church there is no salvation. It is true that this doctrine is somewhat modified Protestant lands allow for those who are catholics in “spirit”, but it remains the fact that the visible church, with a visible Papal head, is of the essence of catholic teaching. The same can be said of some other bodies, even some of the smaller sects. But the matter can only be settle by considering the other occasions when this “One Body” doctrine is used by Paul.

It is first used in Romans 12. As we have many members in our physical bodies, so has the Lord many members in His (12:4). The members differ in their functions, and have various earthly members, and have various gifts provided by their head (12:5ff). But it is not a purely automatic relationship, as our physical make up is. Exhortation is needed to hold the spiritual body together. The exhorter must be told to exhort (12:8), and the one who ministers to minister (12:7). The method whereby this harmonious exercise can be secured is also set out, and there appears in the prescription the word love: “Let love be without dissimulation” (12:9)

It is the same, though in much more detail, in the next use of the figure, in 1 Corinthians 12-14. For here it is very plain that the unity of the body is not automatic. Corinth is full of strife and competitions, as absurd in themselves as if the foot shall say, because I am not the hand, I am not of the body” (12:15). And amidst all the strife and disunities of Corinth there comes the fullest exposition of the sovereign doctrine that the body must be held together by love: “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am nothing” (13:1). All the qualities, which in our epistle we are bidden to show, are here seen clearly to emerge from showing this spirit. For if “love seeketh not her own and envyeth not”, there can no disunity arise. We ought always to consider the famous chapter of love in this context. Love is not here introduced without a motive, but in the direct setting of the needs of the Corinthian church. Unity cannot be secured without it. If it is unfaithfully taken as the guide, unity cannot fail to follow.

Our own chapter introduces the third example, and, here also, the means of keeping the One Body united is the same. It can be accomplished only by the constant manifestation of love: “Acting the truth in love the disciples grow up in all things unto him which is the head, even

Christ” (4:15). But the situation could plainly be otherwise, if love were not shown. In what is perhaps the first hint of criticism that this letter contains, the work of the Lord’s ministers is said to be to ensure “that henceforth ye be no more children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine” (4:14), but should become a united man in Christ. Disunity did, therefore, exist here. The evil work of them that held the doctrine of the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:6) evidently had ground prepared for it even now. The Asian Christians were loyal but unstable, enthusiastic but unreliable, and in some respects they were still “children, tossed to and fro, and blown about”.

It is clear that the unity considered is not a physical unity, represented by a visible head, at all. The unity is known in the mind of God. There may exist cankers in the earthly body, but they do not exist in the bride of Christ. Schisms occurring upon the earth cause dishonour to the name of our Lord; they may cause to stumble those little ones who believe in the Lord (and so bring a heavy responsibility upon those who are responsible for them), and the power of the Gospel may be seriously weakened by the dividing of the forces which should be working in harmony: but “the Lord knoweth them that are His”, and whatever evils arise from the quarrellings and presumptions of disciples on the earth the Lord will steadily build up His own holy temple from among men. He will do this wherever He finds His word received and the spirit of repentance properly displayed in acceptable baptism, and He will not allow Himself to be moved from this because we, on our part, may insufficiently have endeavoured to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

The manner in which the Lord accomplished the education of the body is set out in this chapter in words of singular beauty and difficulty: “Unto each one of us was the grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, ‘When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men’. “ (4:7-8). In the Psalm itself (68:18) it would be possible to suppose that, in the ascension of the Lord, the tables were turned upon sin and death, which hath no more dominion over Him, and the Lord received power to compel tribute from all men, including those who would have rebelled. And the day of the Lord’s return will show this to be true. But the use of the passage in Ephesians seems to bring out the additional thought that the Lord Jesus “led captive a captivity”: that is, took a large number of prisoners with Him when He ascended to God. In this case it would be in beautiful harmony with the thought of “leading us in triumph in Christ”, which Paul expresses elsewhere, where the saints appear in His figure as the captives who are made to follow the victors’ chariots in the Roman triumphal procession. It is true that we are willing victims of His triumph, and that we are Christ’s bondslaves only to become freer than we ever were before, but the Lord’s victory is none the less complete. It may be, too, that the victory of the Cross expressed in Colossians, “have spoiled principalities and powers we made a show of them openly” (Colossians 2:15), “triumphing over them in his cross”, is also intended. The powers, which had enslaved men, are themselves reduced to impotence by the might of His death.

