

# **The Administration of the Ages: Being Remarks on the Epistle to the Ephesians**

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## INTRODUCTION.

It may be necessary, first of all, to explain the above title. We have long felt that the word “administration” is the keyword of at least, the first half of the Epistle to the Ephesians. The word “dispensation” in our A.V. in Chap. 1: 10, 3: 2, and the word “fellowship” Chap. 3: 9; these are both represented in another translation (J. N. Darby’s) by the word “administration.” In the last passage cited, the word in the original in the received text is different, and is translated, by some, “stewardship,” but in several MSS. it is the same, and the above translator adheres to the word “administration” all through. In Chap. 1: 10, therefore, we have “the administration of the fulness of times”; Chap. 3: 2, “The administration of the grace of God”; Chap. 3: 9, “The administration of the mystery.”

The word “age” or “ages” occurs repeatedly throughout this epistle. “The fulness of times” refers to an age succeeding the present. “This age” is mentioned in Chap. 1: 21 and 2: 2. “The ages” are spoken of in Chap. 3: 9 (though this refers to the past); in ver. 11, where it is “the purpose of the ages,” and in ver. 21, where it is again future, “throughout all ages,” or “unto all generations of the age of ages.”

This wonderful epistle deals, therefore, with “the purpose of the ages.” Not in any elaborate detail, of course—nor must we look for any minute particulars—but on a broad scale, presented in a few graphic touches.

What does this purpose necessitate and involve? Nothing less than the accomplishment of God’s will in the administration of everything by Christ; He will “head up all things in the Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth” (N.T.). Christ is now actually set above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion in the heavenlies, and this equally applies, in God’s purpose to the earth in the age to come; while all things are said to be put under His feet, and God gave Him to be head over all things to the Church (Eph 1: 21-22). In all this, we have the thought of administration. Just as Adam was made head of the first creation, and all things were placed in subjection under him, and he gave names to every beast of the field and fowl of the air—he was the great administrator; so Christ will be the administrator of redeemed creation; everything everywhere will be subject to Him—He will be Head and Lord of all.

In all this vast inheritance and this unparalleled glory, the Church is to share. She will be the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. How fitting that Christ should have a companion suitable to Him, the sharer of His empire when He governs the universe—one in whom His glory and character will be perfectly displayed. A second Eve united to the last Adam, but aspiring to nothing, because all will be hers.

The blessing of Israel, though not specifically mentioned, is included in the administration of the fulness of times. And although the eternal state is not the subject of direct reference, yet surely it is implied. God’s purpose is unchanging. And if we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, 1:e., ere time began, we may be quite sure God’s purpose in Christ will not change when time shall end. Unto God the Father will be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages.” (It is possible, that in the eternal state, certain aspects of the administration will be changed, when Christ has delivered up the Kingdom to

God even the Father, and God is all in all (see 1Cor 15:). But Ephesians does not touch upon this.)

Such will be the divine administration of the ages. How glorious! And as certain as it is satisfying. Every emotion thrills, as we think of Christ administering all on God's behalf; heaven and earth united under His sway and alike owning His sovereignty; and men blessed in Him, and all nations calling Him blessed. Through Him, God's way will be "known upon earth, His saving health among all nations." But, what blessing for the Church. Can she lack anything when HE will be the administrator—Head over all things to the Church; His hands will supply every need, His heart will never allow any blessing to be wanting—through Him and in Him, every divine favor will be hers. In closest union with Him, she will know a nearer place than either Israel or the nations. She will be the object of His care, the sharer of His supreme joys, and by Him she will be nourished and cherished.

It is striking that, in connection with all this glory and this administration of the ages, Christ is spoken of as the Beloved. He is the true Joseph—the Beloved of the Father. And the dreams of Joseph find their answer in Christ, being Head over all things in Heaven and on earth. What is this, but the fulfilment of the sheaves of the field, doing obeisance to Joseph's sheaf; along with the homage of the sun, moon and stars? "All kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him."

There is also another thought in connection with this title. We are accepted, or taken into favour, in the Beloved. He alone can measure the extent of God's favour to those predestinated to sonship by Him.

Administration will no longer be in the hands of men, except in subordination to Christ. Supreme rule and authority will be vested in Him. Man, as such, has had rule and authority committed to him, but here, as everywhere, he has hopelessly broken down. The present War [WW I] is sufficient evidence of it (even if there were no other proofs) in the ruin and devastation being spread over a large part of the Continent of Europe; and what for? Ambition and the military spirit, backed by armaments, have plunged Europe in blood, and this, in spite of nineteen centuries of Christianity. Is it not time that One Whose title is the Prince of Peace, took the administration of everything into His Own hands? God has decreed that He shall; it is part of His purpose. He "hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man Whom He hath ordained."

And the saints will have part in this administration. "Do ye not know," asks the apostle Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, "that the saints shall judge the world?" And we must read this word "judge" not in its restricted, but in its largest sense. God's plan is to take possession of the heavenlies by the Church, and of earth through Israel. Not, but what there will be intercommunication; for we believe that the heavenly saints will have some part in Christ's rule over the earth; but, broadly speaking, it will be as we have stated. And this explains a statement in our epistle, Chap. 1: 18: "What the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." Here it is not our inheritance (which is referred to in ver. 11) but God's inheritance. His glory will be set forth in them; and they will occupy for Him and represent Him. This is seen in the heavenly city (Rev 21:) "descending out of Heaven from God, having the glory of God." So that again in Ephesians, we have the thought of administration, and, in this instance, in

connection with the saints.

So in Chap. 4, we have the present administration in the Church. Alas, how little Christ's administration in the Church is realized to-day! "Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." What is this, but Christ's present administration in connection with His members? He ascended on high and gave gifts unto men, and grace is given commensurate with the gift. Some apostles; some prophets; some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers. "For the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of the ministry, unto the edifying of the body of Christ." But all these gifts to His Church are subject to the administration of Christ. As it says, "The Lord working with them, and confirming the Word with signs following." And again, "Assuredly, gathering that the Lord had called us to preach the Gospel unto them" (Mark 16: 20; Acts 16: 10).

As we pursue our study of this epistle, let us keep before us this thought upon which we have been dwelling. There hardly can be a more uplifting thought, especially at such a moment as the present, than that God's intention, one day, is to govern; and to contemplate the One He has appointed for all His purposes of administration whether in the Church or in the world. Ultimately, God's glory and man's blessing will be secured in Christ. Blessed indeed is it to know now what it means to be under God's administration, through the acknowledgment of Christ as Lord; and to recognize it both in our individual lives and in the Church. This three-fold aspect of administration really embodies the substance of this wondrous epistle; Christ, Head over all things to the Church; Christ, Lord of the individual; Christ, the administrator of the age to come.

## THE NEW CREATION AND THE OLD.

In seeking to understand the glory and beauty of this epistle, which unfolds God's new creation where all is under Christ, it would be well for us to go back in thought to the first creation where all was placed under Adam.

What a world that was which God prepared and furnished for man! All that Divine wisdom, skill and forethought could devise and carry into execution was in readiness when we hear the utterance of the Divine counsel, "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness." Nothing was wanting which could minister to his happiness when man was ushered upon the scene—and, as he looked round upon it, all was calculated to remind him of the goodness and beneficence of his Maker. In the same passage which tells us of man's creation, we are permitted, too, to learn the Divine plan connected with it. Man was to have dominion over the works of God's hands: "Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." And not only was this in the Divine counsel, but it was repeated to the happy pair whom God had constituted His heirs and executors. "And God blessed them, and God said unto them . . . have dominion."

With what a large and bounteous hand, God did everything, and then, so to speak, gave it away. And along with it, He gives His blessing. Perhaps, the sweetest part in it all is to read, "God blessed them." Was this the answer to some unrevealed sin on Satan's part which had misrepresented God, and maligned His character? God creates a world, of which He Himself

can say, "He saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good," and He forms a new creature, man, and sets him at the head of it. If so, then we can easily understand why Satan should soon enter that world and lie again about God. God anticipated this, and prepared for it. Fair as this earthly scene was, beautiful and perfect in every part, designed for man's benefit, and answering his every need, and of which man himself was constituted head and lord, it was, after all, as seen in the opening chapters of Genesis, but an adumbration of another order of things more glorious and perfect still. The scene was but the faint picture of something fair beyond all conception—and the man at the head of it but the figure of Him that was to come.

It is in this Epistle to the Ephesians, especially the opening verses, that this new world bursts upon our view. Here we have another scene—Heaven instead of earth: another man—Christ and not Adam: a different order of blessing—spiritual blessings in the heavenlies, and not temporal and material blessings on earth, and God, something more than Creator—God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our God and Father in Him. It is a new world—the Father's world—and Christ is the Light, and Christ is the Centre, and all things are delivered into His hands. But He is not to be alone in this heavenly scene any more than Adam was left alone in that other scene. There will be a partner in His glory. Saved sinners out of every nation will have part with Him. "All things" are His; but all things are also ours. As it is written, "All things are yours . . . life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours: AND YE ARE CHRIST'S; and Christ is God's." And in the Words of our Lord: "The glory which Thou gavest Me, I have given them."

We may well ask, what attraction has such a world for us? Has it attracted us? Do we know our part in it? If not yet, then may our study of this epistle have this effect: may Christ and the scene where He is, engage our hearts; and our hopes be more and more set there, and less and less upon the poor blighted and ruined creation through which we are passing.

