

The background of the cover is a photograph of a prison interior. On the right, a thick, dark stone wall is visible, featuring a small, recessed stone niche. To the left, an arched window with black metal bars is set into a tan-colored wall. Light streams through the window, creating a bright circular glow. The floor is made of large, light-colored tiles.

# Letters from Prison

STUART ALLEN

# LETTERS FROM PRISON

by STUART ALLEN

THE BEREAN PUBLISHING TRUST

52A, Wilson St. London EC2A 2ER.

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# Letters from Prison

**An Exposition of the Prison Epistles  
of the Apostle Paul:**

**Ephesians**

**Colossians**

**Philemon**

**Philippians**

**2 Timothy**

**by STUART ALLEN**

Author of

*The Unfolding Purpose of God*

*On Reading the Bible*

*The Interpretation of Scripture*

*The Early Centuries and the Truth*

*The Lord Jesus Christ, God or only man?*

*etc., etc.*

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## FOREWORD

In the preface to his book, *The Testimony of the Lord's Prisoner*, Charles Welch writes: "To speak of all that this volume means to the writer is neither possible nor fitting. . . . In a sense, perhaps, that is impossible to convey to others, we believe we can say that in giving this book we give ourselves." The present author can well understand these words. For many years our aim has been to give a verse by verse exposition of the five Captivity Epistles of Paul, written not for the scholar, but for the sincere seeker after Truth. These studies appeared in *The Berean Expositor* over a number of years. They have now been gathered into one volume and in some cases expanded, and our earnest prayer is that the Lord will use them for His glory and the enlightenment and lasting blessing of each reader. There is a certain amount of repetition in them, but as the supreme truth of these epistles seems to be so little known in Christian circles, we do not apologize for this.

Our grateful thanks are due to many friends behind the scenes: Leonard and Irene Canning for preparing the manuscript for the printers; Mike Penny for his work on the indexes and other friends who have assisted in the exacting work of proof reading. We also appreciate the generous financial support of Joseph Harkness which has greatly assisted in the publication of this book.

STUART ALLEN

## INTRODUCTION

If we include the epistle to the Hebrews among the writings of Paul we find there are fourteen, seven of which were written during the period covered by the Acts of the Apostles and seven afterwards:\*

	<i>During Acts</i>		<i>After Acts</i>
(1)	Galatians	(1)	Ephesians
(2)	1 Thessalonians	(2)	Colossians
(3)	2 Thessalonians	(3)	Philemon
(4)	1 Corinthians	(4)	Philippians
(5)	2 Corinthians	(5)	1 Timothy
(6)	Hebrews	(6)	Titus
(7)	Romans	(7)	2 Timothy

This leaves seven more (1 and 2 Peter; James; 1,2 and 3 John; and Jude) to complete the twenty-one New Testament epistles which then show a perfect balance of sevens. Some expositors do not accept the imprisonment referred to in Philippians as relating to Rome, but would place it late in the Acts. However we accept the Roman setting of Philippians and deal with this in our introduction to that epistle. We do not attempt to base any doctrine on this grouping, but noting how prominent the number seven is in creation, in Israel's economy and in the purpose of the ages, we believe it is helpful to see this arrangement of the epistles of the New Testament.

What is certain is that five of Paul's letters bear the imprint of prison: Ephesians (3:1; 4:1; 6:19,20); Philippians (1:7,13,14,16); Colossians (4:3,10,18); Philemon (verses 1,9,10,13,23); 2 Timothy (1:8; 2:9); and if they all refer to Paul's Roman imprisonment at the end of the Acts, then they relate to this experience of the Apostle and the period that follows, that is, the present age of grace in which we live.

Paul stated that he had frequently endured imprisonment (2 Cor. 11:23), but there are only two recorded in the Acts: two years at Caesarea (Acts 24:27) and two years at Rome (Acts 28:30). The single night's imprisonment in Philippi

\* The human authorship of the epistle to the Hebrews is dealt with at some length in the first part of the volume *Perfection or Perdition* by Charles H. Welch and Stuart Allen (B.P.T.).

naturally does not count here. Some postulate an imprisonment at Ephesus, but as E. K. Simpson states:

“The date of the epistle (Ephesians) has been shifted by some to the period of Paul’s detention at Caesarea, or even to an Ephesian imprisonment nowhere on record, but the Roman captivity holds the field”

(Introduction—*The Epistle to the Ephesians* p. 19).

The date of writing is therefore A.D. 60 or just after. Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Asia, which was a large and populous region situated on the main thoroughfare from East to West. As a city, it teemed with wealth and luxury. Its chief architectural boast was the immense Temple of Artemis (or Diana as the Romans termed her). This was built in dazzling marble and was reckoned as one of the seven wonders of the world. Ephesus also contained one of the largest of all open-air theatres, capable of holding 50,000 spectators.

For nearly three years (A.D. 52–55) Paul had established his headquarters at Ephesus and with the assistance of other fellow-labourers had evangelized the whole province.

