

A MAN IN CHRIST

T.B. Baines

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Ephesians 1 - 2:10

I wish in these papers not so much to dwell on the doctrine of the epistle to the Ephesians, as on the conduct to which this doctrine leads. If the teaching of the epistle unfolds the highest character of Christian standing, its exhortations enforce the highest character of Christian walk. But in the Spirit's teaching these subjects are always combined. The rules laid down for the believer's conduct are drawn from the exposition of the place in which he is set. While therefore we shall look more at the practical than at the doctrinal parts of the epistle, we must ascertain the believer's standing as here revealed, in order to comprehend the nature and motives of the conduct afterwards enjoined.

The epistle to the Ephesians, though of course owning Jesus as the eternal Son, looks at Him generally in another character. We read in Phil. 2: 6-11 that He, though "in the form of God, thought it not an object of rapine [a thing to be grasped at] to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even, the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should

bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Now here we have glory conferred upon Jesus, not in consequence of His being equal with God, but in consequence of His humbling Himself, being found in fashion as a man, and becoming obedient unto death. As God, all dominion and glory were His own; nor could anything be given Him. But as man, He had voluntarily emptied Himself, taking the lowest place, and bowing even to the power of death, in order to carry out God’s purposes of grace. God’s righteous response, then, to this obedience and devotedness was to exalt Him in the same character in which He had humbled Himself, giving to the man “Jesus” a name at which every knee should bow, and making every tongue to confess that He is Lord.

Now it is in this character that Jesus is generally presented in the epistle to the Ephesians. And this gives occasion to the unfolding of two great mysteries, till then hidden in the counsels of God from before the foundation of the world. The first of these is, that God will “gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth.” (Eph. 1: 10.) This is a vast expansion of the Messiah’s glories predicted in the Old Testament, and is the dignity which Jesus has acquired by His humiliation — the exalted “name” given Him because of His obedience “unto death, even the death of the cross.” The other mystery is, “that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of God’s promise in Christ by the gospel.” (Eph. 3: 6.) This shows the complete suspension of God’s earthly purposes while He is bringing in a new people. In this new people the distinction between Jew and Gentile entirely disappears, and the two are classed together on the same ground. The new people are not an earthly people; for though still in the world, they are “blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places” — nay,

are even made to “sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Their distinguishing feature is, that they are seen and accepted “in Christ.”

The two mysteries are, then, the counsels of God, first concerning the full glory of the Lord Jesus, and next concerning the blessedness of the people who are thus closely associated with Him. The development of these two mysteries is the great object of the first half of the epistle. Hence it is not the sinner’s side of salvation, as in the epistle to the Romans, but God’s side, that is brought into prominence. In Romans the sinner is seen in his evil nature, and the cross is brought in for his deliverance. In Ephesians God’s eternal purposes are disclosed, and the object of redemption and the blessedness of the redeemed in connection with Christ set forth. The epistle to the Romans starts from man’s need to God’s grace; the epistle to the Ephesians starts from God’s grace to man’s need. The one shows how God can be righteous while He justifies and delivers the sinner; the other how the sinner’s need gives occasion to the display of God’s wisdom and grace. Hence in the Romans the sinner is regarded as alive in the flesh, and death is brought in as the means of his deliverance; while in the Ephesians the sinner is regarded as spiritually dead, dead in trespasses and sins, and the quickening power of God is shown in raising him out of this state, and setting him in the heavenly places in Christ.

The epistle begins therefore with thanksgivings for the standing which the believer now has in Christ. The question is not how far he comprehends or enjoys the privileges and blessings into which he is brought. In this there may be wide differences; in the privileges and blessings themselves there are none. The babe in Christ is in this respect on an equality with the young man and the father, for both are “in Christ,” and have the full blessedness of

this standing. All believers are “blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ;” have been “chosen in Him before the foundation of the world, that they should be holy and without blame before God in love;” have been “predestinated unto the adoption of children by Christ Jesus” unto God, “according to the good pleasure of His will;” and are, therefore, “to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.” (Eph. 1: 3-6.) These are the privileges, though the very unequally enjoyed privileges, of all believers as seen in Christ, just as the foundation on which everything rests, “redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of God’s grace” (v. 7), is the common portion of all saints. They are not future, but present privileges, and our possession of them arises from our having an acceptance in Him who has perfectly glorified God, and is now — not as the eternal Son of the Father, but in virtue of His work and obedience unto death — the object of God’s special delight and love. To speak of our being accepted, or of our being “in Christ,” when He is looked at in His divine nature, would be a grave error. But we are accepted, and are, as to our standing, “in Christ,” the risen glorified man at God’s right hand. In Romans believers are not spoken of as being “in Christ” until the eighth chapter, because there only do we arrive at the true Christian standing. In Ephesians this remarkable expression occurs at the very threshold, because all is here seen according to the counsels of God, and the full standing of the believer is therefore at once set forth.

And now the apostle, having put us in possession of our present privileges “in Christ,” goes on to show how God in His grace “hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence” (v. 8), disclosing to us His own marvellous purposes concerning Christ. These purposes are not only concerning the earthly glories foretold by the Old Testament prophets, but also concerning the

heavenly glories now first made known. Hence they are called a mystery; and we are told that God hath “made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself; that in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth.” (vv. 9, 10.) The Christ, God’s anointed, was always predicted as the One who was to exercise sovereign authority on earth; but that the man Jesus should, by virtue of His obedience and humiliation, have this supreme dignity conferred upon Him in heaven as well as on earth, was a mystery now first revealed. Of course it is not Christ’s glory as God that is here spoken of, for that He had always and inalienably; but it is as the risen man, the One in whom we are accepted, that He is thus exalted and glorified. Hence believers have a share in this dominion; for in Him “also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will; that we should be to the praise of His glory, who first trusted in Christ” (vv. 11, 12.) And not only had the believing Jews, “who first trusted in Christ,” this inheritance, but the believing Gentiles had the same; for they also had trusted when they heard the gospel, and after they believed, “were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession.” (vv. 13, 14.)

The possession has been purchased by the cross, but has not yet been fully redeemed, has not yet passed into the hands of the purchaser. Hence Christ is waiting, seated at the Father’s right hand, until “the dispensation of the fulness of times,” when this gathering together of all things in Himself will take place. We, too, are waiting, often indeed with very feeble faith and hope, but still with no uncertainty as to the result; for God has sealed us with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the pledge or earnest of

our title till the time of redemption, when the possession will be entered upon and fully enjoyed.

The subject here is not the believer's blessedness when he goes at death to be with Christ, nor even the richer blessedness he will know when the Lord comes to complete the work of redemption as to him, by giving him a body like His own, and taking him to the Father's house. The redemption spoken of is not the redemption of the believer, but the redemption of the inheritance which the believer will receive together with Christ. The possession spoken of is not the possession of the joys and blessedness of the Father's house, but the possession of that dominion which Christ will take, together with us as His joint-heirs, when all things are gathered together in Him.

Thus we have brought before us, in the opening of the epistle, our present privileges and our future possession "in Christ." The apostle then prays that we may understand these things, and also "what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." (vv. 15-21.) If our acceptance in the Beloved involves our receiving the same privileges and possessions that He receives, it is brought about through our being quickened by the same power by which He was quickened. We are not only one with Him in our blessing and prospects, but also in our life. The same power was exercised in the same way in quickening us as in quickening Him. God has wrought toward us "according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead;" for He "hath quickened us together with Christ."

(Eph. 2: 4, 5.) He has also “wrought according to the power which has set Christ “at His own right hand in the heavenly places;” for He “hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” (v. 6.)

All this is most beautiful. We, poor helpless sinners, had no spiritual life whatever; “were dead in trespasses and sins.” Jesus in grace put Himself in our stead under God’s judgment, and died “the just for the unjust” Thus we are fully delivered — not only freed from the righteous judgment of God, but, as shown in the Romans, “dead with Christ,” “crucified with Him,” our old sinful nature regarded as dead and buried with Him. The epistle to the Ephesians begins at this point of our history. It takes Christ up in death, and shows how God’s power “raised Him from the dead;” it takes us up as “dead in trespasses and sins,” and shows how the same power which raised Christ has quickened us. Thus in Romans we are delivered from the old nature by the cross of Christ; in Ephesians we are quickened in the new nature together with Christ. And this is something much more than new birth. It is a new birth, or a new life, of a peculiar character, conferred by the same power which raised Christ from the dead, so that we are not only quickened with Him, but are identified with Him — the risen and glorified One at God’s right hand. And so close is this identification, that, though still on earth, we are even now spoken of as seated together “in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

The closing words of the first chapter show the character of this identification in a very striking way. There we are told, concerning Christ, that God “hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.” (vv. 22, 23.) This is the first time the Church is named in the epistle, and a most marvellous

revelation it is as to its character. From it we learn that when Christ takes the dominion over all things, according to God's purpose, He will take it, not alone, but in conjunction with the Church. It is not Christ that will reign merely, but Christ and the Church; the Church being so inseparably united with Him that it is said to be His "fulness" or completion — as much one with Himself as the body is one with the head. Hence Christ is not complete, in the character in which He will take the headship over all things, until the Church, His body, is complete also. Until the last member has been added, Christ waits; for until then His body has not received its, "fulness," and the Head cannot take the dominion apart from the whole body.

It is perhaps unnecessary to repeat, though most important to remember, that this union, with all its blessed consequences, is not with Christ as the eternal Son, the Word who "was God," but with Christ as the, risen glorified Man. As God, there could be no union with Him. Nor again, as born into this world, could we be united with Him, or He with us. Until the corn of wheat had fallen into the ground and died, it must abide alone; but having died, it could bring forth much fruit. In His sinless life He was the spotless and obedient One, the revealer of the Father, but alone. In the death in which "He was made sin," He was our Substitute and Saviour; but there too He was all alone. In resurrection He became the head of a new creation, and it is by new creation that we are now "in Him;" for "if any man be in Christ, it is a new creation." (2 Cor. 5: 17.) Union with Christ is always spoken of in this connection: "He is the Head of the body, the Church, who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead." (Col. 1: 18.) It is after He has been on the "horns of the unicorns" that He says, "I will declare thy name unto my brethren." (Ps. 22: 21, 22; Heb. 2: 9-12.) Not till after His resurrection does He use the words, "Go to my brethren," or associate the disciples with Himself by

speaking of “my Father, and your Father; my God, and your God.” (John 20: 17.) So, too, it is by our being conformed to the image of the risen One that He becomes “the first-born among many brethren.” (Rom. 8: 29.)

Such then is God’s grace towards us, who were once walking “according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air ...fulfilling the desires of the flesh... children of wrath.” (Eph. 2: 2, 3.) Grace has delivered us from this lost state, quickened us together with Christ, made us members of His body, given us His own acceptance before God, and associated us as fellow-heirs in His universal dominion. Surely this is worthy of God! He has thus wrought for His own glory, “that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.” (v. 7.) All is of grace. Works can have no place here, nor the boastings of man. But is God indifferent to good works? Nay; “for we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” (vv. 8-10.) As to our standing, good works have no place; for we are God’s workmanship. But this very fact demands that good works should follow as a result. We are not created by good works, but we are created unto them.

Ephesians 2:11 - 3

In our last chapter we saw the privileges of the believer as associated with the risen Christ in new life, in present blessing, and in future dominion and glory. This is the portion of the individual Christian; and in the scriptures then before us only a brief, though very blessed, reference was made to the character of the Church. The part we now come to is, however, more concerned with the Church than with the individual Christian. In the passage already looked at, the Church was shown as the body of Christ — “the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.” But the passage we are now to examine regards it in another aspect, bringing out its exceptional nature, its wide departure from all God’s previously pursued or previously announced plans. In former times God had called a people into special relationship with Himself. This people was “the commonwealth of Israel,” and to it belonged the knowledge of God, the birth of the Messiah, the covenants of promise, and the outward mark of circumcision. In Old Testament history, they had been His favoured, though rebellious, people. In Old Testament prophecies, they were the centre of all His dealings. The glories of the Messiah were to be displayed in their midst, and no promise of blessing was made to the Gentiles save through them.

But God was now performing a work entirely distinct from anything recorded in Old Testament narrative, or predicted in Old Testament prophecies. The apostle therefore calls upon the Ephesian believers, who were of Gentile origin, to remember that they had no title such as the Jews might claim, not having one of those marks, which the Jews possessed, of relationship with God. They had been “in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called uncircumcision by that which is called the circumcision in the flesh made by hands.” Moreover, they were at that time “without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.” (Eph. 2: 11, 12.) But though the Gentiles had no title founded on covenant, promise, or national connection, God was now bringing them in by His own sovereign grace. The Jews, who had a direct interest in the Messiah, had rejected Him and shed His blood. This had caused them, as a nation, to be set aside, and had ended, until their restoration, all those purposes to which the covenants and promises referred. God had therefore turned, as it were, to another object. “The blood of Christ,” which caused the national rejection of the Jews, was made the means of bringing people nigh. But in this sovereign and wonderful action of grace, God was no longer confined within the channels traced out by prophecy. All the prophetic blessings were postponed, because the nation in whom they centred was rejected. A new class of blessings, richer, higher, and with no restriction of nation or class, was thus brought in.

Hence the apostle says, “Now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” (v. 13.) Thus Gentile believers were brought nigh by that very blood, the shedding of which caused the rejection of the Jews and the postponement of their national blessings. And not only was the blessing entirely different from what they as Gentiles could have

enjoyed, if the covenants of promise to Israel had then been fulfilled. It was of a far higher order than even the Jew Himself could have enjoyed under those covenants. For these Gentiles were now brought nigh "in Christ Jesus," which is a standing never spoken of in Old Testament prophecy. In this wondrous place the believing Jew and the believing Gentile were blended together, all earthly distinctions disappearing in the new character of blessing, into which both were now introduced. Christ not only had made peace for them, but was their peace, and had "made both one," having "broken down the middle wall of partition," and "having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace." (vv. 14, 15.)