As always, the Lord’s victory is wrought by His suffering. He descends into the lower parts of the earth before He ascends in triumph. He “descends unto hell, rises from the dead, and now sits at the right hand of the Father” (4:9). It is from this that there arises His power to give gifts, for “it is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away the Holy Spirit will not come unto you” (John 16:7). And He provided abundantly for the needs of the earliest church. Apostles were there to lead and command, prophets to minister the divine revelations, evangelists to spread abroad the gospel, pastors to care for their needs and guide them in the paths of righteousness, and teachers to instruct both them and their young (4:11). All that they required was there to

effect the transition from the unruly and disordered into the perfect, love-bound unity of the perfect man in Christ (4:12-16). All that is required is still there. The message of the apostles is with us now, and the abiding revelations of the older and newer prophets. Pastors and teachers and evangelists can find all the instruction, which they need to discharge their office in this fund of wisdom, and the same Lord over all can be asked to watch over them in their work, to prosper and extend it in His service.

The exhortation becomes gradually more penetrating. "Remember", was all we were asked at first; "be humble" was added to this later; and now there follows: "walk no longer as the Gentiles walk" (4:17). Behind this there may lie all manner of fears that not all was well with those to whom Paul was writing, but he conceals his fears delicately by calling attention to the Gentiles' evil deeds, the things which the Christians used to do before they were converted, and warning them to be on their guard against them (4:18-19). This would appear to establish that these saints were, as we thought possible before, in something the same position as Corinth, for these are openly wicked things which they are asked to avoid: lasciviousness, all uncleannesses with greediness".

It can sometimes be wondered whether the lessons of these warnings are properly heeded. It has probably always been the case that the evils of the world have provoked some emulation of them inside the camp of the saints, and it must be that offences come. There is perhaps not a problem in the life of the world, its commerce, pleasure, and lust, which does not at some time find a partner in the body of the believers: and we are from time to time terribly reminded of the fact. It happened in the first century and it can happen now. Yet it would surely be greatly for our spiritual good if we could persuade ourselves in all our ways to walk a little further from the edge of the precipice. There is a temptation which assails the hearts of many men and women, if not to do the abominations which are done in the world, at least to read about them, or talk about them (with a protestation of shock and abhorrence, perhaps, which it might be possible to think of as insincere), or hear about them from the lips of others or on our radio, or see them on television, screen or stage. In all these things we may be able to protest our innocence to each other or our accuser, but it is surely difficult to feel innocent in the conscience in the presence of these defiling associations? A later verse tells us to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather even reprove them; for the things which are done by them in secret it is a shame even to speak of" (5:11-12). Those who talk lightly about there being "no harm" in certain indulgences, and "no commandment" against certain relaxations, might surely think again about them in the light of what we read here. It is not that we are here being told what we must and must not do: we are being advised as to what is good for us.

The old man was put off, formally, in baptism. He must be put off constantly in practice (4:22). We were reborn in baptism: the rebirth must bear its constant fruits in behaviour, "putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (4:24). The beginning in baptism was only the beginning: watchful vigilance to keep our garments, and keep them white, is needed throughout. We took up our Cross once, to be crucified with Christ in baptism. It is needful to keep our old man suppressed by "taking up our cross daily" also (Luke 9:23).

We can pass rapidly through the particular counsel given to this end. We are to "put away falsehood and speak truth, for we are members one of another" (4:25). This means, not merely that we are not to tell open lies, but lies of any shade, including white ones, are forbidden us. For the effect of all these is to deceive our neighbour, with whatever pretence they may be whited. And deceiving our neighbour is a thing we could never wish to do, if we remembered that our

neighbour is a neighbouring member of the same body, doing the same work, serving the Lord, and working to the same end.