When we come to study the epistle to the Ephesians we find that some of the oldest Greek manuscripts (The Vatican and Sinaitic uncials and the earlier Chester Beatty papyrus) omit the words “in Ephesus” of 1:1, which suggests that while it may have been written to the Ephesian church, yet a wider circle was envisaged, namely all the churches of the province of Asia and when we realize its revelation of new truth, this is what we should expect rather than it being restricted to one assembly of believers. Furthermore this would explain the absence of personal references, a surprising thing considering Paul had spent nearly three years at Ephesus.

It is evident from the context that the Ephesian letter is closely linked to the one addressed to Colossae, both being sent by the hand of Tychicus. Bible scholars are not in agreement as to their order, some thinking Colossians was written first and others Ephesians. In Colossians Paul was moved to expound the profound exaltation of Christ not only over all things earthly, but heavenly too, and this to counteract a Jewish-Gnostic heresy that was creeping in. In Ephesians the Apostle does not have any particular error in mind. He equally exalts the

Lord Jesus in this epistle, but concentrates on the New Creation, termed the New Man, the church, the joint-Body, of which Christ is the Head. We therefore believe that Ephesians was written first, although there cannot be a long interval between the two epistles.

In the Ephesian epistle we reach heights of doctrine and revelation which are the “high water mark” of the New Testament and in fact the whole Bible. It is one of the loftiest products of Divine inspiration. No wonder Dr. A. T. Pierson described it as “the Switzerland of the New Testament”. Yet how many believers rejoice in its riches and how often is it ministered from our pulpits and in Bible classes? So many are content to stay with the knowledge of personal salvation and make no more spiritual progress. They can only take the “milk” of the Word, the “strong meat” is beyond them.

Professor F. F. Bruce’s words are to the point here:

“In many Protestant circles it has been customary to look upon the doctrine of justification by faith as the be-all and end-all of Paul’s teaching. Justification by faith is certainly fundamental to all his thinking, and it comes readily to the surface no matter what subject he is dealing with. Even in Ephesians it is uncompromisingly affirmed: ‘by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, that no man should glory’ (Eph. 2:8 f). It was inevitable and salutary in the Reformation age that the attention of Christians should be directed afresh to the ground on which men and women are accepted as righteous by God. But it is a pity when Paulinism is identified so exclusively with the emphasis of Galatians and Romans that the corporate and cosmic insights of Colossians and Ephesians are overlooked, or felt to be un-Pauline. True Paulinism has room for both, and our Christian thinking must similarly make room for both if it is not to become lop-sided and defective” (Introduction—*The Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 15).

There is therefore a great need to “go on to maturity” (Heb. 6:1) in order to appreciate the vastness of the spiritual wealth contained in Ephesians and the other three Prison Epistles. We omit Philemon, for while it is a prison letter of Paul’s, it is personal, one of many such letters Paul must have written to individual Christians and the Holy Spirit has seen fit to preserve this one. It is a delightful letter, whose aim is not to scale the heights and depths of doctrine, but to ensure the runaway slave



Onesimus should be graciously received back again by his master, Philemon.

To get the background to the Prison Epistles of Paul, one must go to the remoter context and bear in mind the main purpose of God revealed from Abraham's time and onwards. This was to bring in His rule of righteousness over all the earth and the means which God willed was to use the posterity of Abraham, the people of Israel, as a channel through which "all families of the earth" should be blessed and a knowledge of God and His plan of redemption spread to all mankind. The whole great purpose was secured in Christ as Son of David and Son of Abraham (Matt. 1:1). He was to be not only King of Israel, but the King of all the earth (Ps. 72:8,11,17; Zech. 14:9), His redemptive work on the cross was as sin-bearer blotting out the failure of Israel and the nations, and is in fact the foundation of salvation for all His people, whether earthly or heavenly.

The supreme tragedy was that, when He came to Israel in the flesh, they rejected Him as their great King-Priest, the One Who was to be their Ruler (King) and their Priest (the One Who alone could remove their sins and redeem them). Their verdict was "we will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14), and the only crown He received was a crown of thorns. He was indeed "despised and rejected of men; a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3).

What was the next step on the part of God? Many say, that for this climax crime, the nation of Israel was rejected by Him, with the church, the Body of Christ, commenced at Pentecost, taking the place of Israel as God's instrument to bring in His kingdom upon earth. But a careful study of the historical book that follows the Gospel records, namely the Acts of the Apostles, shows that this is erroneous. God's longsuffering with His earthly people did not cease at the cross. The Saviour had prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). The Acts shows us that this prayer was answered and God's longsuffering with this nation went on right through the period covered by this book. It is very necessary to understand how this is expressed clearly in Acts 3:19-26 and all that lies behind these words. Their importance can hardly be over-stressed. It was nothing less than to proclaim that if Israel would repent and turn back to God, her sins

would be forgiven, even the climax sin of crucifying their Messiah. *Then He would return to them* and the glowing prophecies of the Old Testament concerning this kingdom of God on earth would be realized to the full.