This passage conclusively shows that Christianity is not the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, but something brought in while this awaits its fulfilment. In the fulfilment of the prophecies, the Jew will receive the place of pre-eminence which the covenants of promise assign him, and his blessings will be of a national character. The blessings here named are not national, but individual, and require the setting aside of all national distinctions for their accomplishment. Moreover, the passage speaks of both Jew and Gentile being made in Christ into "one new man." Understood literally, this could have no meaning; but understood figuratively, its sense is at once clear and beautiful. The Church is the body of Christ; and the Church and Christ are the "one new man" here spoken of. Language such as this is wholly foreign to the old prophets. It implies a nearness of relationship which the Old Testament never contemplates, and which indeed would be entirely inconsistent with the character in which the Messiah will be known by His earthly people.

But this nearness of relationship is the blessed portion of the believer, without distinction of Jew or Gentile; for Christ's object was, "that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby." (v. 16.) The cross has not only obtained for us forgiveness of sins. It has ended up our standing in the flesh. As "dead with Christ," earthly and fleshly distinctions cease; and in the new creation, that is, in Christ Himself, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, circumcision nor uncircumcision. By the cross we are dead, and the enmities of the flesh are slain with us. Thus both Jew and Gentile are reconciled "unto God in one body." This body is, of course, the body of Christ, the Church, which stands therefore entirely outside all earthly distinctions or covenant relationships. Hence peace can now be preached alike, says the apostle, "to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh" (v. 17); for those that were nigh having forfeited their claim, and those that were afar off never having had any claim, both are now dealt with on the same footing of sovereign grace. They are brought, not into the position which as a nation the Jews had lost by their rejection of the Christ, but into an entirely new position; "for through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." (v. 18.) Jehovah is the name and character in which Israel will yet know God. But under the new order of things introduced by grace, the believer, whether Jew or Gentile, knows God as Father.

The result is that old distinctions altogether vanish. "Now therefore ye" (the Gentile believers) "are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints" (that is, believers generally, whether Jewish or Gentile) "and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles. and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone." (vv. 19, 20.) Both Jewish and Gentile believers are transplanted from their old ground and placed in entirely different soil. They

are “fellow-citizens,” but not of an earthly country; for “our citizenship is in heaven.” They are of the “household of God “ — a closer relationship than the Jew will enjoy when his national blessings reach their highest point. They are built into a new and wonderful structure, of which “Jesus Christ Himself” is the chief corner-stone, and “the apostles and prophets” the foundation course.

In the next chapter we read that the mystery of the Church was in other ages “not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.” (Eph. 3: 5.) This shows that the prophets here spoken of in connection with the apostles were not the Old Testament prophets. In the times of the Old Testament prophets the mystery was not made known. To the prophets here named, as well as to the apostles, the mystery was made known. In this epistle “prophets” are only named three times, and each time in connection with “apostles.” Both apostles and prophets are spoken of as gifts of an ascended Christ. The prophets therefore here mentioned as forming part of the foundation on which we are built are not the Old Testament prophets, but the prophets to whom this mystery was now first imparted.

But the figure of our oneness with Christ is still strikingly continued; for after speaking of Him as “the chief corner-stone,” the Spirit adds, “In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.” (vv. 21, 22.) Strictly speaking, it is not correct to say that a building grows, or that the various materials added are built together, in the corner-stone. But this very departure from strict accuracy only shows with greater vividness the prominence in which the Spirit seeks to set the thought of our standing “in Christ.” In another epistle

Paul writes, that “as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.” (1 Cor. 12: 12.) Here the Church is the body, and Christ is the head; but the two are looked upon as so identified that the body itself, as well as the head, is spoken of as “Christ.” It is the same blending together of Christ and the Church that we find in the passage before us. Christ is the corner-stone, and believers are the rest of the building; but so bound up are they with each other that the whole is spoken of as in Him, and is said to be builded together in Him “for an habitation of God through the Spirit.”

This is God’s building, consisting only of real believers, who are built together in Christ, and form, as thus constructed, a suitable dwelling-place for Himself. It must be carefully distinguished from the building raised by man on the same foundation — a building in which all sorts of worthless material are brought in, and which will therefore be tried by fire. A confusion between these two buildings has been the source of very much and very lamentable error.

Thus we have two remarkable figures of the Church, in both of which its oneness with Christ is very strikingly set forth. Considered as a body, it is the body of Christ — a thing necessary, as it were, to His own completeness. Considered as a temple, a dwelling-place for God, it is “builded together” in Christ, He Himself being the chief corner-stone, all believers being reared upon this foundation, and the whole growing up to completeness in Him.

To Paul was specially entrusted this truth concerning the new thing which God was bringing in. For this cause he was a prisoner of Jesus Christ for the Gentiles, having had given to him “a dispensation of the grace of God” towards them. He

had received “by revelation” a mystery — or secret purpose of God — not disclosed in past times, “that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel.” (Eph. 3: 1-6.) That the Gentiles should be “fellow-heirs” with the Jews was a new thing, not only in fact, but in the revealed purposes of God. Still more marvellous was it that they should be “of the same body;” for this was something which neither Jew nor Gentile had ever heard of. They were made “fellow-heirs” with each other by being made fellow-heirs with Christ; they were made “of the same body” with each other by being made members of the body of Christ. It was thus that the Gentiles became “partakers of God’s promise in Christ by the gospel.” According to covenants and prophecy, Christ was the special hope of Israel. But the promises of blessing in Christ went far beyond Israel, and were wide enough to embrace God’s present work, in which Jew and Gentile are blended together, as well as that work to which the covenants and prophecies of the Old Testament look forward.

Paul therefore had before him two objects. As a servant of the gospel he had “this grace given,” to “preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” (vv. 7, 8.) And as the one to whom the mystery was revealed, he was “to make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things, to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (vv. 9-11.) This is a wonderful passage. God, as creator of all things, had shown His wisdom. But there was a still more marvellous display which this wisdom was to receive, a display contemplated in God’s counsels from all eternity, but now first brought to light. When all His earthly purposes seemed

to be frustrated, when Satan seemed to have succeeded, God's manifold wisdom displays itself by turning this very apparent defeat into the crowning victory of His grace. The great seeming triumph which Satan achieved at the cross, the temporary setting aside of all the revealed purposes of blessing and glory through Christ, only gave occasion for God to put a higher glory on Christ, and to introduce a richer and more unrestricted blessing than any before revealed. Thus the manifold character of God's wisdom shows itself, and not only to men, but to the principalities and powers in heavenly places. "The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" when they beheld His wisdom in creating the world; but they see its manifold nature and its brightest display in His ways concerning the Church.

This leads the apostle to a very remarkable prayer, which closes the third chapter. In the prayer which concludes the first chapter, Christ is looked upon as man, as the One who was raised from the dead. The prayer is, therefore, addressed to "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ." In the prayer of the third chapter, the subject is not our standing in Christ, but Christ dwelling in our hearts. Christ is looked upon, not as the man raised from the dead, but as the One who accomplishes the purposes of God, and manifests His love. It is more as the Son revealing the Father, than as the man glorifying God and glorified by Him, that He is here presented before us. The prayer is therefore addressed, not to "the God," but to "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (v. 14.) While the earlier prayer, moreover, is, that we may understand God's purposes and power, this carries us into a still higher region. The apostle prays that we may, according to the riches of God's glory, "be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ,

which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled to all the fulness of God.” (vv. 16-19.)

Here we have the indwelling of the Holy Ghost as the source of strength, and that “according to the riches of God’s glory;” Christ taking His abode in our hearts by faith; the soul, “rooted and grounded in love;” able to enter into the vastness of God’s ways; “the breadth, and length, and depth, and height” of those purposes which His grace has formed for His own glory, as well as for our blessing; and, finally, ourselves taught to know, not indeed in its extent — for in this it passes knowledge — but in its nature, the wondrous love of Christ Himself, that we may “be filled to all the fulness of God.” This last expression is beautiful in its very indefiniteness. That we can be filled to God’s fulness is, of course, impossible; but this is, as it were, the measure in which God is willing to supply, and the only limit of the Holy Ghost’s desire for us. Full as we may be, there is still infinitely more beyond; so that there is no limit to what is placed at our command.

And then, after bringing out all God’s wonderful purposes, His power and His grace; after showing His manifold wisdom, as displayed in the Church, the apostle concludes by an outburst of praise to Him. “Now,” he says, “unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.” (vv. 20, 21.) It is surely meet that He who has displayed His wisdom and grace in calling the Church should throughout eternity derive glory from it. Such is the apostle’s desire, and such should be the desire of every believer brought into this marvellous place. It will be fulfilled in the ages to come; but just in proportion as our hearts enter into the spirit of this prayer will it be their desire that, as far as may be, it should be fulfilled now.

Ephesians 4:1, 2

We have seen in the first three chapters of the epistle the believer's standing in Christ, and God's thoughts about the Church. The practical teaching which follows is divided into four classes, according to the believer's relationship with the Church (Eph. 4: 1-16), the world (Eph. 4: 17-5: 21), the family (Eph. 5: 21 — Eph. 6: 9), and the powers of darkness (Eph. 6: 10-17). We shall see how, in each of these positions, the rule of conduct given him corresponds with his standing as shown in the earlier part of the epistle.

The apostle describes himself as a "prisoner in the Lord." This is an interesting circumstance, and throws much light on the Lord's present ways. Although, as Peter told the Jews, "God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ," yet His lordship is so far from being recognised by the world that His most faithful servant and ambassador is now a prisoner in the hands of the world's ruling power. This could not have been if the kingdom in its proper or prophetic form had been established. In that day Christ will cast out His enemies, and exalt His faithful followers. Now, however, tribulation and rejection are the portion which God's people are told to expect. This does not at all interfere with the lordship of Christ. David was as much God's

anointed king when he hid in the cave of Adullam as when he reigned on the throne in Zion; but in the one case his dignity was discerned only by faith, in the other by sight. So with the great Antitype. Christ's lordship exists now as much as it will when He comes to reign over the earth. But it is now only seen by the eye of faith; and the world may go on despising Him and rejecting His people without calling down immediate judgment. Jesus has taken in grace the position of a dependent and obedient man; and He retains His position as man, though glorified at the right hand of God. He waits till the world shall be given Him by His Father. Till then, vengeance belongeth unto God, and Jesus, like David, leaves His case in God's hands. His followers are called upon to share His patience and rejection; and hence the foremost apostle is now nothing in the eyes of the world but an obscure prisoner in a Roman gaol.

He begins his exhortation in the fourth chapter with the word "therefore." This word really resumes the sentence commenced in the first verse of the third chapter, and interrupted by the long and wonderful parenthesis of which that chapter consists. It refers, therefore, to what has been said before in Ephesians 2, that is, to the calling of the Gentiles and Jews into one "new man," the breaking down of the middle wall of partition between them, and the building of them both into "an holy temple in the Lord," of which Jesus Christ Himself was the chief corner-stone, the apostles and prophets the foundation course, and believers the materials, "builDED together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." And this call was from a condition of deadness in trespasses and sins, a state of distance and alienation from God, to which no promises and no covenant relationships attached; so that all was of simple grace, the believer having no claim to any portion of the blessing he receives in Christ.

Such, then, being the character of the saints' standing, the apostle beseeches them "that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called." (Eph. 4: 1.)

But what walk is worthy of a vocation in which all is of simple grace? The most humbling thing in the world is the reception of boundless and undeserved favour; and the first point therefore which the Spirit urges on believers as worthy of their calling is that they should walk "with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love." (v. 2.) Nothing is more becoming in a believer than "lowliness and meekness;" but perhaps there is nothing more misunderstood. In too many instances these beautiful Christian graces are transformed, through the craft of Satan, into doubts dishonouring to God and destructive of the believer's peace. Now God never calls it lowliness and meekness to doubt the truth of His word, or the efficacy of Christ's work. On the contrary, He counts it pride and presumption. The simple child-like faith which bows to the word He has spoken, which says, "Let God be true, but every man a liar," alone pleases and honours Him. Abraham was commended, not because he questioned God's truth, but because he trusted it, and even "against hope believed in hope;" not because he doubted whether God would fulfil His word, but because he was "fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform." And what was the effect? Did it puff him up? Just the contrary. Because he was "strong in faith" he gave "glory to God." The very fact that there was no power in himself only magnified God's grace. And so it must be with the believer. The more fully we lay hold of what grace has done for us, the more completely are we abased in God's presence. That we, sinners and enemies, should be chosen by God to be fellow-heirs with Christ, should be predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, can, if really apprehended by faith, only fill us with wonder and praise.

Where is the room for boasting when all is so clearly of God? None are so meek and lowly as the crowned elders who fall down and worship in heaven; and the larger our grasp of God's purposes towards us, the deeper our lowliness and meekness will be. So far, then, from being founded on doubts as to the blessings we have received, these graces are the proper fruits of faith, and are always proportioned to the degree in which the blessings are apprehended by the soul.

There is, however, another mistake on which we would touch while speaking of lowliness and meekness. If it is not true lowliness, but Satan's counterfeit of lowliness, to doubt our standing in Christ, neither is it true lowliness for one to shrink from taking the place, or exercising the gift, which God has bestowed upon him in the Church. There is a time to speak as well as a time to be silent; and while nothing is more unbecoming than that forwardness and ostentation of gift which seems to have brought disorder into the meetings of the assembly at Corinth; yet, on the other hand, it is quite possible to quench the Spirit, and thus hinder blessing, under the false impression that silence is a display of lowliness and meekness. If God has bestowed a gift, He means it to be used; and to plead lowliness and meekness as a reason for not using it is merely to cloak our unfaithfulness under a pretentious name. So as to prayer, or the giving out of a hymn, if anyone has it laid on his heart by the Spirit thus to take part in an assembly, is it lowliness and meekness to remain silent?