We may be angry, but not so as to sin (4:26), and this perhaps is a two-fold counsel. If we do lose our temper, let us quickly seek to have it restored again, and above all not let it burn through the night so that impulse becomes hate. And there are grounds for anger, which are legitimate and proper, as when the Lord showed anger against those who refused his words and preferred the ways of evil. But the guiding thought is to examine whether our anger is personal irritation, offended dignity, or jealousy, on the one hand; or whether it is zeal for the Lord, on the other. A good clue is to consider whether we are enraged at the person, or at the deed. If it is the former, our anger is almost certainly sinful, for judgement belongeth unto the Lord; if it is the latter, our wrath may be wholesome and good.

The counsel against theft is wonderful. To steal is wrong, of course, and the thief must rob no more (4:28). But he has a wonderful alternative. Why not let him signalise his reform by turning the tables. He could work with his own hands and earn money sufficient for his needs, and then give away what was over to those who might otherwise have been driven to theft. Could repentance be better exhibited?

On "corrupt communication" (4:29) we could expound indefinitely. There are communications, which are corrupt because of the message they bear: tale-telling, spreading of false rumours foolish jesting which is designed to excite our baser passions (see 5:4). There are words and phrases which knowingly take in vain the names of our God and saviour. There are corruptions of these names whose sound is innocent but whose blasphemy is merely concealed. And, there are needless exaggerations of truth which cast doubt on our sincerity. All are in their way corrupt communications, and all are unbecoming in a disciple. Against tale-bearing and evil rumour the law is strict - and "a whisperer separateth chief friends" -; against vain oaths the Lord and James speak emphatically, our 'Yes' should mean 'Yes', and "Yes, I really mean it!" should be superfluous, to say nothing of more emphatic protestation (Matthew 5:33-37; James 5:12). The mark of an upright man in scripture is the word of his mouth, for "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh". The fundamental remedy for the problem of evil-speaking is, of course, the cleansing of our inward being, and any censorship of the lips is a poor substitute for the purification of the fountain (James 3:11). Nevertheless, to keep a watch upon our mouths is a good way of reminding us of the iniquity of our hearts, and he that bridled the tongue is able also to control the whole body (James 3:2-11). The tongue will sooner or later give our hearts away if we are not pure in heart, and it is not by accident that the flawlessness of the Lord's behaviour is expressed in the form: "He did not sin, neither was guile found in his mouth". That is as near to outward proof of righteousness as one can get, for "If any offend not in word, the same is a perfect man". Therefore, the commendation of the future blessed takes the form: "These were purchased from among men, to be the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile, for they are without fault before the throne of God." (Revelation 1:4-5). Our best testimonial that we had truly followed the Lord Jesus would be that our "speech was always with grace, seasoned with salt". For of Him it is written that they "wondered at the gracious words which He spake". This is "that which is good to the use of edifying", in this chapter (4:29).

"And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, in which ye were sealed unto the day of redemption (4:30). This is the most compelling exhortation to righteousness. The Holy Spirit revealed God's will through the prophets - and Israel rejected the prophets, though God rose up early and sent them. Was not this a grief to God? The Holy Spirit gave conception to Mary and wrought by her

Son God's mighty works. Yet Israel looked at the palpable fruits of the Spirit of God and in defence of its own way ascribed them to the devil. That was their unforgivable sin. To maintain their own stand they were prepared to blaspheme, would not repent. It can happen to Christians, too. It is possible to throw God's kindness back in His face by complete and calculated indifference to His goodness, "doing despite unto the Spirit of grace" (Hebrews 10:29). Those who have participated in the Holy Spirit's gifts may fall away in such a manner as to crucify the Son of God and put Him to an open shame (Hebrews 6:3-6). A man may be so far gone in sin that he will not even seek for forgiveness for himself, and this is the sin unto death (1 John 5:16-17). But Paul is still not threatening. He is asking us in common gratitude not to repay the goodness of God by causing Him pain. Could He reasonably ask for less?