## THE WILL OF GOD.

Let us notice, first, that all is connected with the will of God. This thought runs through the first half of the chapter we are considering. All is the result of God's plan, purpose and counsel. And if it be asked, why has all this been done for God's glory, and in connection with the salvation of sinners? the only answer is, it is God's will. God has a will—He decrees—He orders—and in the end, He will have His Own way. It is truly very instructive to see that God's will is good, and to learn, as we do from this passage, that when God is exercising that will according to His Own sovereign rights, and independent of man's will, it always secures His Own glory, and, at the same time, man's blessing. For man has a will, and the state of this world with all its sin, misery and degradation, is the result of it. But God's will is finally to triumph, and it will mean perfection of peace and blessedness. All that is good, lies in the will of God for man; all that is evil, lies in the will of man when opposed to God. What makes the happiness of Heaven is that the will of God is always obeyed: and so we pray, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven."

There are two aspects of God's will—the general and the particular. There is His will which is common to all believers; and there is His will regarding some particular individual, which concerns him alone. This distinction can be traced in the chapter before us. Paul tells us in the

opening verse, that he was an Apostle by the will of God. This is certainly not God's will for every child of His. "Are all apostles, are all prophets?" But when we read of "the good pleasure of His will," that we should be sons (v. 5); of the mystery of His will," as to His purpose (v. 9); and of "the counsel of His Own will," as regards the inheritance (v. 11); this concerns every believer.

It was by the will of God, then, that Paul was an Apostle. For nothing is right except it lies within the will of God. Good as it is to be an Apostle, it would be nothing short of a sin for a man to presume to be one, of his own accord. Many things which are right in themselves—many things which may be right for other people—become wrong if they are not part of God's purpose for the particular individual in question. Then we are told that God has---

"Predestinated us unto sonship by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will."

Here we have an aspect of God's will which is general, and has reference to all His children—we are His predestined sons. This wondrous position is the fruit of God's will. We shall speak, later on, of what it all involves; our object, at present, is to draw attention to the fact that such a consummation did not spring from our will—for even if it had been possible of attainment, we had no such inclination or desire—but God willed it, for it was His pleasure to do so. All was yet future when this will came into operation, for we were chosen in Christ, and given this place of sonship, before the foundation of the world. It was love in God's heart which prompted it. He planned, He ordered all. And when there was no one to advise or suggest, or press his suit, God was doing His very best for creatures yet unborn, and who, when born, He knew would turn against Him. Love dictated everything; and for His Own pleasure, He marked us out for sonship, because it was the highest blessing He could give us; and nothing short of the highest would satisfy His love.

All this gave Him pleasure. It was "According to the good pleasure of His will." How immeasurably this enhances the blessing, we all know. He was not driven by necessity; there was no compulsion; our need did not extort it from Him; no one had any claim to such an exalted station; it pleased Him to have us eternally before Him in this relationship; and the pleasure it gives Him, and the knowledge that it is according to His Own will, leave us nothing to ask or desire. Sometimes with regard to things down here and the ordering of our lives, we are tempted to think God's will hard, and we often regard it simply as a cross we have to bear. Let us, in the light of the passage before us, remember that God's will—i.e., God having His Own way—meant our highest blessing; and let us ask ourselves, whether He Who planned for us ere time began, and Whose plans comprehend the eternity that is to come, can make any mistake in His arrangement for the brief span of our life here, or fail to do for us what is best? He gave us all, and thought of our highest good before we had any existence; will He do less for us now that we are His sons, cleansed in the precious blood of Christ?

## **"THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL."**

The mystery of God's will has to do with the gracious purpose which He is unfolding and accomplishing in connection with the government of the universe; the solution of the question of good and evil; and the final subjugation of everything to Christ.

It is called a “mystery” because God is working behind the scenes. And although it is fully declared in Scripture, it is not at present, part of His public ways. The term “mystery,” therefore, does not mean that it is entirely hidden and no one understands it, but rather that it is not discerned by everyone, and is known only to the initiated. Just as one might enter a factory where some complicated machine was being manufactured, and the various parts of it being made in different workshops; the whole process might seem a mystery to us, because unacquainted with the process and the mechanism, though in reality, everything is going on beneath our eyes. But to the foreman of the works, who knows the end for which every machine moves, it is no mystery.

The mystery of God’s will is---”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; even in Him.” So that we see, there is not only the good pleasure of His will in connection with our blessing, but there is also the “mystery of His will” in relation to Heaven and earth. “He doeth according to His will in the army of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest thou?” God is determined to exalt Christ; to place Him on the throne of the universe; to bring all into subjection to Him, Who ever did His will. Christ is the pre-ordained Man Who will judge the world in righteousness on God’s behalf—He will hold the reins of government and rule the world as God’s representative. We are told that God has purposed this in Himself (v. 9). It all rests upon His Own power and is in accordance with His Own decree. The execution of it will not be left to man; it will not depend in any way upon man’s faithfulness: “Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion.” And just as it was according to the good pleasure of His will to constitute us His sons, so, here, it will be “according to His good pleasure” to make Christ the Head of all.

But, wonderful to relate, Christ will not be alone in this exalted state, for God after “THE COUNSEL OF HIS OWN WILL” has ordained that we should obtain an inheritance in Him. We who were predestinated unto sonship, are also predestined unto the vast inheritance which embraces “all things,” and all this will be done “after the counsel of His Own will.” God did not ask anyone, or take counsel with anyone. He did not confer with angels or with men; He just took counsel with Himself. He Who made everything, disposes of all as He sees fit. We can understand being told that Christ—the Son—is the appointed Heir of all things (Heb 1:). But to be told that God’s will is that saved sinners—we who had forfeited everything—prodigals who had spent our patrimony—to be told that we are to have part with Christ, may well fill us both with amazement and gratitude. But such is “the counsel of His Own will.” And mark the introduction of the word “Own” here. No one prompted the gift, and no one can interfere with it. It is all according to God’s Own will, without reference to the will of another. When God’s will is so good, may we not exclaim, ‘How blessed that He has a will!’ And equally blessed, that He has the power to give effect to it. In the end, through all the chances and mischances of this mortal life, God’s Own will, will prevail, and we shall see at last, how good and acceptable and perfect it is. In sovereign power and goodness, He will give effect to “the good pleasure of His will”: to the accomplishment of “the mystery of His will,” and will bring to pass all things “after the counsel of His Own will.” In the administration of the ages, God’s will is thus seen to be paramount.

## CHAPTER 1:—SONSHIP.



We have been predestinated unto sonship. So verse 5 should read. Let us consider what this involves.

In the New Testament, believers are spoken of both as children and sons. And although the translators of our A.V. have mixed the two, putting children for sons, and sons for children, yet, in the original, the one term is not intended to do duty for the other. Each has its own distinct meaning. Sonship refers to position and dignity. This is recognized even in natural relationships. A man's children may embrace both sons and daughters; and one is his child as much as another; but it is the eldest son who is the heir, and inherits his father's titles and estates.

The Apostle Paul is speaking here of sonship, the most exalted position which even God could give us. And what does he connect with it? The highest blessings conceivable; for they are spiritual and heavenly. The greatest favour; for we are taken into favour in the Beloved. A vast inheritance; for it embraces all things. And we are endowed with God's Spirit, that we may even now realize the dignity and glory of our position, and consciously enjoy the favour and love in which we stand.

Let us consider these various features of sonship.

We are blessed "with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." What are these spiritual blessings? "In Christ" gives its own peculiar and special character to them. He is the measure of them; and in Him, they are all secured. They are the consequence of His Headship. God has set Christ at His Own right hand in the heavenly places; and if we are to understand our own blessing, we must understand what that position given Him, as man, involves. For although there is a sense in which the position at God's right hand is His, and His alone, yet in another sense, the place He has as Man, is the place we occupy, by the grace of God. There is another difference, of course, between Him and us. He deserves that place, for He has won it—His worthiness merits it. It is ours through grace and because of Him. Yet, when all this allowance is made, the term "in Christ," as regards general position and favour, means nothing less than this—"as He is, so are we."

What then are these spiritual blessings in heavenly places? They are holiness and love. Let us remember, the Apostle is speaking of spiritual blessings. And the next verse alludes to what they are: "Chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love."

"Holy and without blame . . . in love." Can we have blessings of a higher order than these? They are peculiarly characteristic of God Himself; and if we look at ourselves and probe our spiritual instincts, is there anything which, in our very best moments, we crave more than these? To be free from all that is evil; to love only the good; to love and be loved—is there anything higher? Will there be anything better in Heaven? Do the angels who inhabit that bright and perfect sphere, know anything beyond? Shall we, when we reach the perfection that awaits us?

In Colossians 3:, where we are exhorted to seek the things which are above, we discover, if we read down the chapter, that these things are spiritual in their character, and that, in reality,



they are the same as we have been thinking of—holiness and love. What else, indeed, could the things be, which are above? These give Heaven its atmosphere, and are the source of its happiness. In this exalted position of sonship therefore, we shall be all that God requires; we shall partake of His Own nature and of all that is suited to Himself—all that we shall be before Him. For, be it remembered, it is not here what we are in ourselves, but as “in Christ,” and “before Him.” All is connected with God’s purpose, and not with our attainment or apprehension.

But ver. 6 tells us, that as sons, we shall be also to the praise of the glory of His grace. He will have us before Him in such fashion that He can ever delight in us, for when He looks upon us, He will see nothing but what is according to Himself. And all will be to His praise. Grace in all its fulness, in its height and its depth, in its largeness and richness, will be manifest to the universe. It covers all that He has bestowed upon us in the Beloved. How blessed to know that sonship not merely sets forth position and dignity, but it tells of what we are to God. Could anything impress this upon us more than the thought that we are not only objects of God’s grace, but that we are taken into favour in the Beloved. This is the only occasion where this title is used in any of the Epistles. We are the objects of grace in the One Who is the object of the Father’s heart. It is the Apostle John who presents Christ to us as the Beloved. Again and again, in his Gospel, he repeats the words, “The Father loveth the Son,” and he also adds, “And hath given all things into His hands.” The very same truth is emphasized here. It is the Beloved Who is to be the Administrator of the Ages—the true Joseph—Lord of all, and Who is to bring in the fulness of blessing for man.