Is it not rather the vanity that shrinks from the criticism of others, or seeks their applause by a feigned modesty? No doubt there is need of spiritual discernment as to when and how to take part; but this will be given where it is sought. It was becoming in Barnabas, when travelling with a more gifted brother, to let Paul be the chief speaker. But would it have been becoming in

Paul to decline exercising the gift which he had received, on the plea of showing “all lowliness and meekness” in the presence of Barnabas, who was his elder? It was becoming in Elihu to stand aside in the colloquy between Job and his old friends; but would it have been becoming in him, when they had failed to convince Job, and when the truth was taught him by the Spirit, to remain silent and refuse to utter it? These, no doubt, are very far from ordinary examples, but they serve to show the difference between true lowliness and meekness, and that which, though so easily mistaken for it, is in fact nothing more than the indulgence of the sloth or timidity of the natural heart in opposition to the leadings of the Spirit of God.

“Lowliness and meekness,” then, are the first things pressed upon us by the Spirit of God as worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called. But closely associated with these, and indeed necessarily flowing out of them, are other graces mentioned in the same verse, “long-suffering, forbearing one another in love.” The man who is prompt to resent injuries and assert rights is the man who has a high opinion of himself. If he sees himself in the nothingness to which grace reduces him, patience under injury, and forbearance towards those who have wronged him, will be the result. But still more will this be the case with those with whom he is made one in Christ. How can the man who is conscious of the grace that has remitted the ten thousand talents seize his brother by the throat and claim the hundred pence due to himself? If there is any sense of the love with which we are loved, and loved in spite of our coldness and deadness, our ingratitude and provocations — if there is any apprehension of the grace which bought us, and which still bears with us in all our perverseness and folly — long-suffering will be a comparatively easy thing, and forbearance in love will commend itself as suited

to the state of one whose own failures and sins are continually calling for the forbearing love of our blessed Lord.

The key to the whole verse is “love.” This is the nature of God Himself, and grace, which is the form love takes when directed towards sinners, is just the very thing which the Son manifested when He came to reveal the Father. For “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” (John 1: 14.) The long-suffering and forbearance here spoken of are not the results of a naturally placable and generous disposition, nor of the training which reason and philosophy may give. They have a higher source. They are the outflow of divine love, dwelling in the heart, and shaping the ways in conformity with the mind and walk of the blessed Lord. In Him alone we see all these graces perfectly displayed. Unwearied in devotion, whether to God or to man, “having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.” How beautifully, too, does the same appear in the ways of His servant who, in writing to the Corinthians, could say, “I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.”

Yet here again, Satan has been busy in setting up an imitation of Christian love which is too easily accepted for the original. To talk of Christian love while there is allowance of evil is to suppose Christian love in which Christ is dishonoured. Forbearance and forgiveness towards those who commit evil is surely a very different thing from connivance at the evil itself. Where did love manifest itself in forgiveness so marvellously as at the cross? and where was God’s intolerance of evil so fearfully displayed? The blessed Lord’s present dealings with us are expressly for the purpose of cleansing us from defilement by the washing of water; for He cannot endure that the least stain should rest upon

His beloved people. So, too, the Father's chastening is directed just to this point, "that we might be partakers of His holiness." Under the Levitical economy an Israelite was told, "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him." (Lev. 19: 17.) So, too, if one believer has been injured by another, he is to go to him and "tell him his fault," not with a view of getting redress for himself, but because "if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." In extreme cases, the discipline of the Church must be called into action, and the offender put out as a "wicked person;" but even here the motive is love, and the object to be sought is, "that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." (1 Cor. 5: 5.)

Nothing therefore can be less in accordance with the love here spoken of than that sort of good-fellowship with believers which refuses to disturb their conscience when they are acting in a way to dishonour the Lord. True Christian love must give Christ the first place, and where the fellowship of believers is preferred to the honour of Christ, the "love in the Spirit" spoken of by the apostle has really been surrendered to the instincts of natural affection. On the other hand, if we are called to show the Lord's faithfulness in dealing with evil, we are called to show His gentleness too. How many a rebuke has missed its point altogether, because the manner in which it was delivered savoured rather of the natural legality of the human heart than of the tenderness of Christ. May we be much in His own presence, that His ways may be more perfectly reflected in our walk. This is the only transforming power. Just so far as we are "with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are" we "changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

Ephesians 4:3-6

Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit

The believer is, as we have seen, entreated to “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith he is called.” Owing everything to grace, and nothing to self, “lowliness and meekness” are obviously becoming, and these are therefore the first qualities he is exhorted to display. Longsuffering and forbearance in love, as the close, and indeed inseparable companions of lowliness and meekness, are also enjoined along with them. These characteristics should under all circumstances distinguish one who is saved by grace, and we shall see how their manifestation is urged in each of the various positions in which the believer is looked upon in this epistle. In none, however, are they more important than in that relationship which takes the first place in the practical exhortations here given; for nowhere does the working of self-will and self-assertion produce such disastrous consequences as in the assembly of God.

We are called through grace into oneness with Christ, as members of His body; and into oneness with each other, as united in Him. If, then, we would walk worthy of our vocation, we must, in accordance with the next practical exhortation, be “endeavouring

to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (v. 3.) How closely this is connected with lowliness and meekness, how constantly it calls for the exercise of long-suffering and forbearance, is too evident to need further remark. If self is made much of, the unity of the Spirit cannot be preserved. It is only as self is dropped out of sight, and Christ becomes the prominent object before the eye, that this exhortation can be followed. But as the Church-relationship is the first here taken up in the practical portion of the epistle, and as this exhortation is the first given with reference to the Church, it is clear that it demands an especially close and careful examination.

The preservation of unity is obviously the point which the Holy Ghost is here pressing, and the importance attached to it is somewhat intensified by the word which is translated “bond,” but which should rather be rendered “the uniting bond.” The believer is not told to keep the unity of the body, or even the unity of the Spirit, but to endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit. The word “keep,” however, is here used in the sense of watching over or caring for, rather than in the absolute sense of maintaining. This latter is clearly beyond man’s power, and can be done by God only. Thanks be to His name, it is safe in His keeping; and however grievously man may have failed in His responsibility, the unity of the body and of the Spirit cannot really be broken. What, then, is the meaning of the exhortation here addressed to the believer? It is manifestly not to maintain that which can be maintained by God only; and yet it is manifestly something after which the believer is to strive. The unity of the Spirit exists, and can never cease to exist; but it may cease to be held, guarded, and watched over by us. It is to this, then, that the exhortation of the apostle is directed.

But how is this to be accomplished? Most Protestants say that the unity here spoken of is an invisible unity in Christ, and that it is quite consistent with sectarian divisions; though believers thus outwardly separated, being really one, should cultivate peace towards each other. This interpretation, however, makes peace the object, and leaves oneness, as a thing which we are to strive after, entirely out of account. Now we are not told to endeavour to keep the bond of peace, but to endeavour to keep "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." The unity of the Spirit is what we are to endeavour to keep, and the bond of peace is the means to be employed. The Holy Ghost does not press that peace should be kept amidst divisions, but that oneness should be kept by peace. How, then, can this oneness be the invisible oneness which exists in Christ? How could believers be told to endeavour to keep that which is solely in God's keeping? They might as well be told to endeavour to keep the earth revolving on its axis. If they are exhorted to do something, it is because there is something for them to do. And what there is for them to do here is quite plain. Being called into the unity of the Spirit, they are to watch and guard it, to endeavour to keep it in the bond of peace. It is not an invisible unity which they can neither keep nor lose, but something which can be kept or lost according to their watchfulness or negligence. The preservation of this outward unity is to be the object of striving and effort.

If this be so, it is clear that the present divided condition of the Church is not according to the mind of the Spirit. It may be well, however, to look at some other scriptures bearing on this subject. In John 17 we find that, whether our Lord was praying for the disciples then with Him, or whether He enlarges the sphere to the whole of those who should believe on Him through their word, in both cases the first petition that He presents concerning them is — for their oneness. In verse 21 He prays, "That they all," that

is all believers, “may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.” Here, then, the special object for which the Lord desires this oneness is that it may be a testimony to the world. No invisible unity can be this. The world can receive no evidence but that presented to it, and unless the oneness of believers is a thing discernible by the world, the testimony here spoken of is not given. The Church indeed was not formed when these words were uttered, but they were uttered in full view of the fact that the Church was soon to be formed; and the formation of the Church could not dissolve, but rather cement and define the oneness here spoken of.

In 1 Cor. 12: 12, 13, we read that “as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” This is clearly the same unity spoken of in Ephesians (Church unity), the whole being one with and in Christ. It cannot be said that the unity here named is merely spiritual, and that nothing is said about its practical manifestation to the world; for the very same chapter declares that “God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked, that there should be no schism [or division] in the body.” (vv. 24, 25.)

Other parts of the same epistle bring out the same truth with even greater clearness. Thus in 1 Cor. 10: 17, which speaks of the Lord’s Supper, we find that the reason for our all partaking of one loaf is that our oneness in Christ may be signified. “For we being many are one bread [that is one loaf], one body: for we are all partakers of that one loaf.”

In the first chapter we find divisions denounced in the most solemn and energetic way. The apostle beseeches the believers to “speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions [or schisms] among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” (vv. 10-13.) Now what do we find here? Just the same thing as in modern Christendom. Different sects had already begun to exist in principle, different human teachers or schools of theology to be regarded as rallying-points. True, they had not yet gone the length of separating from one another, and they still, as to outward form, recognized no centre of gathering but Christ. But what does the apostle say about it? He asks, “Is Christ divided?” These words can have but one meaning. They show that the division of Christians into different schools or sects, even in the mild form which it had then assumed, was a contradiction of the oneness of the Church as the body of Christ. To set up Paul as a rallying-point was like saying that Paul, rather than Christ, had been crucified for them.

If they used Paul’s name as a party cry, they should, in consistency, be baptized in Paul’s name too. Every Christian must be shocked at the thought of Christ being divided, of Paul being crucified for him, or of being baptized in the name of Paul. But the Holy Ghost declares that the divisions of the Corinthians are just as shocking as these suggestions; nay, that nothing but the truth of these suggestions could justify their divisions. Surely a more emphatic condemnation of sects, even in the mildest and least offensive form, it would be difficult to conceive.

But the powers of the human mind are illimitable in escaping unpleasant conclusions. Thus it has been urged that though the divisions of the Corinthians were doubtless wrong, what the apostle condemns was not the divisions themselves, but the spirit in which they were carried out; that the rival schools were probably very bitter, and that it was this bitterness which the apostle censures; whereas modern sects are so loving and amiable, that had he lived in our days he would have commended their spirit, and sanctioned their separate organizations. Now, nothing is more dangerous than seeking to blunt the edge of Scripture so as to escape the wound to our own consciences. The apostle does not say, "I beseech you that ye all speak different things in a friendly way;" but he does say, "I beseech you that ye all speak the same thing." He does not say, "Let the divisions among you be amiably conducted;" but he does say, "Let there be no divisions among you." He does not say, "Let there be peace among those of different minds and of different judgments;" but he does say, "Be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

"Oh, but," it is objected, "these persons were all in one assembly, and of course their divisions were wrong. But this is quite different from the state of things now." No doubt it is different; but when the apostle blames them for saying, "I am of Paul, and I of Apollos," does he mean that the followers of Paul ought to form one sect, and have one sort of meeting, and the followers of Apollos to form another sect, and have another sort of meeting? When he says, "Is Christ divided?" does he mean that the evil ought to be cured by believers widening their divisions, and splitting into different denominations? Surely such reasoning is trifling with Scripture! And is it not a solemn thing to see believers willing to trifle with God's word for the sake of hiding from their gaze the evidence of the ruin which stares them in the face. The Pharisees

boasted while they were groaning under the Roman yoke: “We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man.” (John 8: 33.) But would they not have been wiser if they had owned their ruined condition, and searched into its cause? Is it not the same with modern believers? Surely it would be better to bow to God’s word instead of seeking to torture it into sanctioning the Church’s failure!

Who can, without stifling his own conscience, maintain that the state of things reprov’d by Paul at Corinth was wrong, and that the state of things now prevailing around us is right? If the apostle says to the Corinthians, “Ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?” if he asks, “While one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?” is it not self-evident that he would have regarded those who are now divided into all sorts of sectarian combinations as carnal too? No doubt this is deeply humbling. It is far more pleasant to be flattering ourselves that we are “rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing,” than to be owning that we are “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” But if this is our real condition, what do we gain by concealing it? We gain nothing, and we lose everything. In the things of God, to judge ourselves is the sure precursor of blessing. If once the conscience is brought into exercise about our state, whether individually or collectively, we are on the way to discover God’s mode of deliverance. Among the Jews of old, as among ourselves now, the most fatal thing is that slothful acquiescence in the confusion and ruin around us; that readiness to accept present ease, and to drift on with the current of the day, which at once closes the heart against the entrance of God’s truth, and shuts out self-judgment on account of our own failure. We are quick enough in detecting the folly and

fatal results of this conduct among the Jews. How little we often suspect the same blindness among ourselves!

The apostle goes on to enlarge on this subject of “endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” He gives as a reason for this effort the various unities into which we are brought. These may be divided into three classes, comprising, as it were, three concentric, but not co-extensive, circles. “There is,” he says, “one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.” Here we have the innermost circle, consisting only of true believers, those who are really members of the body of Christ, really sealed by the Spirit, and really possessed of the hope of God’s calling as unfolded in the first chapter. Besides this, however, the believer is brought into another circle, including, but far overlapping, the first, the circle of outward profession and privilege, the circle which owns the “one Lord, one faith, one baptism.” All Christendom owns, however little it may submit to, the lordship of Christ, and the authority and truth of “the faith,” while by far the greater part of Christendom is baptized. There is yet another circle, with wider circumference still, presented to us in the words, “One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all.” Here we have the whole race included, God being the common Father, in the same sense in which Paul else where quotes the Greek poet as saying, “We are also His offspring.” (Acts 17: 28.) As such He is “above all,” and His providence ranges “through all,” but it can only be said of believers that He is “in all;” hence in this case only do we find in some of the best texts that the word “us” is introduced.