## **Ephesians Chapter 5: The Behaviour of the Bride of Christ**

Bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, railing and malice are displaced by the response to the affection of God. In their place, following the pattern of God's forgiveness of us in Christ, come kindness, tenderness and mutual reconciliation (4:31). The fifth chapter repeats in a way some of the counsel given in the fourth, advising the abandonment of all fleshly uncleanness (5:3) and evil speaking (5:4). But it goes further in the direction of exhortation than we have so far gone and perhaps, if we may put it so, caters for a less responsive class of mind. If a man is spiritually really alert, the mere counsel to "remember" may stir up his mind to all that is needed to ensure his moral rectitude in God's sight. If he is prepared for good advice, the counsel of "meekness" may tell him all he wants to keep him on the direct way. The mere advice to leave Gentile habits alone would be enough to tell us what we should do if the desire to cause God no grief were strong within us.

But if not, we must be warned of consequences. In this exposition the warnings have from time to time been anticipated, but here they emerge, for a moment, with all necessary severity before the Epistle resumes its more serene progress: "For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man who is an idolater hath any inheritance in the Kingdom of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience: (5:5-6). There is a double warning. These vices exclude from the Kingdom of God, indeed, and are enumerated among the things cast outside the New Jerusalem (Revelation 22:15). But it is no use blinding us as to where they are cast. The wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience and whereas they who sin without law shall perish without law, thou who sin under the law shall be judged by the Law in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men (Romans 2:12-16). Therefore, those who knowingly - and our present discussion concerns them - who knowingly abandon themselves to the fundamental denial of their calling, are excluded from the New Jerusalem only to find their destiny in the Lake of Fire (Revelation 21:8)

At the same time, we should be on our guard against a falsehood here. There have been those who say that these sins, as such, inevitably exclude from the Kingdom of God: these sins - adultery and blasphemy for example - are sometimes set out as the unforgivable sin in themselves and people guilty of the most notorious of the Seven Deadly Sins have sometimes been heard to include themselves in the ranks of the unforgivable. This is assuredly not the case. As to blaspheme, indeed Paul says of himself that he was a blasphemer, who obtained mercy because he did it ignorantly and in unbelief (1 Timothy 1:13). And as to the other vices, although he himself says that such shall not inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10), he makes it quite plain that true repentance covers the case and provides restorations (v. 11). Otherwise the woman of John 8 would never have been forgiven, neither can we justifiably say that such a thing is altogether unforgivable after baptism, for the incestuous man of Corinth was to be withdrawn from partly for his own sake, "that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 5:15), and was to be restored upon repentance (2 Corinthians 2:1). But a very difficult problem in practical behaviour is here created. It is possible that the early churches adopted a more severe line such misbehaviour as the only way to keep it in check, and that these offences survive in recollection as unforgivable sins on that account. Modern entertainments have to a large extent obliterated that impression and we have in any case to adopt a different standpoint. The wrongness of such actions cannot be overemphasised. The Lord's forgiveness in the face of bitter repentance must not be weakened. The important matter

is to guard against hypocrisy. The Lord's forgiveness is limitless, for the penitent, but only "he that confesseth and forsaketh shall have mercy".

But the warning passes, and the apostle has resumed his counsel. These sins are punishable in this way: avoid them therefore. Ye are children of light: avoid the unprofitable works of darkness (5:11). Let the guiding principle be the doing of that which is right in the sight of the Lord; giving Him pleasure (5:10). This comes in fitting contrast to an earlier remark about causing Him pain (4:30). We rarely think of God as having "feelings", even when we talk of His love, but it is self-evident that love rewarded is satisfied, while love spurned is saddened. That which is "well-pleasing" to God is not only that which He approves of, but that which gives Him pleasure. And it was for His pleasure that all things were created (Revelation 4:11).