At present, He is the Administrator of grace. This is what especially characterizes the present age. And the glory of that grace is that we are associated with the Beloved Himself. What He is to God, is the measure of God’s favour to us.

But there is still a further thought as to sonship. We are heirs— “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.” Something would be wanting to the dignity and position of sonship if there were no inheritance. This inheritance, ver. 10 tells us, comprises “all things.” When grace acts, the only limit to its intentions and activities is the love of God—and that is illimitable. That “all things” should be Christ’s, we can understand, but to read, “In Whom also we have obtained an inheritance,” fills us with amazement. Yet, need we be astonished that He Who shed His blood for us should be willing to share with us all that He has? After reading ver. 7, we need not wonder at ver. 10.

Everything, it is to be noted, is “in Christ.” It is not a question here of our responsibility or what we deserved. We were entitled to nothing, we had no claim; all that is passed, and God here is unfolding what He had planned before time began and before sin had entered this scene. All is “in Christ,” in contrast to being “in Adam.” Our blessings are “in Christ”; our acceptance is “in Christ”; it is “in Christ,” we have obtained an inheritance; and our redemption is also “in Christ”; and it is upon this last fact that all rests. Here is the foundation upon which is based the magnificent superstructure which grace has raised. “In Whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”

The BLOOD is the foundation of all. Through it we are forgiven—God can righteously blot out the past. And the same blood which takes away our guilt, brings us nigh—we have

redemption. We are neither guilty nor slaves, but we have forgiveness and we are sons; and all the purposes of God, and the pillars of that universe of bliss where we shall find our eternal home, are based upon this redemption through His blood. In this redemption, God hath “abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence” (ver. 8). If creation displays His eternal power and Godhead, redemption will display His wisdom and prudence, His love and grace, His faithfulness and mercy—the depth of His pity and the largeness of His heart. And it will be seen that all springs from Himself, for all is according to His purpose, and it will be the highest display of His glory.

“O mind divine, so must it be

That glory all belongs to God:

O love divine, that did decree

We should be part, through Jesu’s blood.”

Yes, it is all the result of the “good pleasure of His will” and “according to the good pleasure which he hath purposed in Himself.” We do well to ponder such words, for they reveal the infinite goodness of Him to Whom we owe all. For as that goodness is apprehended, it will become reflected in ourselves. The crowning wickedness of men is shown, not only in that they do such things as the Apostle describes (Rom 1:), but that they \*’have pleasure in them that do them.” Equally so, is the goodness of God seen, in that He has not only purposed all this good for His creatures, but it gives Him pleasure.

Only one thing more remains. We read in another place, “Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts.” So here, it says: “In Whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.” If we are to realize now what God’s purpose means, if we are consciously to take the place of sons; if all that grace has bestowed is to awaken in us an intelligent response, and we are to be in true liberty, this gift of the Spirit must be ours. It is, without exception, the portion of the sons. Nor is it the least of all the wondrous blessings we have been thinking of. The Spirit is said to be “the earnest of our inheritance.” He gives us a foretaste of coming glory. We know that we are sons now. We rejoice in God’s purpose concerning us. The unfoldings of His grace have the greatest attraction for our hearts. Above all, the Spirit is given, that affection for Christ—God’s Beloved might be awakened, and our hearts be firmly attached to Him.

In all this, God’s glory will be secured. It is to be “unto the praise of His glory.” When every purpose is accomplished, it will mean the glory of God and the blessing of men. This consummation only awaits “the redemption of the purchased possession.” Redemption involves purchase, but much more. Israel in Egypt were purchased by the blood; they were not redeemed, in the fullest sense, until they had crossed the Red Sea, and God could say, “I have brought you to Myself.” But even this does not fully illustrate either “purchase” or “redemption”; though it serves to mark a distinction between the two. “The purchased possession,” alluded to in ver. 14, includes all that is comprised in our inheritance, and it

embraces this very earth where we have been born and where we now live. It is purchased, but it is not yet redeemed. The usurper still holds sway; evil yet casts its blight over the scene. But Christ is to take possession of what He has purchased by His blood, and He will---

“Bid the whole Creation smile, And hush its groan.”

## THE CHURCH.

AFTER unfolding the glories and privileges connected with our position as sons, the apostle gives himself to prayer; beseeching God to give to the saints, he was addressing, the knowledge of Himself as the Father of Glory, and asking that the eyes of their heart might be enlightened to discern the full wealth and meaning of His calling. Incidentally, this prayer reveals truth as to the Church, which is of the utmost importance.

1. It is composed of all the saints. The apostle thanks God for the faith of these believers at Ephesus and for their love unto all the saints. A love that embraced all alone, comprehended the true nature of the Church. Love to a mere section of it—however devoted and enlightened that section may be—love to a denomination or to “our Church,” however ancient and historic—falls far short of the apostle’s conception, here. The Church—and there is only one—includes all the saints; and “all the saints” are the true Church. It is faith in the Lord Jesus which constitutes any of us members of that Church. Even the Pope of Rome; or the Patriarch of the Greek Church; or the Archbishop of Canterbury, is not a member of the Church because of his office, but only on the same ground as everyone else; and, unless they are true believers, they are not in reality (in spite of their office), members of it at all. The true members are characterized by faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints. And wherever we find one who possesses this faith, to that one, our love must flow out irrespective of party names and distinctions.
2. The apostle’s great desire is that these saints should know God in a special character, viz., as “the Father of Glory” (ver. 17). To comprehend Him thus, they needed “the spirit of wisdom and revelation.” Natural gifts and attainments could not impart this knowledge to them. Nor could the apostle. This is the reason of his prayer.

“The Father of glory.” This glory is connected with the special calling of the Church. We have seen, partly, already, what this glory means. We are blessed “in Christ” with all spiritual blessings—we are sons, accepted in the Beloved. This is the glory of His grace, but we are also to share Christ’s inheritance. This will be to the praise of God’s glory. The Church is one with Christ. God is the Father of glory, because He is the Author of all this. That there should be a heavenly company associated with His beloved Son, as Man, was His purpose from all eternity. It is from the standpoint of Christ as Man that everything is viewed here. God is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not here a question of Christ’s deity and all that He is in His Own Person, but of God’s counsels for Man, and Christ filling that place. Only by His becoming a man, could the divine thoughts about man be achieved. All that we speak of now concerns the Second Man, the Lord out of heaven, and our blessing in association with Him. Only one word can express it all—glory. And God is the source and spring of all. What is this glory? What does it all involve? It is “the hope of His calling.” “Glory with Christ above,” is our hope.

“That we, the Church, to glory brought

Should with the Son be blest.”

It is “riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.” Let us think of what God has gained for Himself by Christ becoming man. Think of all that His incarnation, death, and resurrection mean to God. Through it all, God finds His pleasure in, and will manifest His glory by the saints. The Church is to be the vessel for the display of the divine glory. Thus in Rev 21:, we see her under the figure of the heavenly city descending out of heaven from God, “having the glory of God.” This is the riches of the glory of God’s inheritance in the saints. Not our inheritance here, but God’s. Ours is spoken of in ver. 11.

This glory which we are here contemplating, and of which God is the Author, is all to be made good by the exceeding greatness of His power. This power has already 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.” Man occupies the highest place in the Universe, set there by God. Then the Church comes into view; for it is in this place that she is united to the last Adam. As in the case of the first man, he was made lord of creation and given dominion before Eve was united to him, so here, Christ is set in the place destined by God for the Second Man, and all things put under His feet in this new creation, in view of the Church’s union with Him.

What a place for Man, and for this second Eve! The usurper will never enter this new creation; no sin will ever stain it; no fall will ever mar God’s handiwork; and, consequently, change and decay will be unknown. In this place of pre-eminence, God has given Christ “to be Head over all things to the Church.” Can we conceive what this means? What must it have meant to Eve to awake and find herself linked with one who was head of that scene of blessing God had called into existence? Her first thought must have been, “All is mine through him; and if he has dominion over all, what can I lack? I am one with him who is the administrator.” So Christ is the Administrator in this new creation—as He will be also in the age to come—for God “hath put all things under His feet.” And He is “Head over all things to the Church.” No wonder, in his epistle to the Colossians, the same apostle says, “ye are complete in Him.” If He is the Administrator, what can we lack?

There is also another aspect. If we are filled full in Him because He is the Head of the Church, the Church is also His fulness—He completes Himself in her. And so we read, “The Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.” He Who fills all, will fill the Church, and He will fill her with Himself. His character, His beauty, His glory, all will be reflected in this wondrous vessel of grace and glory which God has fashioned.

This is really the thought of the body—the body is for the display of the head. Every movement of the human body is directed by the head—its every activity and energy flow from thence. So, one day, the Church will be filled with Christ—we shall display Him.

“Thou wilt to wond’ring worlds display, That we with Thee are one.”

All this—what it is for the Church to be the body of Christ—should be realized now, in measure. “Christ in you,” says the apostle, “the hope of glory.” It is the hope of glory, but it has a present application. As we realize that Christ is Head over all things to the Church—that He administrates all on her behalf—we shall lack nothing. His power and grace are still sufficient for all present needs and activities. But all power and grace flow from the knowledge of our union with Him where He is—a Man in the glory.