But why is this sevenfold oneness here urged? As a reason for “endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” “There is one body;” what more unseemly, then, than the divisions by which the unity established by God is obscured

and practically denied? There is “one Spirit;” why, then, the endless diversities of judgment, of practice, of order, of doctrine, indicating the multiform action of man’s thoughts rather than the operation of the one Spirit here spoken of? There is “one hope of our calling;” whence, then, the conflicting ways and purposes of men who should all be marching to the same goal? There is “one Lord;” how shocking, then, the setting up of every species of human rule, dividing those who own His lordship into different camps, each under a government of man’s invention. There is “one faith;” alas! what a multitude of faiths and creeds, confessions and professions, have sprung up to hide and choke that one “faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” There is “one baptism;” how sad, then, that those who profess to be “buried with Christ” should be splitting into sects and divisions which show that they are “carnal, and walk as men.” Lastly, there is “one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all;” how bitter a satire, then, on the faithfulness of the church, that even believers, who know this Father, should exhibit, not the reflection of divine order and oneness, but the picture of confusion and division which we see around us in Christendom.

But if sects are thus a denial of God’s teaching concerning the Church, what are believers to do? The only organization which claims catholicity is so evidently corrupt that its pretensions to be the one Church need scarcely be discussed. Evangelical believers, admitting the practical evils, though denying the unscriptural character, of the divisions in the Church, have sought to mitigate them by various devices for friendly co-operation among the sects. Of the kindly feeling thus evinced, and the sincere expressions of brotherly love thus called forth, we would certainly not speak in slighting terms. But a false diagnosis necessarily leads to false treatment. The disease is not the ill-feeling existing among the sects, but the sects themselves; and this disease is neither removed

nor altered in character by the occasional “exchange of pulpits,” united prayer-meetings or communions, joint committees and societies for common objects, by which modern evangelical Christians so earnestly seek to promote religious fellowship and good feeling. We have seen that sects are condemned altogether, and no mere rubbing off of their angles will therefore restore the order enjoined in God’s word

“Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” A mortified limb may exhibit certain superficial wounds; but the most careful dressing of these will not obviate the necessity for amputation. Excision of sects, not removal of a few of their worst features, is what is needed to revert to God’s order.

But here the question necessarily arises, Is this possible? Granted that the unity ought never to have been broken, surely it cannot now be regained? This is quite true and the Holy Ghost does not therefore exhort believers to keep it, but to endeavour to keep it. Each person is responsible to do all in his power; and though, when ruin has come in, he cannot reconstruct, he can at all events revert to the principle on which the unity was founded. The passage already quoted from 1 Cor. 1 shows us how the departure took place, and therefore gives some indication of the way of return. What, then, was the manner in which the ruin commenced? By the believers in Corinth setting up party names and rallying-points. It is clear, therefore, that the first step back towards the original ground is the abandonment of all party names and rallying-points. We are told to gather to “the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;” and are assured by Himself that those thus gathered have His presence in their midst.

It is possible however, as this passage proves, to use the name of Christ as a party name; and no distinction in guilt is made between those who thus used the name of Christ, and those who thus

used the name of Paul and Apollos. It is not enough, therefore, merely to renounce all other names, and to meet in the name of Christ only. What, then, is required besides? The apostle exhorts the Corinthians not only to have no party names, but all to “speak the same thing,” and to “be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” Man cries at once that this is impossible; and if man’s mind and man’s judgment are allowed, undoubtedly it is. But surely it is a solemn position to take, thus to challenge God’s word, and to charge the Holy Ghost with urging impossibilities. Where, then, is the solution of the apparent contradiction? Clearly in the fact that man’s will and man’s judgment are not here allowed, but that God’s will and God’s judgment are put in their place. The same chapter which tells us to be joined together in mind and judgment pours contempt on all human wisdom, and especially declares the incompetence of that wisdom to deal with the things of God. It asserts that God hath “made foolish the wisdom of this world,” and that “the world by wisdom knew not God.” What, then, has God substituted for it? “The foolishness of preaching” “Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” Thus He has “chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.” How clear, then, that in the things of God man’s wisdom can have no place, His mind and judgment are set aside, and the word of God is given as the only rule.

This brings out the second thing which is needed, if we would escape the evil of sectarian division. The name of the Lord Jesus Christ must be the only centre around which we gather, and the word of God the only guide by which we are led. It is these two things, and these two things alone, that amidst much weakness, and in the absence of any special works, draw forth the Lord’s

commendation of the church in Philadelphia, and cause Him momentarily to drop the judicial character elsewhere maintained throughout these addresses, and to declare, concerning this assembly only, "that I have loved thee."

Are these two things sufficient, then, to remove us from a false sectarian position, and to put us on a true scriptural foundation? Amply sufficient. They are all that the Lord finds in the church in Philadelphia; they are all that can be expected or attained in an age of failure and ruin. They are the two things that lend such a beauty to the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, who, amidst all the failure and weakness of the day in which their lot was cast, were kept in the path of obedience and blessing by no other means than their faithfulness to the name of Jehovah and their subjection to the written Word. All the errors that Christendom has fallen into have begun by altering, adding to, or taking from, the Scriptures.

Paul, Apollos, and Cephas were all honoured servants of God; but God had given to each his own special line of truth. What, then, was the first error? Believers, instead of taking the truth from all, took only that portion of the truth ministered by one. Instead of recognizing that all things were theirs, "whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas," their narrowness would only receive one; and in receiving one, rejected and opposed the others. Here we have the root of nearly all doctrinal error. It is almost invariably, at least in its origin, a partial, one-sided application of truth. Instead of the many-sidedness of Scripture, man has generally preferred to build upon some special doctrine; and all the rest he has either wholly neglected, or worked into the shape most suited to harmonize with his peculiar and partial theological system. His faith has not been sufficient to persuade him that all the different lines of Scripture truth are really harmonious; that

their reconciliation depends on their origin in God's wisdom, not on the powers of his own intellect.

The same want of faith has operated, though in a different way, in matters of church order. Instead of believing that God cares for His Church, and has left ample rules for its government, man has sought to form a code of his own; and as human wisdom has been the source of this code, each man has had his own judgment; so that in proportion to the freedom with which man could act, different codes and different sects have multiplied. Every departure in this way has been by the addition of something to the word of God - the assumption of powers which the word of God does not give, or the adoption of rules which the word of God does not enjoin. The simple faith which could receive what God has said, leaving difficulties to Him, would have prevented the schisms caused by various theological schools. The simple faith which could accept the teaching of God's word as sufficient guidance on all matters of church order would have prevented the schisms caused by various denominational schools. There would still, of course, have been different measures of intelligence; but even the most unintelligent, if subject to Scripture, would have seen that these furnished no excuse for sectarian separation.

Admitting, then, most fully that any attempt to reconstruct or to imitate the original unity is out of the question, the exhortation to "endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" is still perfectly practicable, and indeed binding. To say that because the Church of God has become broken up into sects, there is no possibility of taking an unsectarian position, is, in fact, to say that God has shut us up to the path which He has expressly stigmatised, and that He exhorts us to a course which He foresaw to be impossible. Anything more dishonouring to Him can scarcely be imagined. There must be some way of walking in

obedience to God's word, and the way is clearly pointed out to us. The refusal of every name as a centre of gathering, save the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and an entire subjection to the word of God, will place us, not in the original church unity, but on the divine principle on which that unity was founded, and by the observance of which it could alone have been preserved.

It is objected, however, that in dividing from fellow-believers those who thus gather only form another sect. To this however it is sufficient to answer, that they do not divide from other believers. They find believers divided, each sect meeting round a centre of its own, and they say, "This division is wrong; we cannot sanction it or become responsible for it by going on with any of the sects, but we come out from them to the common ground on which all believers are told to gather." This is not separating from fellow-believers, but separating from that which divides believers, and going on to the ground which condemns such divisions as unscriptural, and a denial of the oneness of Christ. The sectarian position in which other believers still remain may make a separation, but that separation is not caused by those who refuse such a position, but by those who retain it. If only two or three persons are gathered on true scriptural ground, they are met on the principle of the church, and not of a sect. There is a centre round which all believers ought to be gathered; and if the majority are absent, preferring to meet round other centres, the charge of sectarianism and division lies against them, not against the few persons assembled in the Lord's Name.

Ephesians 4:7-11

The Gifts of an Ascended Christ

We have seen how the first exhortations, with respect to walking worthy of our vocation, are directed to “endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.” Nothing is more practical, nothing dearer to the Lord’s heart, than this manifested oneness; and though its restoration is now impossible, yet the principle on which it was founded can be owned, and obedience to the word of God exhibited.

But it is objected that in all God’s works there is variety, that men’s minds are differently constituted, and that it is impracticable to mould all to the same monotonous pattern. Does the oneness then, so strongly insisted upon in Scripture, imply a lifeless uniformity? The very illustration by which it is constantly described proves the exact opposite. In the human body no two portions are alike, and the endless differences in each of its bones, veins, muscles, and ligaments, all contribute to its healthy action as a whole. Diversity of action does not involve schism and division. Such is the apostle’s argument with respect to the setting of the individual members in the body of Christ. “If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing,

where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body.” (1 Cor. 12: 17-20.) The same fact as to diversity of gifts in one body is presented in the epistle to the Ephesians. The apostle, after dwelling strongly on the manifestation of unity, goes on to say: “But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore He saith, When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.” (vv. 7, 8.) The second of these verses explains the sense in which the word “grace” is used in the first. It is not that display of grace by which sinners are saved, but that by which believers are endowed with the gifts of an ascended Christ. The grace, of course, is the same in both instances, but exercised in a different manner.

There is a marked distinction between the way in which gifts are spoken of in this epistle and in the epistle to the Corinthians. In writing to the Church at Corinth the apostle was giving directions as to the use of gift in the assembly, which is regarded as the house of God on earth, administered by the Holy Ghost. Hence the teaching is not so much with respect to the origin of gifts as with respect to their distribution and exercise, which is the proper circle of the Spirit’s activity. “To one,” we read, “is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit,” and so on through the other gifts; “but all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will.” (1 Cor. 12: 8-11.) Moreover, as the subject here dealt with is the Spirit’s sovereignty in regulating the exercise of gift in the assembly, all gifts that might be used in the assembly are taken into account — the sign gifts, such as the speaking with tongues, as well as the gifts for edifying the body.

In the epistle to the Ephesians the question is not the exercise of gift, but its origin and its object. The object is, "For the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of the ministry, unto the edifying of the body of Christ." (v. 12.) The origin is Christ Himself, not acting, however, in His sovereign rights as the eternal Son of God, but in His acquired rights as the victorious, risen, and ascended man. This agrees with the general character of the epistle. In its earlier chapters we see God's "mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come." (Eph. 1: 19-21.) It is in virtue of the same victory and exaltation that Christ now bestows gifts on believers. "When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." (v. 8.) To lead captivity captive is a poetical expression signifying the complete triumph over a power by which one has formerly been subjugated, as it is said of Israel in reference to Babylon, "They shall take them captives whose captives they were." (Isa. 14: 2.) The words are first found in the song of Deborah, when celebrating the victory of Barak over the armies of Jabin, by whom the Israelites had long been oppressed: "Arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam." (Judges 5: 12.) It is adopted in the passage here quoted by the apostle from the Psalms, where it is clearly prophetic of Christ's triumph: "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive, thou hast received gifts for men." (Ps. 68: 18.) The title by which Christ bestows these gifts is therefore as follows: Man, as fallen, was in bondage under the fear of death, and under the power of the devil. Jesus has come as man, has entered into our wretchedness, charged Himself with our responsibilities, gone down under our judgment, so that "through death He might destroy him that

had the power of death, that is, the devil.” (Heb. 2: 14.) Having thus descended and conquered the foe who held us in captivity, He has ascended in triumph, and received gifts from God in His character as the risen, victorious man. Hence it is said, “Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things.” (vv. 9, 10.) It was in consequence of His humbling Himself and taking the lowest place that He obtained this victory; and in virtue of this victory He “receives gifts for men,” or, as the margin reads, “in the man,” that is, in His character as man.

It will be seen that the Spirit of God, in quoting this passage, has somewhat varied and extended its scope. The psalm, after declaring Christ’s victory, says: “Thou hast received gifts for men,” or, “in the man.” The apostle quotes it thus: “And gave gifts unto men.” The Old Testament shows Christ, as man, receiving gifts in consequence of His triumph. But the Holy Ghost in the New Testament so applies the passage as to show the actual bestowing of these gifts on those for whom they were acquired. Nor is this all. The psalm describes the time when God arises, and His enemies are scattered; when God “is blessed in the congregation, even the Lord from the fountain of Israel;” when, “because of His temple at Jerusalem, kings shall bring presents unto Him;” when “princes shall come out of Egypt, and Ethiopia shall stretch out her hands unto God.” All this looks on to the reign of Christ in glory and majesty; to the full blessing of Israel and the world. Then it is that He receives “gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them.” But in the epistle Christ is shown as bestowing these gifts before this reign and this period of earthly blessing begin — bestowing them in the sphere of His present interests “unto every one of us.” Though the victory has been won, its consequences, in respect to Israel and the world,

are not yet seen. But towards the Church He already exercises His rights in bestowing the gifts He has acquired. How remarkably this insertion of the present use of gifts, not alluded to in the Old Testament, agrees with the character of the Church as a mystery “which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.”