In our earlier chapters we have found much in common between the thought of this Epistle, and that of the Gospel of John. It is possibly of no significance that tradition credits Ephesus as being the place where the Gospel was composed, and yet the resemblances are striking. Perhaps this is nowhere more so than in the passage about light and darkness in which we are involved:

- Ye were once darkness, but now are light in the Lord (5:8);
- walk as children of light;
- for the fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth (5:9);
- have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them (5:11);
- but all things when they are reprov'd are made manifest by the light, for whatsoever doth make manifest is light (5:13).

The last of these selections has a flavour, too, of the words of the Gospel of Luke, that "Whatsoever ye have spoken in the darkness shall be heard in the light" (Luke 12:3), and it is a needful reminder that the things, which we can conceal from our fellows, cannot be hidden from God. We must choose whether they are brought to light in the days of our probation, with whatever temporary shame that may be supposed to be accompanied, and so confessed and forgiven, or whether they shall remain hidden until the day when the secrets of the heart are revealed, and there declared to our shame, and perhaps to our eternal discomfiture. But the contrast between light and darkness is characteristic of John's writings, in which it would be profitable to turn up and examine 1:5; 3:19-21; 11:10; 12:35 in the Gospel; and 1:5 and 2:8 in the First Letter. Perhaps the closest of all these is John 3:19-21, where the effect of the light in reprov'ing the evil works of darkness is outlined, together with the opposition which the world feels towards any such exposure.

The light reprov'es the deeds of evil, and glorifies the deed of truth. The darkness hated the Son of Light because he testified of its dark deeds, and the apostle does not spare the saints the same responsibility. To compromise with the works of darkness is to him unthinkable, and fellowship with them is impossible. The only thing, which can possibly be lawfully done, is to reprove the works of darkness, as a testimony to clear the souls of the witness, and as a possible hope of saving some out of their condition. When we examine what is lawful for a son of light, we might well bear this consideration in mind. It is not whether we can satisfy ourselves that no commandment exists against the deeds we want to share with those around us, but whether we can be happy that we are providing the opportunity which is needed for those in darkness to repent when they see the light of the world which it is our privilege to reflect.

It is not easy to trace the scriptural allusions from which the supporting quotation is drawn (5:14). Paul does not, of course, say that it is drawn from the Old Testament, although the thought behind it is found, perhaps, in those passages listed in the R.V. references: Isaiah 52:1; 60:1 and Malachi 4:2. The only important matter, however, is that God says it: "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine upon thee". This is the first call to alertness in this letter, but it seems to show that this, too, was a possible fault existing in the churches to which it was written. Sleep is a common figure of the real death of the saints in the New Testament, but it is occasionally, also, a figure of spiritual sloth, particularly in 1 Corinthians 11:30. But we have already arrived at the significance of "death", and the example of Sardis previously cited has shown that spiritual death can happen again, to those who once came to life in Christ, if they turn aside from the diligent watchfulness which they have been called to observe. To dead Sardis, the call was to be watchful and strengthen the things which remain, or its time as a lightstand would be short. And to Ephesus the call is the same. They are to walk circumspectly (5:15), which is the same as to be watchful; and they are to redeem the time (5:16), which is the same as being aware that the period of their opportunities is short. "Redeeming the time" is interpreted as "buying up their opportunities", which are rare and precious, and the lesson of this must strike us with uncomfortable force.

Even our time, it seems, is not our own, and why should it be thought that it is? Killing time, when we have the powers to do otherwise, is sinful; marking time when we might be marching is purposeless, and wasting time is spendthrift. We have not enough of it to waste, and the Lord has much to ask of us in service, and much to offer us in present reward. Is not the finest counsel which we could ask to be found in the first Psalm of Moses: "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom? (Psalms 90:12) And are not the counsels to remember our Creator in the days of youth - where they are applicable - the wisest counsels, which could be offered to any of us? We seem to be living in an age and in circumstances when our youth are invited to remember almost everything else when they are taught from the earliest days of adolescence to remember their bodies, their sports and the fact that they had better be looking out for a wife or husband and the sooner they get into practice the better. And we have the difficult responsibility of seeking to point out that it is better at all times to "seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness", and that in His wisdom "all these things shall be added to you".