## Chap. 2: 1-13. GOD’S MERCY, LOVE AND GRACE.

THE first Chapter, as we have seen, shows us God’s purpose. This purpose was in God’s mind before the foundation of the world, when He chose us in Christ. And it embraces the dispensation of the fulness of times when all will be gathered together in one in Christ. The chapter unfolds, too, the special character and calling of the Church. “Blessed with all spiritual blessings,” not in Adam, nor in ourselves, nor on earth, but “in the heavenlies in Christ.” “Predestinated unto sonship” (ver. 5): “Accepted in the beloved” (ver. 6): The inheritance (ver. 11): Sealed with the Spirit (ver. 13). Then we see where the mighty power of God has placed Christ, exalted above all principality and power, etc., and the Church, one with Him there. So we see God’s purpose is that Christ and the Church should fill all things.

In Chap. 2:, the first three verses describe our condition by nature. There was no life for God; we were dead in trespasses and sins. This means dead as between our souls and God. No intercourse—no communion—no relationship. It was a life lived for the world, for Satan, for ourselves; and as a result, wrath was our portion (ver. 3).

Why did not God leave us to ourselves and to our own fate? Ver. 4 gives the answer. “But God Who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us.” What an answer. What a reason for our salvation. “But God.” We could not deliver ourselves, the world had too strong an influence; Satan had too strong a hold; our sinful desires held us captive. “But God.” How this turns the soul to Him. If it had not been that He was rich in mercy, I must have perished. If He had not wanted me, I should forever have remained a child of wrath. And here is the reason for it all. “For His great love.” Oh, my reader, dwell much upon that. Do not think you are loved only with a little love. God’s love for you is a GREAT love; you may not be able to feel it, but believe it. Read over the first three verses; not one redeeming feature; and yet God could and would save us from it.

And then, what a salvation!! Not merely an escape from wrath. That would not have satisfied God’s love. Not merely pardon. Not merely a place just inside the door of Heaven. No, but the very best and highest God could do for us. “Quickened us together with Christ” (ver. 5). Think of the change involved here. We, by nature, are dead in sins, no desire after God, no love for Him. God comes to us to impart a new life, to give us a new footing. We are quickened (i.e. made alive), and we are quickened together with Christ—Christ, God’s delight, ever near to Him, ever pleasing to Him, ever that which God wanted. We are brought into closest union with Him; having the same life; alive in His life. Just as Eve partook of Adam’s life—she came from him before she was united to him—so the believer partakes of Christ’s life, in order to be in closest union with Him. And now God sees us just as Christ is. He no longer sees us dead in sins, but as near to Himself, as dear to Himself, as His Own beloved Son. It is easy to write such words, but think what they mean: God has done His best for us. Instead of seeing us in

our sins, He sees us in closest association with Christ. Has He not loved us with a great love? May we not say to ourselves over and over again, "God sees me as Christ is; God loves me with a great love?" Ver. 6 gives us our place and portion. We are not standing, but seated, and Christ's place is ours. How was all this brought about? Christ came where we were, He came unto death, and then God quickened Him, and us with Him. So that death (as a penalty) and judgment and God's wrath can no more touch us than they can touch Him. We are already alive in a life which is beyond them all. We are now as much identified with Christ beyond all the effects of sin, in the eternal favour of God, as He was identified once with us in our death and distance from God. When God raised Him from the dead, He brought all that to an end and forever, and henceforth we are associated with His beloved Son.

In ver. 7 we have the "ages to come," during which God is going to show the exceeding riches of His grace. In Chap. 1: 4-5, we had the ages past, when God was planning our blessing; here we have the future in which all the full extent of His kindness will be shown. Never anything but kindness as long as the ages shall last. And all "through Christ Jesus." Ah! that is why God will always be nothing but kindness. It will not be according to what we deserve, but what Christ deserves. We have "the riches of His grace" referred to in Chap. 1: 7: here it is "the exceeding riches"; because it will be unbounded kindness to those who are without merit. Not only forgiveness, but favour upon favour as the years and centuries roll by. King David once said, "Are there any left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" David loved Jonathan. God will show us kindness for Christ's sake, the One He gave to die for us. David found there was a poor lame son of Jonathan named Mephibosheth, lame on both his feet, one who could never serve David, and David made him sit at his table and eat of his bread all the days of his life. God has made us to sit in heavenly places, and He will show us kindness, not merely during the brief span of mortal existence, but forever and ever. Oh, think of what the kindness of God must be; all the kindness of all the world (ah! that is only part of it), centred in one Person.

Ver. 8 shows us that all is of grace. All because of what God is. We simply need the faith that receives all He has to give. Salvation is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God. So we see all through this Epistle, everything proceeds from Him. We are seen in all our deadness and badness, and above us, God acting for His Own pleasure and glory, and our eternal blessing. What a view we get of God's goodness, do we not? Surely, we do not wish to boast (ver. 9). What have we to boast in? But though we cannot boast in ourselves, surely we can in God—in such a God, Who has given so largely and so freely.

Ver. 10. Yet all the same, God will have us do good work because He wants us to be like Himself. So we are "created in Christ Jesus unto good works." And if we only wait upon God, He will bring these to pass, for they are as much part of His purpose for us as to be His sons.

How much might be said on that one word "grace" (ver. 8). Do you notice how often it has occurred already in this Epistle? Look at vers. 6-7, Chap. 1:; and vers. 5-7, Chap. 2: Oh, what a word it is, how shall we explain it? It is frequently contrasted with works. Here in the very passage we are looking at, it is (vers. 8-9). So it is in Romans 11: 6, also 4: 4-5. These passages help us to understand its meaning. If I work for any person, wages are my due; it is not reckoned of grace to give a workman his wages, it is of debt. So in ver. 16, Rom 4:; it says, "Therefore it is of faith that it might be by grace." If anything becomes ours, then, through

grace, it means we have neither earned it nor merited it in any way. The one who bestowed the gift or showed the favour has done it entirely of his own free will. No claim, no desert, no merit on our part, but love and goodness on his. Now this is God's way of acting with regard to our salvation. So that works and grace are entirely incompatible. This is what Romans 11: 6 teaches. If it is of grace, it cannot be of works. If of works, it cannot be of grace. But faith is a different matter. Faith suits grace admirably. For faith believes that God is good enough to save and bless without any merit of our own. And this is what God wants; that we should simply believe He is as good and loving and merciful as He says He is; that He is altogether what He declares Himself to be, and will do all that He promises. "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace." For faith looks to God and expects Him to be as good as His Word. Well may the Apostle Peter call it "precious faith." And so, in Eph 2: 8, it says, "By grace are ye saved through faith." Grace the source, faith the instrument. This salvation is not of ourselves. It is not of works. It is a gift. Grace gives out of its own resources—all is on God's part. Think now of the three great words this Chapter has already introduced to us. God's love, God's mercy, and God's grace (vers. 4, 7 and 8). Can we find greater or better words anywhere? Any other words that have so deep and precious a meaning? Surely, these three words mean more and cover more than almost any other words in the English language. What is greater than love, or mercy or grace, and what is better? And notice, they are all connected with God. It is His love, His mercy and His grace, we are called to contemplate. So that all that is best is connected with Him. How great His mercy; for He did not despise or neglect or forsake us in our lost estate. How great His love: for not only did He reach down to us and pick us up, but He gave us all that love could give. How great His grace, for He did infinitely more for us than we deserved. Grace goes beyond even mercy. The parable of the tenth of Luke will furnish an illustration of this. Mercy led the Good Samaritan to the side of the wounded man, and mercy bound up his wounds, but there mercy might have stopped. But grace brought the man to the inn and took care of him, and showed him kindness which extended even to the future. But without love, there would be neither mercy nor grace, and it is greater than both. There may be love where no thought of grace or mercy enters. There is love between God the Father and God the Son, but as between them, no thought of grace and mercy can apply. There may be love where there is no tangible expression of it. The object is everything; it finds its delight and satisfaction in its object. This may exist where there is no call for either mercy or grace—as between parent and child, or husband and wife, to use an earthly illustration. But in our relations with God, His love and all the activities of it become grace, because grace carries with it the thought of unworthiness and undeservingness on our part. This gives such sweetness to grace—it is love to the undeserving. How blessed to think of all this flowing from God; and that love, mercy and grace are all ours, and were all manifested in Christ.

In ver. 11, the Apostle calls upon us to remember what we were as Gentiles. The Jews had an outward place of nearness to God, which the Gentiles did not possess; and they also had promises and privileges from which the latter were excluded. "Without Christ—aliens—strangers; having no hope—this describes our position as Gentiles. What a difference Christ's death and resurrection has made, the Apostle proceeds to show. But it is good always to remember the pit from whence we have been taken. It humbles us and therefore helps us.

And now, in the light of God's mercy, love and grace, how beautiful is ver. 13; to be made nigh to such a God. What has made us nigh? The Blood. How near are we? "In Christ Jesus we



who sometime were far off are made nigh"; 1:e. we are as near as Christ. His precious Blood removed the distance, for He gave His life for those who had forfeited theirs. HE has become the measure of the nearness. Yes, God has not only forgiven, He has brought us nigh. Nothing short of this would content Him. He wants us to take possession of the place that is ours through grace, and to enjoy it.

"Though our natures fall in Adam

Seemed to shut us out from God,

Thus it was His mercy brought us

Nearer still through Jesus' Blood."

## Chap. 2: 14-22. THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT.

Jew and Gentile made one—one new man—one body—one Spirit— builded together for a habitation of God.