Though some special gifts are named in verse 11, the language used in verse 7 takes in a wider field. It is said: “Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.” In the parable of the talents the Lord distributes “to every man according to his several ability.” (Matt. 25: 15.) This, as the parable shows, includes false professors as well as true believers. It makes clear, however, that all believers are entrusted with some gift to use for their absent Lord. So in the text before us the grace spoken of is given not merely to a few, but “unto every one of us.” In connection with Christ, the Head, “the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.” (v. 16.) While, therefore, the special gifts needed for public labour are confined to comparatively few, each believer has some gift for the edifying of the body. In Rom. 12: where the question is the faithful and diligent use of the gifts bestowed, the apostle names, among others, liberality, showing mercy, and ministry — or service — in the widest sense of the word. A vast circle of responsibility and activity is thus opened up, and a set of gifts brought to light which are equally distinct from the miraculous sign-gifts named in the Corinthians, and from the gifts for public teaching. In this wider sense all receive some gift, for the use of which they are responsible. In verse 11, however, the writer comes to a special class of gifts. “He gave some, apostles;

and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." It does not say that the apostles or others received gifts, but that they were gifts. The subject is not, therefore, the gifts bestowed upon individual believers, but the gifts bestowed upon the Church in the form of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

Nothing is said about the continuance of these gifts, and we must look at them separately to see how far they were meant to be permanent or only temporary. As to the apostle, the distinguishing feature was his ability to bear testimony to Christ's resurrection. Thus in the case of the new apostle chosen by lot, the object, as explained by Peter, was that he might "be a witness with us of His resurrection." (Acts 1: 22.) And even Paul, who had never seen Jesus either during His life or in the forty days before His ascension, rests his apostleship on the same ground. "Am I not an apostle?" he asks. "Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" (1 Cor. 9: 1.) And afterwards, speaking of Christ's resurrection, he says, "Last of all He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle" (1 Cor. 15: 8, 9), thus again associating his apostleship with his having seen the risen Christ. Since this, then, was a condition of apostleship, it is clear that no one who has not seen Christ risen could be an apostle; or, in other words, that apostles were only temporary gifts. But again, apostles and prophets were, so to speak, the foundation course of the Church; for we are "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone." No doubt the foundation is permanent, and in this sense the gift is permanent. But this very fact precludes the thought of a succession of apostles; for how could there be a succession of foundations to the same building? The idea of a succession or revival of apostles is therefore a mere fancy of the mind of man,

entirely opposed to Scripture, and subversive of all that is there taught concerning apostolic qualifications and functions.

The prophet was also a foundation gift. It was to prophets as well as to apostles that the mystery which had before been hidden was revealed by the Spirit. In certain cases too the prophet foretold future events. In all these characters the gift of a prophet was only temporary. On the other hand, that part of the prophetic gift which consists of speaking “unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort,” and in this way “edifying the Church” (1 Cor. 14: 3, 4), has never been removed, though whether those possessing it are prophets, in the scriptural sense of the word, is at least doubtful.

The gifts of evangelists, pastors, and teachers are of course permanent, and require little explanation. An evangelist is one who brings glad tidings. It may be well to observe that there is nothing to identify evangelization with public preaching. No doubt many evangelists are public preachers; but it would be a great mistake to confine the term to those who thus labour. Perhaps some of the most largely-blessed evangelists are those who, by their writings, or even by their private visits and conversation, have set forth Christ, with little or no qualification for addressing large audiences. No one would for a moment speak slightly of preaching; but it is more easy to be led by a desire for display in this work than in work of a quieter and less public character. Moreover, the effect produced on the conscience and on the heart by the presentation of the truth in private is often far deeper and more durable than that wrought amidst the excitement of preaching. The same may be said of the teacher, who is really the same gift as the pastor, only as teacher he is looked upon rather in respect of the truth he sets forth, and as pastor rather in respect of the flock which this truth nourishes. But there is

nothing in either case which necessarily identifies the gift with public ministry. Indeed, while the labours of a teacher may be, those of a pastor almost inevitably must be, of a private rather than of a public character.

Ephesians 4:11-16

The Edification of the Body of Christ

Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, such, as we have seen, are the gifts of an ascended Christ. But it is important to take notice that they are gifts, not offices. The confusion of these two things has led to the greatest disorder, and the widest departure from God's thoughts. In the epistles to the Ephesians and Corinthians, where we have the fullest teaching with respect to gift, office is not even named. The most complete instruction concerning office is contained in the first epistle to Timothy, where the subject is the proper ordering and administration of the house of God. This harmonises precisely with the character of the truth contained in these various letters, and shows how completely distinct gift and office are from one another. Gift is the provision made by an ascended Christ for the building up of His body, the Church. Official character and responsibility, on the one hand, are associated with the regular ordering of the Church as administered by man; and as soon as that order ceased to exist, office had no further place.

The only officers named in Scripture are elders (also called overseers or bishops) and deacons. Both these were ordained

by apostles, or apostolic delegates, and exercised their office in the assembly of the city to which they belonged. This assembly consisted of all believers in the city, who were gathered together as one body. Since no such assembly is now to be found, or is indeed possible — since the Church, as to its outward order, has become a ruinous heap, no more presenting even a semblance of its divinely-instituted oneness — it is clear that there can no longer be any officers similar to those named in Scripture. Nay, even if there could be a restoration of church unity, and an assembly which could, in the Scripture sense, be styled the assembly of any particular town, it would still be impossible to have officers, inasmuch as there is no longer any scriptural mode of ordaining them. Man may invent substitutes in his sectarian gatherings; but they are not, and cannot be, the officers spoken of in the word of God. They are mere arrangements of human convenience, without any scriptural sanction or authority. The use of the same names as those given to the officers of the apostolic church is simply misleading, and the claim to appoint such officers, in whatever way, is at once a denial of the Church's ruin, and a usurpation, however unintended, of apostolic authority.

This will make it clear that the distinction between gift and office is one of the very deepest importance to the Church's welfare; for had gift been in any way dependent upon office, the gift must have ceased as soon as the Church fell into ruins. But as it is, though office has ceased through the failure and disorder into which the Church has fallen, gift, the grace bestowed by an ascended Christ, is just as free as ever. Amidst the wildest confusion, amidst the grossest corruption, amidst the infinite sub-division of that which ought to have retained and exhibited its divine unity, the Lord can still freely bestow His gifts, and has done so, in matchless grace, through every age of the melancholy history of the Church on earth.

We have seen that office was local in its character, and required the ordination of apostles or apostolic delegates. In both these particulars gift presents an entire contrast. We read of the bishops and deacons of a particular church; but we never read of the evangelist, pastor, or teacher, of any particular church. These were gifts bestowed upon the Church as a whole, and a teacher or evangelist in one place was also a teacher or evangelist in every place to which he went. Moreover, they were the gifts of an ascended Christ, and never required, or could have received, any human sanction. This was clearly the case with apostles; for when, as Paul tells the Galatians, "it pleased God to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus." (Gal. 1: 15-17.) And it was the same with respect to the teacher. As soon as Aquila and Priscilla had taken Apollos, "and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly," without asking any ordination or authorisation he began to proclaim the truth which he had learnt. Nor was this deemed irregular; for "when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much that had believed through grace." (Acts 18: 26, 27.)

The gifts of an ascended Christ, then, whether apostles, evangelists, or teachers, received their authority from Him alone, and exercised it in responsibility to Him alone. Of course an apostle's advice as to the place or mode of labour would be received with great respect; but he possessed no authority, nor did his advice take away from the responsibility of the individual workman. Thus when Paul "greatly desired" Apollos to go to Corinth "his will was not at all to come at this time." And as with the exercise, so with the authorisation — it came from Christ

only. To accept sanction or ordination from men, or to connect their labours with any local appointment, would have been a departure from God's order, and would have been a marked affront to Christ's authority, by declaring it insufficient unless supported by human approval.

These gifts were bestowed "for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of the ministry, unto the edifying of the body of Christ." (v. 12.) As to standing, the saints are perfected already. All the blessings and privileges recorded in the earlier portion of the epistle belong to the weakest believer, who is sealed by the Spirit of God, no less than to the strongest. But the question here is our practical acquaintance with the truth, and the power it gives us both for maintaining sound doctrine and for pursuing a godly walk. The two prayers in the first and third chapters are directed to these ends, and in the things they ask there is unlimited room for growth. Christ, ascended and triumphant, has therefore bestowed the gifts named in this chapter in order that saints may be perfected. This is always His object. We may be content with a low state, a low walk, a low appreciation of our blessings, a low intelligence of the ways and purposes of God; but Christ is not content. From the height of His glory He is still occupied with the wants of His people, and the first purpose to which He turns His triumph is to send down gifts which shall minister to their growth.

These gifts are provided "unto the work of the ministry." This does not mean, as we have shown, the establishment of any official order of men. It is really Christ's ministry, the work of service He began on earth, now carried on in another form through these gifts which He has bestowed upon the Church. There is another object dear to His heart besides the perfecting of individual saints, and this is "the edifying of His body." Whether this is carried on through the work of the evangelist in bringing sinners

to the knowledge of the truth, or whether through that of the teacher and pastor in establishing and strengthening those who are thus brought in, it is equally precious to Him who “loved the Church, and gave Himself for it,” and who recognizes in it, notwithstanding all its failures, His own “body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.” How little do we enter into Christ’s thoughts as to the preciousness either of the individual believer or of the Church, the “one pearl of great price,” which He has purchased at such a cost!

In verse 14 the apostle shows more fully what is meant by “the perfecting of the saints.” It is, that “we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” Nothing less than this will meet God’s thoughts about us. Here it is not a question of filling up the body of Christ, but of individual growth. The point towards which we are to grow, that which constitutes the perfect man or the full stature, is oneness in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God. This will not indeed be fully reached till we see face to face; but meanwhile there is to be growth — growth in “the faith;” that is, in acquaintance with God’s revealed mind, and growth of heart in knowledge of Jesus the Son of God Himself. These are in accordance with the two prayers of the first and third chapters. In the first the apostle asks for growth in the faith, “that the eyes of your understanding may be enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe.” In the second He asks for growth in knowledge of Christ, that He “may dwell in your hearts by faith;” that ye may be “rooted and grounded in love;” and that ye may “know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.”

It is not only growth in the faith, however, or even in the knowledge of the Son of God, that is here spoken of. Besides this, we find that the “oneness” elsewhere insisted on is again introduced. The goal towards which the gifts should aid us is, “till we all come unto the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.” In this there should be progress; for thus only do we come “unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” We are to exhibit a perfect man — a man fully grown up in Christ. But where there are sects and divisions, believers, instead of being full-grown men in Christ, are only babes. They are carnal, not spiritual — walking as men instead of showing forth Christ. These divisions came in, as we have seen, through the eye being taken off Christ and occupied with men. If the eye is fixed on Christ, the maturity — “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” — here spoken of will practically display itself in our walk. Thus alone believers, “with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” (2 Cor. 3: 18.)

The apostle then shows us the results of this maturity in Christ. The first is, that soundness of judgment in spiritual things which renders even the most unlearned believer proof against the subtleties of the human intellect, drawing away the heart from “the simplicity that is in Christ” into all sorts of false teaching — “that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.” (v. 14.) It is important to observe how this vantage-ground is gained. It is not by human learning, or by skill in controversy. This verse connects itself with the one immediately preceding it, showing that our stability in the midst of the shifting currents of human opinion and speculation is the result of our being full-grown in the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God; that is, of our

possessing an intelligent acquaintance with the word of God, and a heart acquaintance with the blessed Lord Himself. No safeguards against error and false doctrine are proposed by the Scriptures, or can be of the smallest avail if set up by man, except these two.

But God is never satisfied with negative results, and it is not enough therefore that we should be shielded from error. He desires something more for us, that we, “holding” (not merely “speaking”) “the truth in love, may grow up unto Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ.” (v. 15.) The knowledge of the faith is, as we have seen, the weapon which alone enables us to “hold the truth” amidst the “opposition of science falsely so called.” But there must be a corresponding state of soul, showing that the truth is operative in the heart as well as the mind, that it is forming the affections as well as the intellect. Hence the truth must be held in love; for without both of these there can be no “growing up unto Christ in all things.” Where, on the other hand, the truth of God is really held, not simply as an intellectual creed, but in love, the believer will grow up unto Christ — will become more and more assimilated in his walk and ways to the blessed Lord.

And it is from Him alone, who is “the truth,” and who “is love,” that real growth must come. From Him “the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the pleasure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.” (v. 16.) Here then we have important teaching, not only as to the part which the Head, but also as to that which the members play, in this “increase of the body.” Of course all the power for growth, all the supplies, come from the Head. Hence the whole is said to be “from,” or “out of” Him. But the “compacting” of the whole is “through (not from) that which every joint supplieth, according

to the working in its measure of each part” Though all comes from Christ, yet each believer takes his proper place; and thus through him, in his measure, the cementing and filling up of the body is carried on. This is true through grace in spite of man’s failure; but surely it is a deeply humbling fact, that this wondrous unity should have no outward manifestation here on earth. Our failure cannot indeed prevent God’s grace; but should not His grace make us ashamed of our failure?

Ephesians 4:17-29

Living Christ in the World

The believer, “through the law,” as shown by the apostle Paul, is “dead to the law,” that he may “live unto God.” He can say, like Paul, “I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” This is his standing before God, and the result upon his outward conduct should be, as with the apostle, “The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.” (Gal. 2: 19, 20.) He has no longer the law, but Christ, for his standard. To live Christ, that is, to reproduce as it were the life of Christ in our own, is true Christian walk. Christ always walked in the Spirit, and if we are walking in the Spirit we “shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh,” but shall bring forth those fruits of the Spirit — that “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance,” which adorn in such rich clusters the life of the blessed Lord. (Gal. 5: 20-23.) It is impossible to gather grapes from the thorns of the old nature. Christ is the true vine, the one stock from which fruit for God can be brought forth. Only as we are branches abiding in Him can we bear fruit like His own; only

thus is it possible for us “so to walk even as He walked.” (John 15: 5; 1 John 2: 6.)

These truths are beautifully brought out in the passage now before us. The apostle having shown how a believer can walk worthy of the vocation wherewith he is called in the church, next goes on to indicate how he should carry out the same principle in his conduct towards his fellow-men, whether believers or unbelievers. He does not put Gentile converts under law; but while not bringing them on to Jewish ground, he carefully removes them from Gentile. “This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness (or hardness) of their heart; who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.” (vv. 17-19.)