"Be ye not foolish" (5:17) reminds us clearly of the Ten Virgins, and warns us of the folly of those who were satisfied with the small starting supply of the Spirit's power which they started with in their baptismal days, and made no effort to secure more for their journey to the bridegroom while there was still opportunity. Perhaps this significance of the oil in their lamps was in the Apostle's mind when he wrote, for he counsels against the false enthusiasms which come from drunkenness (5:18), and advises diligence to secure the Spirit's supplies while there is yet opportunity: "Be not drunk with wine, but be ye filled with the Spirit".

This filling with the Spirit, this invitation to God to continue and extend His dominion in their hearts, produces the glad result that the cacophony of saxophones and motor horns and commercials yields place to the Spirit's own melodies, and psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, sung unto the Lord in thanksgiving in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (5:19-21). Now very few of the songs which are sung around us throughout the day are spiritual songs; there are not so many of them which are even decently neutral: and the apostle's words do not seem to allow that it is right to indulge in them. Sometimes words are used which fall under our former condemnation. Sometimes the name of God is used in mock prayers so frivolously that a

spiritual mind must feel sick before the sentiments expressed, more particularly when they are used in situations, which are the opposite of worshipful. Sometimes that solemn word “Hallelujah” is bandied about shamelessly as an expression of riotous self-satisfaction. While it is difficult to be in any way critical of singing music which is good in its own sphere, with words which are beautiful and comely, even though its topic is not always strictly that of praise, it would be impossible to couple the apostle’s counsel with liberty in the type of singing we have earlier mentioned.

But if singing of certain types of song is unseemly, there is a manner of singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, which is scarcely less so. As I see it, a hymn is an act of worship from the moment of its announcement to the moment when it is concluded. The only fitting manner in which to make melody to the Lord would be to refrain from the discords, which arise from trying to do something else at the same time. When the words of hymns are announced, we should surely be listening and not talking (about anything at all) to our neighbours; and when others are singing, we should surely be singing with them, or at least listening intently to their words. God will hear melody, even if our voices are not very tuneful, provided that our hearts are attuned to Him: and that the melody should be inward in our hearts, and our minds full of thankfulness, is Paul’s particular wish. He is concerned, not merely that we should make certain kinds of noises, but that we shall make them as a common expression of gladness and gratitude.

The topic of mutual subjection is a difficult one, especially when it concerns relations between brethren on the one hand, and sisters on the other. But difficulty is no excuse for ignoring the subject, and it is at this point that our Letter compels us to face it. The counsel is first quite general: “submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ” (5:21). This is the duty of all without distinction of sex: there should be no self-assertion on the part of any man or any woman. Recognising that we all are subject to our Lord, there should be no attempt on our part to usurp His authority by doing the ruling on our own account. In the most responsible positions we are but servants, doing for the mutual benefit the will of Him who is the head; and whatever arrangements are deemed best, either by the mind of the Spirit or the prayerful will of the church, are arrangements in which the disciples look upon themselves not as “lording it over God’s heritage, but as being examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:3).

But the particular case of wives and husbands is not so easy for an emancipated generation to receive, and we must confess a very sincere understanding of the difficulties of those (particularly the women in our midst) who find themselves in any way obliged to accept a position, which their worldly counterparts would reject with contempt. Nevertheless, the case for proper gradation of authority was never more beautifully or convincingly expressed than here:

- Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord (5:22);
- for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church (5:23),
- therefore, as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything (5:24).
- Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church (5:25);
- Even so ought husbands to love their wives as their own bodies (5:28);

- for no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth it and cherisheth it, even as Christ also the church (5:29),
- for we are members of His body.
- I speak concerning Christ and the church, nevertheless let every one in particular love his wife as himself, and the wife see that she reverence her husband (5:32-33).