"For He (Christ) is our peace." This means here, not exactly the believer's peace with God, or his own peace, but peace between Jew and Gentile, for hitherto there had been enmity, as, strangely enough, there is to-day. But if a Jew accepts Christ, and a Gentile does the same, there is peace at once, they are brothers. Christ has made them one. There is no partition between them. This refers to a wall in the Temple at Jerusalem which shut the Gentile off from certain parts of it to which Jews were admitted. This was by God's ordinance, but all that has now ceased; they both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Jew and Gentile are henceforth on an equal footing. The law of commandments is abolished and in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, but one new man; viz. a Christian (vers. 14-15).

This part of the chapter raises the question as to whether the Jew, as such, any longer possesses a place of privilege on earth, and the Apostle is showing that all that is abolished. In ver. 6, Jew and Gentile are seen sitting together in heavenly places in Christ; and, as regards earth, there is no longer any privileged place, both are on an equal footing: "made nigh" (ver. 13); "made both one" (ver. 14); "one new man" (ver. 15); "one body" (ver. 16). All distinctions according to the flesh are ended. From this standpoint, there is a "new creation" entirely.

"And came and preached peace to you which were afar off" (Gentiles); "And to them that were nigh" (Jews). Christ came with a message of peace to all men. His very presence on earth announced peace. See Luke 2: 14, and Acts 10: 36. And so God is called the God of peace (Heb 13: 20). When we accept Christ, and believe God, peace is ours. Every question is settled with God—and one day, as the fruit of the Saviour's work and His presence on earth, there will be universal peace. For then everyone who refuses Christ will be banished from God's presence, as well as sin; and there will be nothing to disturb.

Read verses 17-18 together. The one is Christ coming to us from God, the other is our going to God through Christ. The second is the consequence of the first. The Saviour—the Son of God—is, first of all, the bearer of a message of peace from God Himself, which is to have the effect of bringing us right back to God. What a thought, Christ preaching peace! and His blood the righteous ground of that peace! Does not His coming, and above all His death, prove that God does not wish to be at war with men? And when that message of peace from the very heart of God reaches my heart, the effect must be to bring me back to God. The very presence of Christ on earth meant an overture of peace on God's part. And so the very next thing we read is, "For through Him" (through the One who has brought us peace) "we both" (both Jew and Gentile) "have access by one Spirit unto the Father." Having received the message of peace from God, proclaimed in the coming of Christ, and by word and action, we are no longer afraid to approach Him. We know that God can have nothing against us, for has He not given His Own Son to take our place? and being at peace with God and He being our Father, we delight in coming to Him.

We have access, and the nearer we come, the more all that the Name, Father, means, as applied to God, becomes known to us. Notice the order. Christ preaches peace. When we receive the message in simple faith, and believe that God really wants us to be at peace with Him, then the Holy Spirit is given, and it is by the Spirit through Christ, we have access. God now loves to have us near Him. It is, by the blood, we are made nigh, as ver. 13 tells us. It is the Spirit that enables us to draw nigh, and gives to our hearts the blessed consciousness of all that it means to call God our Father. We approach God through the very One Who came from Him, and came from Him with a message of peace.

Need we then have any fear? Think of how near God comes to you in Christ, and of how near you can now come to God. Christ on earth, touching the leper, placing His hand upon the sick, feeding the multitude, and then taking the sinner's place in death, tells how near God has come to us. Christ in Heaven tells of how near we can come to God through Him. The One Who brought you the peace is the One through Whom you approach, and the Spirit is the power. It is like the prodigal coming home to the father's heart: "We have access by one spirit unto the Father."

"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (ver. 19). We must remember, the Apostle is writing to Gentiles here (see ver. 11). He has been showing how all the old distinctions between Jew and Gentile have been abolished in Christ, and he concludes his argument by saying, "Now therefore ye (Gentiles) are no more strangers and foreigners." A stranger is one who is not at home, and a foreigner has no rights in the country where he is. You are neither, says St. Paul. You are at home, and all the privileges and rights of the place are yours. You are fellow citizens with the saints. That gives you an equal footing—equal right—and you are of the household of God, you are at home.

St. Paul uses a number of different figures to show what he means, citizenship, household, etc. And now in vers. 20-22, he speaks of a building, for Jews and Gentiles form a dwelling place for God. He no longer dwells in temples made with hands, but in and with individuals (see Acts 7: 48-50). To call a building of bricks and mortar a Church, is, strictly speaking, a misnomer. The Church of God is composed of living persons. This is the wonderful truth the

Apostle now unfolds. "Are built," he says, "upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone" (ver. 20). All believers, from Pentecost onward, are part of the same building. The Apostles were the first, so they form the foundation. Christ Himself is the chief corner stone, "In Whom all the building fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord." We are set apart for God, it is a holy Temple.

There are three ideas connected with a building. One is, it is composed of different stones. You could not very well make a large building out of one stone, and these stones are brought into relation one to another and "fitly framed together," they are joined. A second thought is, that it is always growing until it is complete. And lastly, it is for someone to dwell in. So Christians are not so many units; we are brought into relation one with another, we form part of the same building. There is something altogether different between the relationship of two Christians and that between two unconverted people, even though they be close friends. The former are linked together by God and form part of the habitation where He dwells. The building still grows as every newly converted soul is brought in, and we are "builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (ver. 22). We are God's dwelling place. The effect of this was seen at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came down. It says, He filled all the house where they were sitting and rested upon each of them. From that moment, the disciples were God's temple and God's house. So Paul writes to the Corinthians: "For ye are the temple of the living God, as God hath said: I will dwell in them and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." There are corporate blessings as well as individual blessings. God does dwell in us individually, but also collectively. And the very fact that God dwells in the midst of His people, separates them from the world. Just as of old, God brought the people out of Egypt (type of the world) in order to dwell amongst them. God's house is where He rules His people and provides for them, and if we are in His dwelling place, everything must be ordered and arranged according as He pleases. And in His house, there can be no lack. It is thus we are brought under the divine administration. At the present period, God's administration is concerned with His household and those who form part of the habitation where He dwells. All is under Christ's rule. One day that administration will extend to the whole earth. What a privilege to belong to the household of God and to His habitation. We realize it all by the Spirit. By the Spirit, we have access to the Father. And by the Spirit, God dwells in our midst. On the one hand, the Spirit can bring all the fulness of God to us; and on the other, He can conduct us to the Father, where we share the Father's delight in His Own beloved Son.

## Ephesians 3

THE MYSTERY is one of the greatest chapters of the Bible. Notice a few of the words and expressions to begin with. "Unsearchable riches" (ver. 8); "Manifold (or all various) wisdom of God" (ver. 10); "The love of Christ which passeth knowledge" (ver. 19); "All the fulness of God" (ver. 19); "Exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think," (ver. 20).

Then notice the subject of the chapter. It is the Mystery (vers. 3-4). Something which had been hid from ages and generations and not made known unto the sons of men until it was revealed unto the apostles and prophets by the Spirit. Yet it was God's eternal purpose, though hid in Him until the moment came for its revelation (see vers. 5, 19). So that we are living in a day of marvellous light; and Satan's great effort is to keep the children of God in the dark as to this wondrous truth. By "mystery" is not meant something which no one understands or is intended

to understand. It simply means, a truth which is known only to the initiated. That is to say, the world does not understand it; it is for those who are children of God. You can understand that there are certain truths which are for all the world (such for instance as John 3: 16), but there are other truths which no one can appreciate or understand until he has entered the family of God. This mystery is one of these.

What is the mystery which once even God's children did not know, but which is now revealed? It cannot be found in the Old Testament, for we are told (ver. 9), "it was hid in God." Verse 6 explains it: "That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel." In other words, Jew and Gentile are brought into the same relationship with Christ, and share the same inheritance (see Chap. 1: 10-11). They form one body, and have the promised Spirit. It is not only that Jew and Gentile are one, but they are one with Christ, baptized with one Spirit, so as to form one body—the body of which Christ is the Head; this is the mystery of which the Apostle speaks. To know this wondrous relationship to Christ, its nearness and all that flows from it, is the chief end of the Gospel. It was given in a special way to the Apostle Paul to make known this revelation: "Whereof I was made a minister," he says (ver. 7). And so great is this truth, so exalted and blessed is the place the saints have, that he speaks of himself as "less than the least of all saints." Such is their place collectively in the counsels of God the Father and in relation to the Son, that, looking at himself as an individual, he can only speak of himself in this way.

If the Apostle Paul was speaking to you, he would try and make you understand the truth of your relationship to Christ along with all other Christians. He would speak to you of the "unsearchable riches of Christ." That is, as a member of His body, all the fulness of Christ is for you. You are so joined to Him by the Holy Spirit given to you that only the figure of the head and the body can adequately set it forth. Perhaps you know that brain power is necessary for every movement of the body. The body derives its strength from the head. The stomach cannot digest food without the brain supplying the necessary force; and so with every function of the body. Now this conveys some idea of what Christ is to His body—the Church; and we partake of His life, His Spirit, His energy and His grace—"unsearchable riches" alone conveys some idea of the fulness there is in Him for us.

This union of Christ with believers is God's masterpiece, and He had it in His mind from the beginning. Indeed, when He created the world, He intended it as the theatre of its display, and that thus His all-various wisdom might be known. Read the latter part of ver. 9 in connection with ver. 10. The angels are to learn through the Church, the wonders of God's wisdom, and its all-various character.