Such is man, as fallen, and left to the guidance of natural conscience and reason. Truly he is “without excuse,” for the ignorance is not a guiltless one. “When they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was hardened.” It was because “they did not like to retain God in their knowledge” that He “gave them over to a reprobate mind,” or a mind void of judgment. (Rom. 1: 21, 28.) So in the passage we are considering. It is “because of the hardness of their heart” that their understanding is darkened, and in their ignorance they are alienated from the life of God. Thus they walk “in the vanity of their mind,” the vain, sinful desires and feelings of the natural heart being their only guide. Nor is this all. Corrupt appetites, followed without restraint, soon deaden the conscience and poison the affections, so that all right natural feeling is lost. This is the lamentable condition of the Gentile world.

They are “past feeling,” the restraints of conscience and even decency are removed, and giving themselves over to depraved appetites, they “work all uncleanness with greediness.” Thus it was with the world before the flood, when the whole earth was filled with “corruption and violence.” Thus it was with the cities of the plain, till God rained upon them fire and brimstone from heaven. Thus it ever has been when man has been left to himself to follow the leading of his own evil heart.

But the Ephesians had, through grace, been brought out of this state of things. They had another guide, as widely removed from mere natural conscience on the one side as from law on the other. “But ye,” says the apostle, “have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard Him, and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and holiness of truth.” (vv. 20-24.) These Ephesians had learnt, not law, but Christ. They had by faith heard Him, and been taught by — or rather in — Him, according to the truth of which His own life as man had been the perfect and divine manifestation. The truth as it is in Jesus does not mean the doctrinal truth of salvation, but the perfect, holy walk of truth, as shown in His person; for when Jesus is spoken of in this way it refers to His life and walk here in the world. The Ephesians had “learned Christ” in the only way in which He can be learned. The natural man may learn of Christ; the spiritual man alone can learn Him. For “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Cor. 2: 14.) There must be the hearing ear before Christ’s words can be understood. As Jesus said to the Pharisees, “Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot

hear my word.” (John 8: 43.) The Ephesians had heard Christ, and been instructed in Him. The words that He spoke, “they are spirit and they are life,” and they had produced their quickening power on the hearts of these saints. Hence they knew the truth as it showed itself in the spotless, holy life of Jesus.

This was to be practically manifested in their own lives. They belonged no more to the flesh, and therefore their walk was not to be according to the old model — “the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.” They had done with the old creation, as to their standing before God, and were seen in a new creation, as quickened together with Christ. This then was to be their new model. Being “renewed in the spirit of their mind,” they were to walk after a new fashion, not according to the law of the old nature, but as having “put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and holiness of truth.” The new man is man in the new creation — the creation which has its head in Christ, the creation which draws its character from Christ. To walk as having put on the new man is therefore to walk as Christ walked; for this new man is created according to God’s nature in righteousness and holiness suited to His own truth.

This standard once acknowledged, practical results are to follow; and it is interesting to see how even the most common-place acts are submitted to this new test. Thus the apostle says, “Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.” (v. 25.) Moral philosophers have discussed the question why men should not lie, and wide differences have existed among them on the subject. But moral philosophy never assigned as a reason anything like what is given here. The life of Christ is to be our rule, not worked out through imitation, but worked out by the fact that we are quickened together with Him, and created anew on His model. This settles

the whole question. Who can imagine falsehood from the lips of Him whose words were the words of God, and whose truth was the truth of God? Just as little could falsehood be found in the lips of one who walked in His spirit, showed forth His life.

There is, indeed, another reason given, also characteristic of this epistle, "for we are members one of another." How practical the "one body" is. No man would lie to himself; no man could imagine the hand trying to deceive the foot, or the ears trying to deceive the eyes. Just as little should believers in Christ deceive each other. Being members of Christ, "we are members one of another" — parts, as it were, of the "one new man" which Christ has made us "in Himself."

Another result is seen in the next admonition, "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil." (vv. 26, 27.) Our Lord was angry with certain persons, "being grieved for the hardness of their hearts." (Mark 3: 5.) There is therefore an anger which is of God, but the abiding wrath which springs from vindictive feeling is not of God. Even the anger kindled by godly indignation against evil may too readily degenerate into fleshly passion. We must beware therefore that in anger we "sin not," and guard against vindictive feelings by watching that the sun does not go down on our wrath. Otherwise the tempter may come in, and we are not to "give place to the devil."

The next exhortation is a little startling from its very obviousness, "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." (v. 28.) We must remember that the early assemblies were formed of persons just brought out of heathenism, with all its abominations, and consisted in part of slaves, an oppressed and degraded class, among whom theft

was practised without scruple or shame. The exhortation too goes beyond open theft, and in principle condemns all taking of unfair advantage, such as even the fuller morality of our own day often but feebly condemns. But the interest of the exhortation lies rather in the motive than in the course of conduct enjoined. If believers had been under the law, a simple appeal to the eighth commandment of the decalogue would have been enough. But we are not under the law, but under grace. What is the obligation then imposed by this position? Not only to do “the righteousness of the law,” but a great deal more. Did Christ stop with doing the righteousness of the law? On the contrary, He went far beyond it. The law requires that we should love our neighbour as ourselves, but it does not require us to lay down our lives for our neighbour. This however was what Christ did; and if the life of Christ is in us, “we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” (1 John 3: 16.) So extreme a sacrifice may indeed be rarely demanded, but the spirit of it may always be shown. Christ not only did not injure man, but “though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich.” (2 Cor. 8: 9.) His whole life was one of self-sacrificing love. How beautifully this reappears in Paul, “I will very gladly spend and be spent for you.” (2 Cor. 12: 15.) The Christian should walk in the same path, as he has the same life, not only refraining from stealing, or taking unfair advantage, but working to have the means of ministering “to him that needeth.”

Thus the Holy Ghost, by one of the simplest exhortations in Scripture — an exhortation which from its common-place character might to our blind reasoning seem hardly worthy of a place in such an epistle — brings out one of the most striking differences between law and grace. Law simply prohibits evil; grace delights in doing good. Law is what God demands from man; grace is what God is in Himself. How sad, then, to see believers,

who have been brought into liberty and associated with Christ, falling back into the lower class of motives and principles, and putting themselves again in bondage under a system to which they are declared to be “dead by the body of Christ.” The whole “righteousness of the law” shone out in the ways of Christ, and will shine out in the ways of one who is abiding in Christ. But how infinitely beyond law the grace revealed in every action of that perfect life! And this is what will appear, of course in a vastly inferior degree, but still as a real fruit of abiding in Him, and walking in the power of the new life in which we are quickened together with Him.

The same thing may be observed in the next exhortation, “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers.” (v. 29.) A special class of corrupt communications, such as might be expected from Gentiles who wrought “all uncleanness with greediness,” is alluded to in the next chapter; but here the exhortation has a wider scope. “How can ye, being evil, speak good things?” asks our Lord of the Jews. (Matt. 12: 34.) A corrupt tree can only bring forth corrupt fruit. The words, as well as the works, will bear the character of the heart from which they proceed. But it is not enough that the believer merely abstains from corrupt communications such as naturally belong to “the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.” He has put on the new man, of which Christ is the perfect representative. Did Christ merely refrain from evil in His conversation? No; His words, like His life, “ministered grace unto the hearers.” And so will the words of one who is in communion with Christ. Just so far as we walk after “the new man” will our words resemble the words of Him of whom it is written, “Grace is poured into thy lips, therefore God hath blessed thee for ever.” (Ps. 45: 2.)

Ephesians 4:29 - 5:2

Followers of God

The life of Christ shining forth from the believer is true Christian walk. It is not merely negative, abstaining from evil, but positive, abounding in grace like His who “went about doing good.” There is, however, another motive added, equally in accordance with the general character of this epistle. After exhorting the believer to “let no corrupt communication proceed out of his mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers,” the apostle adds, “And grieve not the Holy Spirit. of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.” Among the privileges of the believer especially enumerated in this epistle we read, “After that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession.” (Eph. 1: 13, 14.) This verse declares God’s purpose concerning us, and shows the perfect security of the believer who is thus sealed. He is sealed for a permanence, sealed “until the redemption of the purchased possession;” that is, until he receives the inheritance which he now enjoys only in promise.

What, then, is the practical application made of this truth? Is it to sanction carelessness of walk? Is it to give the smallest toleration to sin? Nothing could be more dishonouring to the holiness, or more destructive to the truth of God, than this thought. The very opposite is the fact. Though the believer who falls into sin does not forfeit his standing as sealed of the Spirit, he does grieve the Spirit, and therefore loses all the joy which the presence and fellowship of the Spirit impart. Hence the apostle, instead of using the sealing of the Spirit as an excuse for carelessness, urges it as a motive to circumspection. We get the same truth in the epistle to the Corinthians, where, in warning believers against sensual conduct, he tells them that their bodies are members of Christ, and then further asks, "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Cor. 6: 19, 20.) In both cases the believer is said to be sealed or indwelt by the Holy Ghost, and the conduct enjoined is not in order to get or keep this privilege, but because he already has it.

Here again we see the distinction between law and grace. Law demands a certain walk as the means of obtaining a position. Grace bestows the position, and demands a corresponding walk. Law gives no power, but exacts the penalty for failure; grace remits the penalty, and then bestows the power. Law is like the vain attempt to carve a dead stock into the likeness of a living tree. Grace supplies the sap and vital energy which makes it a living tree.

It may be well to distinguish between the grieving of the Spirit here spoken of, and two other expressions found in other parts of the Word. Stephen, in addressing the Jewish council, says, "Ye do

always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.” (Acts 7: 51.) Paul, in writing to the Thessalonians, exhorts them thus: “Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings.” (1 Thess. 5: 19, 20.) Now both these expressions differ, as the connection will show, from the grieving of the Holy Spirit of God spoken of in the passage before us. Resisting the Holy Ghost is refusing the testimony which He gives, whether by prophets, by the mouth of Jesus Himself, or by the apostles after His ascension. This the Jews had done through their whole long history, as Stephen had just been showing, and they were still persisting in the same path of unbelief. The quenching of the Spirit, on the other hand, is connected with ministry. Though Christ risen and ascended is, as we have seen, the author of gifts, their distribution and their exercise in the assembly are regulated by the “Spirit dividing to every man severally as He will.” (1 Cor. 12: 11.) Any usurpation of this power by man, or any rule or regulation not sanctioned by the Word, which restrains the Spirit’s freedom of action in this matter, is quenching the Spirit; and as prophecy was the most important gift for “edification, and exhortation, and comfort,” in the church (1 Cor. 14: 2-4), the apostle connects the command, “Quench not the Spirit,” with the further warning, “Despise not prophesyings.”

Grieving the Holy Spirit is quite a different thing. In Galatians the exhortation given is, “If we live in (or by) the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.” (Gal. 5: 25.) That the Spirit is our life is assumed, and the practical injunction founded upon this is, that we should have Him also for our power of walk. So again we are told to “walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other.” (Gal. 5: 16, 17.) In writing to the Romans, also, the apostle says that “the minding of the flesh is death; but the minding of the Spirit is life and peace.”

(Rom. 8: 6.) It is only, then, as we are walking after the Spirit that the flesh is prevented from acting, or that our conduct can be pleasing in God's sight. If the flesh acts, the Holy Spirit is grieved, and the effect of grieving the Holy Spirit is to destroy fellowship with God.

Moreover the Spirit was promised by Jesus to His disciples as the One who "shall take of mine and shall show it unto you" (John 16: 15); and besides this, "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." (Rom. 5: 5.) But how can the Holy Ghost be ministering Christ to our hearts, and shedding abroad God's love in them, while we are walking in sin, walking after the flesh? The effect, therefore, of grieving the Holy Spirit of God is, to lose that revelation of Christ, and that shedding abroad in our hearts of God's love which it is the special work of the Spirit to bestow.

The apostle now goes on further to specify the walk suited to a believer, and again we find that the standard held up is infinitely higher than that of law. For while law sets before us what man ought to be, grace sets before us what God is. Law reveals God's righteousness, grace reveals His heart, reveals Himself, and that in the scene where all His perfections receive their brightest manifestation. Believers are exhorted, therefore, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers (literally, imitators) of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour." (Eph. 4: 31; Eph. 5: 1, 2.)

Let us look for a little at both the positive and negative side of this picture. As usual, the negative comes first. We have already seen that there is a righteous anger, an anger that never transgressed the limits of righteousness in the blessed One of whom it is recorded, but which needs to be most jealously watched lest it should degenerate into fleshly passion in the believer. The anger here spoken of, however, is, as the context will show, of a different character, and is simply the work of the flesh. In Galatians, where the contrast between the fruits of the flesh and those of the Spirit is so strongly marked, we find among the works which are declared to be manifestly of the flesh, "hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings." (Gal. 5: 20, 21.) Such works, then, are unsuited to those who are sealed with the Holy Spirit of God; they grieve the Spirit; they belong to the old man which we have put off; and have nothing to do with "the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and holiness of truth." How beautifully the same connection is shown in the writings of another apostle, who, after reminding believers that they are "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever," continues his exhortation — "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby." (1 Peter 1: 23 - 2: 2.)

Let us note in passing the condemnation so repeatedly and emphatically pronounced in Scripture against "evil speaking." No doubt there is much that may truly be said against almost any believer. It does not follow that because a person speaks evil, he speaks falsely. But the more thoroughly one is brought to judge one's own condition before God, the less disposed one is to that censorious, fault-finding spirit which delights to detect and expose the failings of others. There are sorrowful occasions when

it is necessary to deal with evil; but the Christian is most happily and profitably occupied when he is thinking on “whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise.” (Phil. 4: 8.) It is God’s work to justify, Satan’s to accuse. How beautifully the Lord Himself speaks the praises of His imprisoned forerunner, even in the moment when He sent the needed warning, “Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.” (Matt. 11: 6-11.) How ceaseless His compassion, now, as High Priest, towards “them that are ignorant and out of the way.” How tender and unfailing His intercession, as advocate with the Father, for the believer who has sinned. Contrast with our readiness to speak evil, the generous warmth which glows in the words of Paul when naming his fellow-soldiers and companions in labour.