Skilfully, but with all possible sincerity, Paul takes our resentment from us. Marriage, he says, is not a thing in itself. For the people of God it is a living type of Christ and the church. The husband acts the part of Christ, and the wife acts the part of the bride of Christ. The family ought to be constructed in such a way that those looking on it can see in it the pattern of the Kingdom of God. They should be able to behold a man who guides wisely and provokes nothing but affection by his rulership. They should be able to see a woman who responds loyally, and receives nothing but appreciation and honour in return. They should be able to turn with relief from their suffragettes and unattainable catchcalls of equality, and incompatibilities and divorces, and see an arrangement which works perfectly well, in which no one lords it over another but each knows his and her place in the plan, and in which above all the love of God in Christ for His church is displayed in all that occurs.

This was perhaps the intention of Holy Matrimony (by which I mean the marriage of saints) from the beginning. It is perhaps the fundamental reason behind the Lord's stressing that in marriage it is God that hath joined together (Matthew 19:6), and therefore no breach should be considered. It is for this, perhaps, that when things do go wrong, so much forgiveness and mutual reconciliation is called for, so that the pattern can be preserved, the forgiveness of God for the most serious of offences made known and understood, and the ultimate acceptance of both parties as members of the subject, but radiantly happy Bride of Christ, made sure.

## **Ephesians Chapter 6: "Them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity"**

This discussion has established a principle. The regulation of our earthly affairs is not to be regulated according to our own unaided wish, nor in accordance with the spirit of the times. It is "as unto the Lord". For that reason, then, Paul goes on to consider parent and children in relationship to each other (6:1-4), and to propound his instruction with a double mention of the Lord's part in the matter. Children obey their parents as an earthly type of men and women obeying their heavenly Father; and parents guide their children with loving care, as their heavenly Father has provided for them. It is significant that Paul here takes a somewhat different approach from that used by the Lord. Jesus bids us knock, ask and seek, and God will respond; for, He says, "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone; or a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent. Or if he ask an egg, will He give him a scorpion? If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" (Luke 11:9-13). We can be sure that God will do better to us, even than we do to our children. But here the thought is the reverse: as in the Lord we know so much of His goodness, we ought to be the more glad to give all that is good and needful without stint unto our children. But it is in "the chastening and admonition of the Lord", and in the face of a certain disposition to give psychological fashions precedence over Scripture in this matter, it must be asserted with firmness that this counsel is utterly incompatible with the up to date extremes of free expression. Every instructed mind will at once think of convincing evidence from the scripture for this, and it is not pleasant to think of the term, which the Bible uses for those who are without chastisement (Hebrews 12:5-11).

The principles established here apply equally to the relationships between masters and servants, each in his own way fulfilling the will of God, in rulership or in submission (6:5-9). The reward of such service is not to be measured in terms of earthly wages (6:8), and the grace of such rulership will in time to come be heaped again into the bosom of the generous master.

And with this Paul ends this type of practical counsel. There remain in the letter a rousing call to strength, preparedness and steadfastness, knowing that God is with us in His heavenly places as we fight, and assured that the armour of God is able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked, leading the saint on to assault against wickedness which cannot be resisted if penitence can be provoked. The armour of the Roman soldier is put to effective use to teach us that it is truth, and not opinions, which we must preach; faith, and not self-assurance, which will keep us whole; righteousness, and not guile which must be our spirit; "the readiness to preach which the Gospel of peace gives" which must move us; the hope of salvation which must guard our minds, and the power of the Word, quickened by the Spirit, which must pierce our adversaries' defences (6:10-17).

Above all there is needed prayer, earnest, sincere prayer in the Spirit, not only on our own behalf, but on the behalf of all, for all saints, in those days for Paul himself in his supreme labours on the Lord's behalf: that the gross indignity of imprisoning the Lord's ambassador might be undone, for the Lord's sake, and Paul's work continued with the same triumphant success that faith has secured for it before.

We could close on no better note. "Now unto Him" must be the end of all our words, and the beginning of them. We have no doubt in this unparalleled expression of spiritual faith how Paul begun and we can do no other than join him, thinking of our fellowship one with another in the way he ends:

“Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.  
Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.” (6:23-34).