So great is the mystery, that the Apostle seems to find relief in prayer (ver. 14), just as he did in chap. 1: ver. 15. Only it is not a repetition; this prayer is quite different. The Church (composed of all believers), can only realize her own position and blessing as she recognizes the place that is Christ's. And in order that we may comprehend the place He fills in the Father's thoughts and plans, we need "to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man" (ver. 16). "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." Christ has been the beloved object of God from all eternity. We read of Him in John 1: as in the bosom of the Father, and it is the Father's desire that He should dwell in our hearts—have a place in our affections—so that we may understand the love that is behind all the wondrous plan for Christ and the saints.

All true Christians are saints, and He desires that we may comprehend with all saints, the extent of it—breadth and length and depth and height—that is, the purpose of God for His people as united to Christ. But it is not only the wisdom of it, it is all the fruit of love, love planned; love executed it; and love delights in it. “And to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.” Think of it, dear Christian reader, you are united to One Who loves you with this surpassing love. We do indeed need to pray this prayer, that we may be strengthened by His Spirit, otherwise we cannot appreciate it, for, in the love of Christ, we reach the very fulness of God (ver. 19). Greater even than the purpose is the love that planned it, and which led Christ to die for its accomplishment. The purpose and the love which prompted it are connected with the very fulness of God. There is nothing more to be revealed. The mystery completes the Word of God. The Spirit strengthens us with might, in order that we may rise to the vastness of it all; and also that our affections may be fixed upon Him Who is the centre of all. Only in the Spirit’s power can we comprehend the love that has associated us with Christ and given us part and place with Him in such a wealth and extent of glory. The love is ours; the inheritance is ours; all things are ours; the very fulness of God is ours. God has filled us into His fulness. All the wisdom, love and power of God are displayed in this mystery.

The Chapter may well close with a doxology. So great is God’s power, enabling Him to give effect to such a glorious purpose, that He can do more than we ask or think. For in this mystery, there is a great deal beyond our asking and thinking. And to God, there will be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages.

## Chapter 4

What is the vocation spoken of in ver. 1? For it is necessary to know our vocation before we can walk worthy of it. We must turn back to chap. 2 vers. 14-22. There we read that Jews and Gentiles are made one, one new man, one body, and have access by one Spirit; 1:e., all distinctions after the flesh are abolished. The Jew has no longer any standing in the flesh—the Gentile never had—it is now what we are in Christ. We belong to the household of God, we are God’s habitation. That is our calling. No wonder the Apostle exhorts us to walk worthy of it. It is said, there was always a peculiar bearing about the sailors on the late Queen Victoria’s yacht, the effect of being in the Royal presence. Should there not be distinguishing marks about those who belong to God’s household, and who form the habitation where He dwells?

Those who have this high honour, are to be characterized by lowliness and meekness, etc., and to endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit, because God has made us one. In vers. 4-6, you will find a seven-fold unity. Yet there is diversity in unity, for “unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.” Look attentively at vers. 9-10. Look at the ascended Christ; He fills all things. Whatever place grace may have accorded to us, Christ is supreme. He fills all things. Before He ascended, He descended. Let us get our souls filled with the sense of this—Christ has been given the place of authority and power. God has placed a Man in Heaven, and He is the source of life and power to His Church. He has given gifts unto men. Here is one supreme proof of Christ’s victory and exaltation; He has, since His ascension, bestowed gifts upon men. On the day of Pentecost, He bestowed the gift of the Holy Spirit, “Having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear,” said St. Peter (Acts 2: 33). Look then at your Saviour, in this exalted position; see Him, Who once bore your sins in His Own body on the tree, now

ascended far above all principality and power, filling all things. Is He not enough for you? He is enough for His whole Church, and therefore He must be sufficient for each individual. "Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." Claim your portion. Say to yourself, "It is not a question of what I am, but of what Christ can do for me. It is not a question of my past, but of all He has for me now." It is not a question of what we are, but of His grace in us. Supposing you heard the empty pipes complaining: "We cannot supply this town with water, we are hollow and dry," what would you say to them? Would you not address them something after this fashion: "Your hollowness and emptiness need be no impediment, nay, they are just what the reservoir requires, that has the water, and as you are connected with it, your empty pipes may soon be filled with the clear sparkling liquid the town below is waiting for." So Christ is the reservoir, and we have only to receive from Him. Look up to Christ ascended, and you will soon feel that He is enough for you. You need be only like the empty pipes to convey His grace to others. "Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ."

Shall I tell you the full story of redemption? How the man that God made in His Own image fell, and dragged everything down to ruin, for God had set him at the head of His creation to rule and hold it for Him; and so, instead of earth being a happy place, it became full of suffering, sin, and death. And then God spoke of Another Man—the woman's seed, which should bruise the serpent's head. One Who, being the woman's seed, was truly man, and yet was more than man. As the angel Gabriel said to Mary, "That Holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." And the moment came when He, truly man and yet God's Son, was born. But His death was the most wondrous thing. Holy in Himself, He could die for the sins of others, and He did. It was God's will. But this was not the end. God, on the third day, manifested His power and declared Christ to be His Son by raising Him from the dead; and He has placed Him as Man, in a place and position man had never occupied before, so that above angels, and in the very centre of God's glory, there is a Man—the very One Who died on Calvary's tree. And what is the meaning of this for us? It means that all who accept Christ, now share His place. The light and love and glory of the Father's presence are for them, and every ray of glory that now shines from the blessed face of Him Who died for them, only tells of the Father's welcome and the Father's love. Think of the difference between Adam and Christ—between man at a distance and subject to God's judgment, and Man now in the very glory of God. Grace has severed our connection with the former and associated us with the latter. Do we know there is a way for the sinner to the Father's heart and the very centre of His bliss, and that the way has been opened by the death of His Son? And all the glory of God the Father has given to that Son, becomes the portion of those who believe.

There is one more part to the wondrous story; the Holy Spirit has come down from the Saviour in His glory to win hearts for the One Who died for them. For Christ is to be the first-born among many brethren. The Father planned it all; the Son shed His blood to make it a possibility; the Holy Ghost has come to bring us the news, and engage our hearts with it. And the wonderful news is that Christ shared all that was ours—condemnation and death—that we might share all that is His. So when Stephen was dying, he looked up and saw "the glory of God and Jesus." Heaven was opened, and that was the sight that met his gaze. And it was the same glorified Man that won the heart of Saul the persecutor.

The Lord Jesus, before He left this world, spoke of the work of the Comforter. "He shall glorify

Me,” He said, “for He shall receive of Mine and shall show it unto you” (John 16: 14). Our home is with Christ in the glory of the Father.

To return to our chapter, we see the ascended Christ bestowing gifts upon men—not natural gifts, but gifts which had never before been bestowed. Ver. 11 gives a list of them; and they are all for the benefit of His Church. Vers. 12-13 tell us why they are given; the final end and aim of all being, to bring us to the knowledge of the Son of God, that thus we might reach the stature of a perfect man, for all truth is set forth in the Son of God. He is the pattern Man, and in Him, now glorified, we learn our own position and blessing. As Romans 8: 29 tells us, we are to be conformed to His image.

## LEARNING CHRIST.

We have already been learning much about Christ and our association with Him. God has chosen and blessed us in Him; predestinated us unto sonship by Him; made us accepted in the Beloved; in Him we have obtained an inheritance, and He is made head over all things to His Church which is His Body. (Chap. 1: 3-6, 11, 22-23). Further, Chap. 2 shows us we are quickened with Christ (one with Him in resurrection life); seated in heavenly places in Him; made nigh in Him; and have access through Him to the Father, and He is the chief cornerstone of the building which is God’s habitation, of which we form a part. (Chap 2: 5-6, 13, 18, 20).

In Chap 3, we read of the unsearchable riches of Christ, all of which is ours, because united to Him, just as a wife shares in all the wealth of her husband. He is to dwell in our hearts by faith, that we may know His love that passeth knowledge.

In Chapter 4, we see the ascended Christ bestowing gifts upon men, for the perfecting of the saints, such is His care for the Church. For the Church is Christ’s. We hear ministers talking about “My” church, and “My” flock, or “My” people until sometimes the thought that the Church is Christ’s, and every true member of it His Own property, is lost sight of. As a result of these gifts Christ bestows, believers come to the knowledge of the Son of God, and grow up into Christ, Who is the head in all things—the whole body deriving strength and nourishment, is compacted together and makes increase (ver. 16).

What a wonderful insight these chapters give us of our association with Christ, and all that flows from it:—Blessed, accepted, quickened, loved, united in living union with the Head.

We now have Christ presented to us as our Teacher, our pattern and our study. The Apostle, first of all, again depicts the state of the Gentiles by nature (vers. 17-19), and then says to those who have now believed: “But ye have not so learned Christ.” This shows us that it is not simply learning something Christ taught, but we are to learn Christ Himself. And He Himself will be our Teacher. “If so be, ye have heard Him and been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus.” It is not merely what He said, but He was all that He taught. People had only to look at Him to see the exemplification of all He said, and it is only by personal contact with the Saviour, a daily living near to Jesus, seeing Him and hearing Him, that we can become like Him. Then, it is we renounce the “old man”—the former conversation—which means the old manner of living, and we are renewed in the spirit of our mind, and put on the “new man”



which is according to God, righteous and holy. It is being in the company of Christ that effects all this. Seek, then, to become daily more acquainted with Him. As it is true even in the world, “a man is known by the company he keeps,” so, if we are in the company of our Lord and Saviour, it will surely be known, as it was of the early disciples—even their enemies “took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus “ (Acts 4: 13).