But the Holy Ghost never stops with negatives. There is the positive side of the picture also. We are made, morally of course, “partakers of the divine nature,” and as such God Himself is our example; just as in John we read, that “if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.” (1 John 4: 11.) Hence the model for our walk towards our fellow-believers is God’s own love to us. The same tender-heartedness, the same forgivingness that God Himself has shown in forgiving us, we are called upon to exhibit towards each other. We are children, and “dear children” — how God delights to tell out the love of His heart towards us! We ought therefore to be followers, or imitators, of Him to whose love and grace we owe all we have, all we are, all we hope to be.

But the example of Christ is also set before us, and that in the matchless love which made Him give Himself on our behalf. Of course in the atonement which He made Christ stands all alone.

There He is the One forsaken of God, and that as the bearer of sin. For us to be so forsaken would be eternal perdition; but, thanks be to God, "by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified," so that we are as secure as Christ Himself, "because as He is, so are we in this world." (1 John 4: 17.) We are not told therefore to "walk in love" as Christ loved us, and gave Himself for us a sin-offering unto God, but as Christ gave "Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour." There is a vast difference between these two things. As bearing sin, Christ was under the judgment and curse of God, "made a curse for us." As glorifying God in death, as exhibiting the perfect obedience due from man, and the perfect grace that belongs to God, He was never so acceptable, never so much the object of the Father's delight, as when He gave up His life upon the cross. It was this entire surrender of self for God and man that made Him the perfect sweet-savour offering, whose fragrance morning and evening ascended to God from the brazen altar.

This, then, is the model of walk presented to us. How marvellous the thought that in the poor self-sacrificing love of our hearts God can find, as it were, some faint savour of the infinite fragrance of that perfect self-sacrifice in which Christ offered Himself upon the cross! In degree, of course, the difference is as wide as between the infinite and finite, between heaven and earth; but yet this is the model placed before us, this the type in every blurred copy of which God can still find His delight. Thus Paul, writing to the Philippians in acknowledgment of their gift, says, "I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God." (Phil. 4: 18.) So again to the Hebrews, "To do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." (Heb. 13: 16.) To what an immeasurably higher level the standard is raised when the living Christ Himself is thus placed

before the soul, than when the believer is again brought beneath the mandates of a lifeless law!

Ephesians 5:3-21

Children of Light

Believers are exhorted to be “imitators of God as dear children.” Now God has revealed Himself as love and as light. He is of course righteous and holy; but we never read that God is righteousness or holiness, whereas we do read that “God is love,” and that “God is light.” In former verses God is seen as love, and hence we are told to “walk in love.” Here God is seen as light, and hence we are told to “walk as children of light.”

The universal principle is, that believers are to “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called.” Since, then, believers are “called to be saints,” or “called saints” (Rom. 1: 7; 1 Cor. 1: 2), their ways should be such as are suitable for saints. So it is here. They are not called to become saints by a saintly walk, but are urged to a saintly walk because they are saints through God’s calling. Hence the apostle says, “But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient [or suitable]: but rather giving of thanks.” (vv. 3, 4.) These believers had once walked in the lusts of the flesh, “fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of

the mind." But they were now saints, or sanctified; and having the life of Christ, they were to show forth this life in their walk. How unfit for those thus sanctified to be walking in uncleanness! How unbecoming in the followers of Him who, though rich, for our sakes became poor, to be eagerly clutching at the riches of this world! Nor is it merely in deed, but in word, that believers are to act "as becometh saints." The light, foolish, and often filthy talk to which as heathen they had been accustomed was as little suitable to those "quickened together with Christ" as the deeds named in the previous verse, and must be just as completely put away. The lightness of heart which in the old man thus expressed itself, might now in the new man find a suitable expression in the "giving of thanks."

But another motive is added. "For this we know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." (v. 5.) The believer is a joint-heir with Christ; for in Him "we have obtained an inheritance." But if we are to have part "in the kingdom of Christ and of God," we must be morally suited to it in character. As seen in Christ indeed we are already made "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light;" but here the question is not so much one of standing as of conduct. And in this too the great principle holds, that if we are to be in God's presence, we must be fitted for it; "for without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie."

No doubt there is often grievous failure; but this does not alter the principle. What distinguishes a well-governed state is order and obedience to law. What distinguishes the kingdom of God is holiness and purity of walk. There are, even in a well-governed state, instances of disorder and disobedience to law; and there

are, even among members of the kingdom of God, instances of unholiness and impurity of walk. But in both cases this is a departure from the normal order. In both cases the distinguishing characteristic is not the departure from the normal order, but the normal order itself. Thus licence and immorality are condemned equally by the grace and by the government of God, and the believer is appealed to, both as a saint and as a member of the kingdom of Christ and of God, to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith he is called.

Man's vain philosophy might indeed seek to pervert the doctrine of grace into a sanction of immorality; but against such corruptions of the truth the apostle warns them: "Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them." (vv. 6, 7.) There needs no lengthened argument. The vanity of the teaching which would sanction such practices is seen at once by the fact, that these were the very practices for which God's judgment comes upon the children of disobedience. They had been in this condition themselves; walking "according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." But God had called them out of it; and how could He possibly endure that they should walk in the very acts from which they were thus delivered? "For," he argues, "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (for the fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) proving what is acceptable unto the Lord." (vv. 8-10.)

"God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." Christ has come to reveal God in this as in all other ways. He is "the true Light, which, coming into the world, lighteth every man." Hence He speaks of

Himself as “the light of the world,” and declares that “he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” (John 8: 12.) The character of the believer is therefore that he has left the darkness, and is in the light. Now Scripture knows no such thought as a man who is in the light walking in darkness. It knows indeed, and gives abundant instances, of the failing and falling of believers; of those who are in the light not acting up to it; and of much else which shows how the flesh, where allowed to work, is just as bad in the converted as in the unconverted person. But for all this the human thought that a believer can, because secured through grace, continue to walk and delight in sin is utterly opposed to the teaching of God’s word: “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.” (1 John 1: 6, 7.) The two broad classes are therefore the believer, who walks in the light, and has fellowship with God; and the unbeliever, who walks in darkness, and has no fellowship. The Ephesian converts had once belonged to the former class, but were now in the latter. As children of the light, they were to show what was acceptable to God; to bring forth the fruit of light (not of the Spirit, as in the English version), which are “goodness, and righteousness, and truth.”

Where light is, darkness disappears. The light of God shining into the heart dispels the evil; not indeed changing the old nature, but enabling us to judge it and its deeds; to take the place of Job, when he saw himself in God’s presence: “Now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” (Job 42: 5, 6.) Hence, where the rays of God’s light are allowed to search the heart there is real and deep judgment of evil, as well as practical separation from it. So the apostle goes on: “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather

reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light; for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." (vv. 11-14.) The believer not only walks in the light, but by so doing becomes himself a source of light. He does more than refuse to have fellowship with "the unfruitful works of darkness;" as "light in the Lord" he reproveth them. Noah "condemned the world." His own faith and walk were the lights which disclosed the thickness of the moral darkness around. So our Lord says, "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin." (John 15: 22.) Thus it must ever be in God's moral government. Darkness does not discover itself, but is discovered by the light. Mere philosophy, however deep, cannot show things according to God's thoughts. Life and light must go together. There must be divine life in the soul before God's light can be received. Only the quickened soul can discern in Christ the light of the world, and see all things in the form and colour in which this light reveals them. "Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

The whole of the preceding exhortations are thus briefly summarized: "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." (vv. 15-17.) Folly and wisdom in Scripture are not merely intellectual qualities, but have always a moral character. It is the fool who says in his heart, "There is no God." It is the fear of the Lord that is declared to be the beginning of wisdom. The believer as a child of light has "the mind of Christ;" he has the Holy Ghost to teach him the deep things of God. However little gifted

in mere worldly wisdom or knowledge, he has “an unction from the Holy One,” and so has the mind of God in all that concerns His things. But the flesh is constantly present to lust against the Spirit, and it needs circumspection therefore, constant watchfulness, to walk as wise men, and not as fools. This is what the Christian is exhorted to exercise. If he is called out of the folly of the world, and has the hidden wisdom of God given him, he is urged to walk worthy of his vocation. And this is all the more necessary because the times are evil, so that every opportunity needs to be seized.

A particular example is then given which illustrates the principles thus laid down: “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.” (vv. 18-21.) The world’s joy expresses itself in a carnal manner; it is mere natural excitement, such as that caused by wine. The believer’s is to be in contrast with this. It is not the exhilaration ministered by mere natural causes, but the deeper delight ministered by the Spirit of God. It is one thing to be indwelt by the Spirit, and another to be filled with the Spirit. All believers are indwelt; but how few, alas, are filled! As we have seen in former chapters, the Spirit, though still sealing, may be grieved, and not able to minister either peace or joy. But to be filled with the Spirit is to be under the direct energy of the Spirit’s action. It is here put in contrast with the forced, natural mirth caused by wine. In place of this the believer should have the joy and happiness shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost. This will find its suitable outlet in expressions of joy; not the foolish songs of the world, but the psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs in which the heart, filled with the sense of God’s goodness, delights to pour forth its feelings. Thanksgiving is

as natural to hearts thus tuned as the idle songs of the world are to the heart excited by the world's gaiety and folly.

There is another word added which seems to come in somewhat strangely: "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God." The mirth excited by wine is quarrelsome and self-assertive; not so the gladness of heart shed abroad by the Spirit. The deep sense of grace which calls forth praise and thanksgiving to God humbles instead of exalting. The fuller the heart is of praise to God the lower it will be in its own esteem, and hence the submission one to another; not indeed out of simple kindness and good-nature, but in the deep sense of the fear of God, which never ceases to fill the heart occupied with His goodness and love.

Ephesians 5:22 - 6:9

The Christian at Home

The family is especially dealt with in the epistles which treat of the Church. Those epistles which take up Church order and rule take up also the order and rule of the family; and those epistles which show the Church as the body of Christ, show also how this relationship, and the principles it involves, affect the family life. Family relationships were instituted by God in Eden, and confirmed after the fall. Christianity does not change their outward character, but infuses into them new and divine principles. The husband is the responsible head of the house, and the mutual obligation subsisting between him and his wife, his children, and his servants, is the subject of the portion now before us. The question is not one of rights on either side, but rather of the way in which each, as having the life of Christ, should exhibit this in his conduct towards the other.

“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the Church: and He is the Saviour of the body. Therefore as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.” (v. 22-24.) Part of the

curse pronounced on the woman at the fall was, “Thy desire shall be [subject] to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.” (Gen. 3: 16.) Christianity confirms this order, but so remodels it that all trace of the curse disappears.

The subjection of the believer to the Lord, or of the Church to Christ, is no curse or bondage, and these are now the models of wifely subjection; for she is to be subject unto her own husband, “as unto the Lord,” and as “the Church is subject unto Christ.” How beautiful to see a human relationship, and one too which derives a part of its character from the fall, thus transformed into a type of the mystery in which God displays His “manifold wisdom” unto “the principalities and powers in heavenly places.”

The subject is expanded in dealing with the other side. “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it might be holy and without blemish.” (vv. 25-27.) Here, though natural affection is owned, a far higher order of love is brought in, so that the earthly relationship is re-cast, as it were, in a heavenly mould. The past, present, and future love of Christ to the Church are all made to bear on the duty of the husband to his wife. And how beautiful the unfolding of this love is! Christ loved the Church — not only saints, but the Church — and gave Himself for it. It was the “pearl of great price” for which He sold all that He had. Now He watches over it, cleansing it from defilement by the application of His word. Soon He will present it to Himself in His own beauty, “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband,” the object of His own eternal delight.

And here the order of creation is brought in, and made to blend, as it were, with that love of Christ of which it furnishes so beautiful a

type. "So ought men to love their own wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth Himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church: for we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh." (vv. 28-31.) The peculiar mode of Eve's creation out of Adam both gives marriage a special sanctity, so that the wife is to be cherished as a part of the husband's own being, and furnishes an exquisite type of Christ's relationship with the Church. As Adam was not complete without Eve, so Christ, though Head over all, is not complete without the Church, "the fulness [completion] of Him that filleth all in all." As Adam fell into a deep sleep, so Christ went into death. As Eve was formed out of Adam, so the Church is quickened with Christ, and has His own life. As Adam acknowledged Eve to be bone of His bone and flesh of his flesh, so does Christ acknowledge the Church. As Adam was bound to care for and cleave to the woman thus formed out of himself, so Christ delights in nourishing and cherishing the Church which is His own body. How wonderfully all that belongs to this divinely-instituted relationship is raised by being thus linked up with the tender, watchful love of Christ over the Church!

This, of course, is the grand subject, and therefore the apostle writes: "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church." Still the relationship of husband and wife is also in his view, so he adds, "Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband." (vv. 32, 33.) Though the believer is not promised his portion in this life, yet he is told that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." (1 Tim. 4: 8.) We have an illustration here. Who cannot see the happiness that would reign in the

house where the relationship of husband and wife was formed on the godly model here furnished?

The subjection of children to their parents is part of God's order as seen in nature; and under the law a special blessing was attached to the observance of the commandment in which this duty was enjoined. Christianity takes up the obligation, but transplants it from natural to divine ground. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and thy mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth." (Eph. 6: 1-3.) Thus the obligation of children, as of wives, is connected with "the Lord." It is not merely the dictate of nature, though perfectly right, but the acknowledgment of the Lord's claims as represented in the parents. The blessed Lord Himself, who "learned obedience," was the beautiful example of this. Of Him in His lifetime it is recorded that He went with His parents "to Nazareth, and was subject unto them." The law is not here introduced as showing that believers are under it, but as proving the special value which God attached to this duty, so as even to depart from the ordinary character of law, by coupling it with a promise which makes known the connection between this duty and earthly blessing.