Notice the terms, “the old man” and “the new man” (vers. 22-24). The first, we “put off”; the last, we “put on.” What a complete change. “The old man,” is an expression denoting the flesh, or evil nature, with its characteristics. You find the expression in Rom 6: 6, and Col 3: 9. We see it to be totally unfit for God, the flesh never wants to please Him. Moreover, it has been condemned by God in the Cross of Christ. For that Cross is the witness that the flesh is incurably bad, and never can love God or try to please Him. Otherwise, Christ need not have died. So that the Cross is the witness of my badness, as well as of God’s goodness. What a comfort to know that God has ended it, and never expects anything from it. But we must have the same mind about it as God. We must accept the truth of Rom 8: 3, “God sending His Own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.” Whether it is respectable flesh, or disreputable flesh; religious flesh or profane flesh (for it takes many forms and can be kind and gentle when it suits as well as fierce and cruel), it is man’s state by nature, and as such, has been tried and tested by God for four thousand years, and proved to be utterly unprofitable, and God has condemned it. Christ is the only One God can accept, and when I accept Him, I am at peace with God, and through the indwelling Spirit, can live to please Him (see Rom 8: 4-16). Then I put on the “new man” which after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness. We become like Christ, and refuse everything that is contrary to Him.

In Christ’s life on earth, we see all the characteristics of the “new man” and the more we are “renewed in the spirit of our mind,” the more we desire likeness to Christ, and refuse the “old man” and all that belongs to him. Thank God, in faith, we believers can adopt the language of Rom 6: 6, and say “our old man is crucified with Him” (Christ). Henceforth, we are to be occupied with Christ, Who is now our life. In the language of our chapter, to learn Christ, if so be, that ye have heard Him and been taught by Him. What a wonderful study. It is something more even than studying the Bible; it is studying a PERSON, the One the Bible reveals. That is why the Bible is the book of books, because it reveals a Person to us which no other book speaks of in the same way. Every other book that speaks of Jesus, borrows from the Bible. And Jesus is so great—for He is God’s Son—so wonderful, so loving, so holy—in a word, so altogether pleasing to God—that only God could depict His life, as we have it in the four Gospels. And the Holy Spirit, Who inspired the writers of the Bible, is ready to lead us into the knowledge of the One presented to us in its pages. How necessary therefore to pray for His illumination whenever we read the book.

In the remainder of our chapter, there follows the exhortation as to putting away things that are characteristic of the “old man” and also the positive characteristics of the “new man”—truth, moderation of anger; giving, instead of stealing; edifying conversation, etc. Then, in ver. 30, we are told not to “grieve the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.” Is not this a wonderful statement? It is not simply that if the believer does wrong, he himself is grieved, but another Person is grieved, even the Holy Spirit Who dwells in him. And if we do not like to grieve ourselves, much less should we like to grieve such a Friend

Who has taken up His abode in our hearts. And how easily angry feeling, or foolish conversation, or evil thoughts may grieve Him. Does not the word “grieve” show He is our Friend, or, as the Lord Jesus called Him—Comforter? He always likes us to say and think and do the things that please Him. For He has taken possession of us for God. We belong to God—body, soul, and spirit—through the precious Blood of Christ, and because of this, God has given us, so to speak, into the keeping of His Spirit, and He has taken possession “until the day of redemption,” that is, until the body itself is fully redeemed like the soul, and we are at home in our Father’s house, and like Christ forever. Think, then, of the Guest you have within your heart, and may your life and everything be ordered to suit Him, so that He may never be grieved, and always be able to make you glad. All the joy we ever know as Christians comes from this Guest Who has been placed within us by God to keep us; and He is able to impart fulness of joy, yea the very joy of God Himself, and as we put away the things of ver. 31 and act according to ver. 32, we shall not make Him sorry, but He will make us happy, with a happiness beyond anything this earth can give.

## Chapter 5: 1-17.

In the first place, notice some contrasts, and how solemn they are. Christ’s love (v. 2) the wrath of God (v. 6). Followers (or imitators) of God (ver. 1), and then the very opposite (vers. 3-4). Those Christ has given Himself for, who are by this made fit for the Kingdom of God (ver. 2), and those who have “no inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God” (ver. 5). Then we have Christ’s sacrifice---self-surrender (ver. 2) and all the self-gratification represented by the sins of verses 3-5. We may well ponder these solemn realities.

In order to understand the force of ver. 1, we must read it in connection with what precedes. We are to behave to one another as God has behaved to us, and so be imitators of Him, for the children should imitate their Father. Notice how Christianity, in contrast to law, always presents a motive. We are to walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us.” Both precept and example are furnished for us under grace: “Christ also hath loved us.” Let us dwell upon that, let us drink deeply here. It is the portion of every child of God. Think too, of the greatness of it. “Gave Himself.” What love! what true love! Love which gives all it could give. Love which serves us even to the giving up of everything. Love which does the very best for us. Christ’s death was both an offering and a sacrifice. He offered Himself to God, and this involved the surrender of Himself. In taking our place, He was forsaken even of God. He became poor; while by man, He was insulted. He was cruelly treated. What love! And what was the effect of it? This offering and sacrifice to God, for us, are of unspeakable preciousness. All went up to God as a sweet smelling savour. That is what it was to God. But then it was for us, the same verse tells us so. It means therefore, that all this sweet savor covers us before the holy eye of our Creator. God no longer sees us in connection with our sins or demerits or shortcomings of any kind; those hideous sins are gone from His eye and He sees us covered with all the value and fragrance of what His Own Son has given to Him. Could we want more than this? If our first parents had remained innocent and we had shared that condition, should we have been so well off as we are now? Clothed in the merits of Christ Himself. Seen as He is. Covered by all His perfection. Or, should, we ever have known the love of God as it is possible to know it now? Our need, desperate beyond all human power to meet, it has brought out God’s love. Our sin brought Christ to the Cross. But there is another thought, too. Love may be real and intense, but it is sometimes helpless. How often it is so in human affairs. But in this case, it is

not so. Christ's act of love suffices. It removes sin. It takes away the guilt, and leaves only its Own perfection behind. And this love enables us to become like itself, and instead of those sins which in themselves, rendered us absolutely unfit, ever to have part in the Kingdom of Christ and of God. We are to become, not like Adam innocent, but even like Christ Himself. And as surely as there has been the love (and oh, how foolish men are to slight it) so surely will there be the wrath. Verse 6 is as true and as certain as ver. 2.

But we who have been delivered are to walk now as children of light. That is, all God's nature and His hatred of sin and His saving grace are all revealed in Christ Who is Lord, and as we are in the light of it all, we become conformed to it and walk accordingly. "For the fruit of the light (it should be, not spirit here) is in all goodness and righteousness and truth." And we are to prove what is acceptable unto the Lord. What it means by the light, is that God has become manifest in Christ, both as to His willingness, and power to save and as to His abhorrence of sin and determination to punish it, and it is the knowledge of God thus revealed, that of itself produces fruit according to God when the heart is in subjection to the revealed will of God.

Verse 10 reads, according to another translation, "Learn in your own experience what is fully pleasing to the Lord" That means, I think, if we really desire to know if a thing is pleasing to God, He will show us. Sometimes it takes time. We do not discern all at once whether a certain matter is agreeable to God. In other cases, we can see at once either that it is, or is not, If we happen to be in doubt, God will give us time to put it to the proof. The all important consideration is not to be in a sleepy state of soul (see ver. 14). Sleep, in the Bible, when used in such a connection, always refers to spiritual stagnation and indifference. We are to awake from that, and be alive to Christ and He will shine upon us. It means that if our spiritual affections are awake and going out to Christ, He will continually reveal Himself to us. Compare Song of Solomon vers. 2-8; which gives a description of a sleepy condition. Communion is interrupted though afterwards restored. See also Rev 3: 20. We are not to be dormant spiritually, or amongst the dead, but the heart alive to Christ's love and worth, and then He will make Himself known; He will shine upon us.

We need circumspection, for we are in a world of difficulties and dangers, and we are not to give Satan any advantage. And in the use of our time, we are to buy it back again. Redeem it. That is, so use it that it is not wasted but used to a good purpose, and time so spent is not lost, otherwise it is gone forever. We need to think more of how we use our time. Trying to ascertain the will of God for each hour and day, and then we are redeeming the time (v. 17). It is this constant dependence upon God, which makes life so useful and happy, and saves us from much that is unprofitable.

How we should rejoice when this light reaches us. Think what it means to bring this light to a soul, to be able to say what the Apostle says of these Gentile converts of his day, "Ye were sometimes darkness but now ye are light in the Lord" (ver. 8). To learn all that God can be to you in Christ, this is the wonderful light that has come from God into the world and is reaching the hearts of men and women. In darkness once, not knowing even our own need or danger, or God's thoughts about us; in the light now----the light that brings the knowledge of sins forgiven----"the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." It is as we let this light shine into our hearts, that we shall reflect the Father's glory, so that people will ask us for "a reason of the hope that is in us."

## Chapter 5: 18-25.

At once, we come to a great truth: "Be filled with the Spirit." Notice what we have been told already concerning the Spirit. "Sealed with the Spirit----(chapter 1: 13.) God marking us off---taking possession of us----for His special purpose. Next verse speaks of "the earnest." We have foretastes of coming joy and glory. Then "Access by one Spirit"----(chapter 2: 18). Before we reach Heaven, we can draw near to God, and enter His presence. "Strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man"----(chapter 3: 16). He brings Christ to our hearts, and enables us to enter into God's purpose concerning Him, in which we have part. "Grieve not the Holy Spirit----"(chapter 4: 30). He is our companion and friend. And now, "be filled with the Spirit." Notice, it is in contrast to being drunk with wine. The contrast really is between being under the influence of natural things and being under the Spirit's influence. Wine in Scripture, is usually the symbol of earthly joy. We should not be so under the influence of this as to become intoxicated with it. It does not say you are not to have any of it, but don't be carried away by it. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. And then what a joyful life the Christian life becomes, psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord. If we are filled with the Spirit, we have such a joyful sense of all that Christ is, that we cannot help singing----our hearts are full of gladness. And then we give thanks always for all things. These are the works of a Spirit-filled life. It is all the result of ver. 14. The soul awakes to Christ. Not as if we were amongst the dead, but fully alive to Him----His worth, His glory, and in addition, all that He is to the believer.

Then comes submission (ver. 21)----because God has ordained these relationships; they are not of man's creating; and it is only when their divine character is maintained that the blessing of them is realized. The wife is to submit to her husband as unto the Lord. He is in the place of Lord to her (see 1. Peter 3: 6), and has the Lord's authority. Of course, the Apostle is addressing Christians.

Moreover, the relationship of husband and wife is taken as a figure of the Church (ver. 23). What a spiritual character marriage has then; and it is because this is so little understood, that there are so many unhappy marriages. The husband on his part, is to love his wife as Christ loved the Church; and there follows a beautiful unfolding of that love, and the service that it has undertaken. He "gave Himself for it." That was in dying for it. The greatest act of love is to give oneself. But His service did not end there. There is a present service of sanctification and cleansing. Another proof of love, for love desires its object to confirm to itself, and so by the washing of water, the Church is being set apart and cleansed. As the Word of God is followed, Christians become more and more separate from all that is unsuited to Christ. They belong to Christ, and He wants them to be like Himself, having the same tastes and caring for the same things. With His blood, He has bought us, and He is still serving us to make us like Himself. Out of His side poured blood and water. Perfect cleansing. The blood to expiate our sin----the water to cleanse us from all defects and defilement. We might see something about a person we, loved that we could not say perhaps was sinful, but it does not suit us, it is something we dislike, and the more truly we love that person, the more we would try to alter it. This is just what Christ is doing for every member of His Church. How much, surely, He can see which He would like to remove, not sins, exactly, but spots and blemishes. And why? Because He so loves the Church. He wants it to be altogether to His mind. And so, through His death, and by His present service for her, He will one day present the Church to Himself. "A glorious Church,

not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy, without blemish.”

If we as Christians thought more of this----of what the Church is to Christ----would it not make a difference to us? If one saw that there is something in this world that Christ loves, which He died for, which is the object of His regard----a Church which He lives to serve, and which is in the closest relationship to Him; so close that we are said to be members of His body and His “own flesh”----looks upon it in fact as part of Himself which He nourishes and cherishes (verses 28-30----should we not have higher thoughts of the Church, and say to ourselves with ever increasing wonder, “I form part of that?” We should go over these verses one by one, and say to ourselves, “That Church for which Christ has done, and is doing so much, is composed of saved sinners like myself.”

“One flesh,” which is the very essence of marriage (ver. 31)---- becomes a symbol of the union of Christ and His Church, and so the Apostle adds, “This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning “Christ and the Church.” “Christ and the Church” not the Pope and the Church, nor the Archbishops and Bishops and the Church; but “Christ and the Church” and nothing between. And it is His Own ministry that is spoken of in verses 26-29.

It is good to think of all that the Church is to Christ; and all He has done, is doing, and will yet do, for her, until one day, she is perfected in glory, and with Him and like Him forever. “Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it.”

## Chapter 6

It is unnecessary to say much about the opening verses, except that Christianity touches and transforms every department. and relationship of life; and if all who profess and call themselves Christians were acting in the spirit of these verses, how different things would be, even in the world.

With verse 10, the Apostle comes to the concluding section of the epistle----”Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.” He is about to speak of Christian conflict, and of the armour which alone can enable us to come off victorious. In order to wear armour and fight, strength is the great requisite, and so he begins by saying, “Be strong in the Lord.” In other words, “Understand that Christ is your Lord, and that you are fighting under a Leader who has already vanquished the foe, which will come against you; you have no need, therefore, to be defeated.” It is an immense gain for soldiers in battle, to have confidence in their leader. It is half the battle. And so, before telling us the details of the conflict or even mentioning the enemy, we are told, as it were, to look at our Leader. He is Lord. He has overcome every form of evil. (See Luke. 10: 17-19). Be strong, therefore, in the Lord and in the power of His might, for you are following this One in the fight. You are not called to go against the foe in your own strength. Our Captain goes before us. He became Lord after proving superior to every foe. Then, next, “Put on the whole armour of God.” Before we are told about the armour, we are informed as to the nature of our enemies. We are to stand against the wiles of the Devil. Notice that word “wiles.” In vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird. If Satan always gives us notice of his coming, always said, “I am Satan”; always presented as a temptation, something we knew to be wrong, he would have comparatively small success. He pursues the opposite plan. He is wily. He tries to take us unawares. He tries

to persuade the people of God, that the thing he suggests is not evil. And so we need to be fully armed and fully prepared. That is why it says, "Put on the whole armour of God."

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against wicked spirits in heavenly places." (See margin). These are the foes that are against God's people.

Perhaps you have never thought that these evil agencies spoken of as principalities and powers, are in heavenly places. This does not mean in the immediate presence of God and of Christ, but if you will turn back to chapter 2:, you will see what it means. In ver. 2, you read of the prince of the power of the air!" The effort of this prince, which is Satan, is to defeat God's purpose, by deceiving God's people as to their true calling and getting them engrossed with present things. And he has all these evil agencies we read of in the sixth chapter, the wicked spirits, to help him. The air is full of them.

You remember how at the beginning of the Epistle, we are told that God chose us in Christ, and that we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. We see how God has exalted Christ, as man, to His Own right hand, and is going to give Him universal dominion, the Church to be associated with Him. Satan's effort is to prevent the children of God, enjoying their true portion. That is why we see such a mixture in Christendom to-day. By his wiles, he has induced the Church to join the world, and the world to enter the Church. Thus, Christians have lost the idea of God's calling and of what their true blessing is. They have become earthly, and this has deprived them of both joy and power.

In order to stand against Satan's attack, we are exhorted to take the whole armour of God (v. 13). There are several parts to it:

1. "Loins girt about with truth." If we are to fight, we must not have loose flowing robes. This is true in actual warfare. What it means in the spiritual conflict is, that truth must hold us in its separating power. If we are mixed up with evil, choosing the company of the world, Satan will soon get an advantage over us, and we shall not enjoy our blessings. He will keep us away from Christ. The truth, then, is the first requisite; to know the truth that God has saved me and associated me with Christ in Heaven. To know the truth about the world, that its course is contrary to God. Satan is its prince, and I am to walk through it with garments tucked up, not trailing in the mud. This is the idea of "Loins girt about with truth." I realize that I am walking through a scene that is contrary to God, and that I belong to Christ and Heaven.
2. "The breastplate of righteousness." I must be practically righteous in all my doings and relations. If not, Satan will soon trouble me, and any defect in this respect, will lay me open to his attack, like a warrior without a breastplate. How soon the enemy could get in a dart. But, if I am doing right and pleasing God, Satan cannot, harm me.
3. "Your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace." The gospel is one of peace. God wants to be at peace with all men, and He would like all men to be at peace with Him. This truth is to affect all our relations with people. We are to seek peace and pursue it. "Still, in thy right hand carry gentle peace." This is the idea. I am to represent a God of peace to all men. Because if we create bitterness and ill feeling, it gives Satan a point of attack; he can make mischief and do harm to ourselves and others.

4. "Over all, the shield of faith." We are never to lose faith in God. Perfect trust in Him; unswerving confidence in His goodness is one of the surest safeguards against Satan. But if the shield of faith is lowered, if we begin to question God's goodness, and mistrust His dealings with us, then the fiery darts of the wicked one will soon hit us, for Satan (the wicked one) delights to misrepresent God, and thus turn the heart away from Him.
5. "The helmet of salvation." We can always look to God for salvation. We must never think that He cannot deliver. We are saved, we are being saved every day, and we look for salvation in the future. There is salvation, whatever our circumstances; and if we know this, it will be like a helmet to us. What courage this will give us in meeting the foe.
6. "The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." This is our only instrument of attack. All the rest is defensive. And how can I use a sword unless I practice with it. How necessary, then, to know my Bible well, for that is the Word of God, and Satan cannot stand before it. But if I do not know my Bible, I have nothing with which to drive Satan off when he comes. Have you ever noticed that in our Lord's temptation, He again and again quoted the Bible, and that is how He defeated Satan. (Luke 4)
7. Finally, Prayer. Praying always. Fight Satan upon your knees. Nearly every downfall could be traced to neglect of the Bible and prayer. And so it says, "Watching thereunto." Watch your opportunities to pray and never neglect them. And besides praying for ourselves, we are told to pray "for all saints."

Here, then, we have what is to afford us protection. With this armour on, the soul enjoys its proper portion, and cannot be decoyed from it by the wiles of the enemy. Remember, there are enemies seeking to rob you, but this is God's armour, and Satan and all his darts, can never penetrate that or touch the one who is clothed with it.

Then think for a moment of the closing verse, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ with sincerity." If love to Him fills your heart, all will be well. And the grace spoken of here is for those who love Him. May He say of you as He said once of one on earth; "She loved much." Turn back to chapter 3: 19, and see how much Christ loves you. This love is great enough to create a response. And as you have welcomed this love that passeth knowledge into your heart, so the response is, sure to come. May you love Him in return with incorruption (see margin). That is a love that retains its first ardour and depth and doesn't change. In the first chapter of this wonderful epistle, Christ is spoken of as God's Beloved, the One in Whom we are taken into favour. Is it not fitting that He should be beloved by us? What grace for those who do thus love Him!