But the duty is not one-sided. The apostle adds, "And ye, fathers, provoke not your children to wrath but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." (v. 4.) Both parents are to be obeyed, but this admonition is addressed only to the fathers. This may be partly because fathers are more likely to err in the provoking of their children to wrath than mothers; but the principal reason is that the father, as the head of the house, is responsible to God for the bringing up of the children, and he is treated on the ground of this responsibility. This principle, as

seen in Eli's case, runs throughout Scripture. It is all the more solemn because under Christianity the children are already holy, as belonging to the house of God; and the obligation is therefore the greater to "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." The Israelites were holy by birth — not personally, but as belonging to a nation set apart to God — and therefore the fathers were to instruct the children in the law, their then link with God. So Christian parents are to instruct their children as to what becomes the holy character which attaches to them as members of a Christian family.

The next class of household relationships differs from the others in being one instituted by social rather than natural causes. The servants here named were bondsmen. Whether slavery is right or wrong, humane or cruel, is not the point here. Christianity takes men in the social position in which it finds them, and shows how they may live Christ in that place. It is not occupied in remodelling society, but in teaching the believer to exhibit Christ. He was to be subject to the powers that be; and as these authorized slavery, he was to obey the laws in this as in other matters, seeking freedom lawfully if he could, but if not, to be content with his lot. The service rendered under present social conditions differs in its legal basis, but this does not alter the obligations on either side named by the apostle. Nay, if there is any difference, the obligation is even stronger; for service rendered for wages should surely be given as cheerfully and performed as thoroughly as service exacted by bondage.

"Servants," therefore, are exhorted to "be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord,

and not to men.” (v. 5-7.) Here again the obligation is taken out of the range of the old creation, and connected with Christ in glory. Like wives and children, the servants are exhorted to render their obedience “as unto Christ.” This at once transfers their duties to a higher region than either the legal compulsion of the old system, or the legal contract of the present. Even a slave’s duties were at once ennobled and sweetened if he could say, “I am doing this, not for reward, or to escape punishment, but to please Christ.” It was not to be a question of whether the task imposed was reasonable or unreasonable, light or arduous. Wrong endured, or severe labour performed for Christ’s sake, might be cheerfully borne.

How beautifully our Lord Himself furnishes the example of this. He “took upon Him the form of a servant.” Though entitled to be free, He submits to tribute lest He should offend them. So the believing servant, under the cruelest and most tyrannical treatment, was to show out the life of Christ in him. “For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully for even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow His steps.” (1 Peter 2: 19-21.) And as the cheerful and diligent obedience of the servant was the means of showing forth Christ, so any failure in the respect or subjection here enjoined would bring reproach on His name. Hence the apostle, in writing to Timothy, says, “Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and His doctrine be not blasphemed.” (1 Tim. 6: 1.)

Nowhere is the honour of Christ spoken of as bound up with the conduct of the believer, so remarkably as in the case of the servant. The very hardships of his lot, the very injustice and cruelty with which he was liable to be treated, only rendered the power of

the life of Christ in him the more conspicuous. And before none other is the reward of his conduct so distinctly set: "Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free." (v. 8.) How cheering to the suffering bondsman, to look beyond the drudgery and unrequited labours of his earthly lot, and to know that the faithful toil endured with good will for the Lord's sake here, is not, and never will be, forgotten, but will all "be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ!" (1 Peter 1: 7.)

And if Christ, as the Lord of the inheritance, holds out the hope of reward to the servant, so He utters words of warning to the master: "And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with Him." (v. 9.) "The same things" probably mean what is called in the Colossians, "that which is just and equal." The principle here is the counterpart of that in the last verse. Even a Christian master might forget that social distinctions, though recognized and sanctioned on earth, have no existence in Christ's judgment. Master and servant will all answer to Him. To the one whose low position might cause discouragement He holds out, therefore, the prospect of reward for faithful service; to the one whose high position might lead to oppression, He holds out the judgment that will follow an abuse of power. Though the law might give the injured servant no redress, the master was reminded of another tribunal before which he must stand, and in which his conduct to his servant would be judged, not according to man's laws, but according to the estimate of Him that is holy, Him that is true. Thus Christ is made the standard of everything in the Christian's walk. Whether as wife or husband, as child or parent, as bondsman or master, the rule is, that having Christ's life, the walk of Christ is to be shown forth in the believer's ways.

“He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk even as He walked.”

Ephesians 6:10-24

Wrestling in the Heavenly Places

Believers are in this epistle seen in Christ. They are blessed “with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places” in Him, and made to “sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” This is where God’s grace has set them; and their walk in the world is to be such as befits those holding so marvellous a position. The same fact determines also the character of their conflict; for though the believer has a perfect title to these blessings and this position, his practical enjoyment of them in this world depends entirely on the extent to which he lays hold of them by faith. In heaven there can of course be no conflict; then it will all be rest, and calm, undisturbed possession, with no foe to seek to drive us out of the field. Here, however, it is entirely different; we are not only surrounded with foes on every hand, but we have a special class of enemies to meet, and a special kind of conflict to maintain, in consequence of the heavenly place into which we are brought.

We have a type of this in Joshua, where the Israelites come up from the Jordan, a figure of resurrection, and enter into the land, which represents the heavenly places. The day will come when Israel will have rest in the land, and all conflict will be over. But it

was not so when they crossed under Joshua's guidance. Their title was good, for it rested on God's promise to Abraham; but they were yet in a scene of conflict, a scene calling for self-judgment, for watchfulness, and for courage. So it is with us. The heavenly places are ours in title, and we too, as "quickened together with Christ," are entered into them. But, like Israel, the time for undisturbed possession has not yet come, and we must hold our ground in them by vigilance and conflict. The Israelites began at Gilgal, the hill of circumcision; and so we are called upon to "put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts."¹ Having thus in type put the flesh in the place of death, the Israelites had to gird themselves for conflict with giants, dwelling in "cities great and walled up to heaven," enemies in comparison with whom they were "in their own sight as grasshoppers." So, too, we have enemies, principalities and powers in heavenly places, compared with whom all our strength is mere weakness. Joshua was exhorted — "Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." (Joshua 1: 9.) So, in the portion we are now considering, the exhortation is — "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might." (v. 10.) The conflict is not one as to standing. There the believer can say, "In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." In these conflicts in the heavenly places, however, the believer is himself called upon to wage war, to "put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." (v. 11.) The power of Satan and the spiritual principalities is, indeed, already broken; but their wiles are always to be dreaded, and call for unceasing watchfulness. They cannot change or lower

1 It so stands in our translation; but it may be questioned whether it should not read, "that we have put off the old man," etc. — E.D.

our standing, but they can cheat us of the enjoyment of it, and so rob God of the glory which our walk and conversation should bring Him; for Satan's object always is to deprive God of His glory, and the believer of his blessing. And here, where God is setting a people in Christ, accepting them in the Beloved, "to the praise of the glory of His grace," Satan's craft is specially put forth to lower the standard of blessing, and lead them to take an inferior place, and therefore a place less honouring to God than that which He has assigned them.

Hence our conflict, as set forth in this epistle, is for the possession by faith of these heavenly places, and our enemies are those who would seek to drive us from them. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high (or heavenly) places." (v. 12.) This conflict is one we must sustain if we would practically enjoy the heavenly place and the heavenly blessings which are ours in Christ. "The old corn of the land" can only be eaten in the land. But it is clear that no strength of ours can cope with such enemies as those now arrayed against us. What, then, is our resource? God has made ample provision; He has stored up in His divine armoury a harness which can withstand even such assaults as those we have to resist. "Wherefore," He says, through the apostle, "take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." (v. 13.) Thus, though we are ourselves to wage this warfare, it is as strengthened with the power of God's might, and equipped with armour from God's magazine.

What, then, is this suit of armour? "Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the

gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (vv. 14-17.) We have seen how Joshua was assured of the Lord's presence; but this was not promised unconditionally. The condition was this — "Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest." (Joshua 1: 7.) Such was Joshua's armour for the conflict which typifies ours — the truth of God, grasped by faith and followed in obedience. God's presence could alone give victory, and this depended upon obedience. So, too, the believer can only sustain his conflict by having his "loins girt about with truth." Thus only can he baffle "the wiles of the devil." Had Eve been thus guarded, how could the serpent have deceived and destroyed her? This, then, is the first requisite for withstanding his wiles. The immutable truth of God's word is the only anchor that can steady the soul amidst all the waves of temptation with which the devil assails it.

But what is the security which this truth gives? How does it enable us to meet the devil's wiles with unruffled breast? It furnishes us with the breastplate of righteousness, "the righteousness which is of God by faith." Assured that God is our Justifier, we can keep possession of the heavenly places from which the devil would seek to dislodge us. A doubt upon this point, and all is lost, as to the practical enjoyment of our heavenly position. Our title to it is, that we are "made the righteousness of God in Christ;" and our practical power to make good the position depends on our grasp of this truth. The heart once calmly resting on the full work of Christ and our standing in Him, all the efforts of Satan to dislodge it are vain. It is protected with the breastplate of righteousness,

which all his shafts cannot pierce. “If God be for us, who can be against us?” is the triumphant answer to all his assaults in this direction. This breastplate, as has been said, is the believer’s righteousness in Christ, not the righteousness of his walk. It must be remembered, however, that unrighteousness of walk saps the heart’s confidence and destroys its communion, so that though the believer’s standing may be certain, his own sense of it is weakened, or even lost, and thus he is wholly unable to maintain his ground against the wiles of the devil.

“Being justified by faith, we have peace with God;” and if it is necessary that our breast should be shielded from danger by the consciousness of our righteousness in Christ, it is equally necessary, along the rough road we have to tread, that our feet should be “shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” The assurance that every question is settled between God and our souls, that we have full unclouded peace with Him, can alone keep our feet steady in the conflict we have to wage with the craft of the enemy. Without this we shall be sure to trip at the critical moment of the fight, for if Satan can once insinuate a doubt on this point, it is vain to suppose we can hold our ground for conscious enjoyment in the heavenly places. All these, however, are only kept by faith. The truth of God, our righteousness in Christ, and our peace with God, are indeed the believer’s portion, even when his faith fails; but it is only as his faith is in active operation that they can avail him in baffling the wiles of the devil, or in maintaining his heavenly standing. It is necessary, therefore, that over all these he should cast the protection of faith — “above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked” — or, rather, “of the wicked one.”

And closely connected with this is another piece of defensive armour — “the helmet of salvation.” This, like one of the former

figures, is doubtless taken from the Old Testament prophecy, which speaks of Christ as putting on “righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon His head.” (Isa. 49: 17.) But with Christ it is the righteousness which He executes in judgment, and the salvation which He brings as the deliverer of His people. With us it is the righteousness and salvation we have in Him. If righteousness is the breastplate which protects the heart from misgiving, the helmet is the crowning piece of the armour, which enables the believer to hold his head erect in the conflict, the consciousness of full assured salvation, which gives a title to the heavenly places, and therefore gives confidence in maintaining the ground against all the stratagems of the foe.

There is, in addition to these pieces of defensive armour, one offensive weapon — “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” It is interesting to see the close connection between the first and last piece of God’s panoply. The truth of the Word is the power to gird up the loins; the sword of the Word is the weapon to put Satan to flight. Our Lord Himself furnishes us with an example in the use of both. He repels all the subtle attacks of Satan by the simple use of the Word. In the first two temptations, however, He uses it only as a defensive piece of armour, baffling the enemy, but not, as it were, wounding him. On the third occasion, on the contrary, He uses it as a sword, inflicting so deadly a thrust that the enemy is put to flight.

Such is the armour in which God has clothed us for this conflict in the heavenly places. Our attitude there is defensive — guarding what is already ours through grace. But this defensive attitude, being maintained solely by what we have in God, needs constant prayer. Dependence alone enables us to hold the heavenly places in spite of Satan’s opposition; and this dependence expresses itself in prayer. The Apostle therefore adds — “Praying always with

all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” (v. 18.) What a place prayer has in almost all the apostle’s letters! How earnest and incessant his own prayers for the saints! A constant sense of dependence on God, and of God’s interest in His people — the two great essentials to prayer, shine forth in all his writings and his ways. So, too, in the gospel of Luke, where we have the path of the perfectly dependent man, do we not continually find Him going apart to pray, and even spending whole nights in prayer? How much of the weakness and failure we have so constantly to deplore arises from our being so unlike the apostle, and the blessed Lord Himself, in this respect! and he who best knows the value of prayer will most desire the prayers of others. Thus the apostle constantly asks the prayers of believers, even as he does here, exhorting them to pray “for all saints; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.” (vv. 18-20.) It is not for his liberation, or for any personal benefit, that he seeks their prayers; but only that through him “the mystery of the gospel” might sound forth, and thus glory be brought to the name of Christ. Oh for more of the apostle’s singleness of eye in those whom the Lord now uses to proclaim His word

It is beautiful to see, too, how tenderly he cares for the feelings of the saints, counting on their affections, and sending one who, while helping them in their souls’ growth, would also meet the anxiety of their hearts for news respecting his own position and circumstances. “But that ye also may know my affairs, and how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things; whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that ye might know our affairs, and that he

might comfort your hearts.” (vv. 21, 22.) The personal messages and salutations, so beautiful in some of the epistles, are not given here, being probably carried by Tychicus himself. But the warm love of the apostle’s heart to all the saints glows forth in the parting benediction — “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” — or incorruptness. — “Amen.” (vv. 23, 24.) How comprehensive and beautiful a prayer to close this epistle! an epistle which unfolds all the purposes of love in God’s heart towards us, the wonderful blessedness of our standing “in Christ,” the walk suited to our heavenly calling, and the weapons furnished for our heavenly warfare. It is doubtful whether the “Amen” is in the original; but surely it will be the suited response of every believing heart.