To this end both the ministry of Peter and the Twelve and Paul was to Israel *first* to proclaim and watch their reaction to this astounding promise. As late as Acts twenty-six Paul limits his ministry to the Old Testament (Moses and the Prophets who reveal so much of this glorious kingdom, Acts 26:22,23).

Peter's ministry to Israel in the land and Paul's to the Jew living outside the land (the Dispersion of which there were thousands) assured that *all* Israel heard the message concerning the possibility of forgiveness and reinstatement in the purpose of God. In his last letter written during the Acts period, namely Romans (10:18), Paul asks the question, "But I say, have they (Israel) not heard?". The answer is "*Yes, verily*"; so that they were certainly without excuse. In his defence before Agrippa, Paul stated that the twelve tribes were still waiting for their hope, and that hope was not just a personal belief in Christ as Messiah, but "the hope of the *promise made of God unto our fathers*" (that is Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and God's unconditional promise to them of a *seed* and a portion of *land* from the Nile to the Euphrates Genesis 15:18 and note 26:3,4 and 28:13,14). This has a direct bearing upon the Middle East problem today regarding Palestine (a part of this promised land), and the conflict between the Jew and the Arab which evidently will not be fully resolved until the Lord's Second Coming.

In the last chapter of the Acts, Paul testifies before the Jews at Rome concerning this kingdom out of the Old Testament (verse 23) and asserts he was a prisoner for the hope of Israel (verse 20), which hope he had already described, as we have just seen. The result was still uncertainty and rejection (verse 24), and at last God's patience ran out with this earthly people of His and the terribly solemn verse from Isaiah six is quoted by Paul under the authority of the Holy Spirit for the third and last time in the New Testament concerning them, giving them blinded eyes, deaf ears and a hard non-understanding heart or mind. In this sad state the nation has been spiritually ever since.



But Romans 9–11 reveals that this is not the end for them, for underlying their restoration at the Second Coming of Christ is the New Covenant of grace (Jer. 31:31–36; 33:20–26; Rom. 11:25–29). Because of this, the unconditional promises made in the Old Testament period concerning this earthly people will be abundantly fulfilled and then they will be a blessing to the whole world and finally “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea”.

Thus it is that Gentile blessing was always in the mind of God in the selection of Israel. This truth was never hidden, but is manifest in many Old Testament Scriptures. One is not surprised therefore to find the divine purpose widening during the period covered by the Acts, the door to the Gentiles being opened by Peter in Acts ten. The real reason for this is given by Paul in Romans, one that is very different from popular evangelical theology:

“But I say, did not Israel know? First Moses saith, *I will provoke you to jealousy* by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you” (Rom. 10:19).

“I say then, have they (Israel) stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, *for to provoke them to jealousy*” (Rom. 11:11).

In other words the Gentiles were admitted to partake of salvation and Israel’s covenant blessings (Rom. 9:3–5) to stir them up, to revitalize them spiritually as they were sinking deeper and deeper into unbelief and rejection of Christ. This is set forth symbolically in the olive tree of Romans eleven. Israel should have been the fair and fruitful olive tree of Jeremiah 11:16: “The Lord called thy name, *a green olive tree, fair, and of goodly fruit*”, but during the Acts, through their unbelief, God had lopped off many of the branches and in their place had grafted in believing Gentiles (“wild olives”). At the same time He warned these Gentile believers that they could be “lopped off” too if they manifested the same disobedience, and that they should remember that Israel was still *first*; the *root* (Israel) bore them and not the other way round (Rom. 11:17–24).

This sounds very strange and contradictory to what Paul had just written in Romans eight concerning the impossibility of being separated from Christ. But a distinction is made by

God between individual Jews and Gentiles as sinners saved by grace and justified (made righteous) by faith in Christ. In this there was no difference between them (Rom. 3:21–26) and they could be reckoned as “one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). But there was a great difference when all the covenant blessings that God had lavished on Israel were taken into consideration (compare Romans 9:3–5; 3:1,2) to which the Gentile was a complete stranger (Eph. 2:11,12). No Jewish believer forfeited these when he was saved during the Acts. This could not possibly happen as long as Israel was a covenant nation before God, and this was their position until the end of the Acts and their laying aside at that point by the Holy Spirit in spiritual darkness and hardness of heart, thus temporarily breaking the relationship between God and Israel as a nation that had existed for centuries past.

As the Scriptures quoted earlier on show clearly, this break is only *temporary*, for the epistle to the Romans assures us that God, Who broke off the olive branches of Israel, because of their unbelief, can just as easily graft them back in again, in other words, *restore them* to their previous relationship with Him (Rom. 11:21–29). This will be accomplished at Christ’s Second Advent on the basis of *grace*, not works or merit, which grace is clearly shown in the New Covenant (verses 25–27) made with this people by God in Jeremiah 31:31 onwards.\*

There is then quite obviously a period of time between Israel’s laying aside by the Holy Spirit at Acts twenty-eight and their restoration at the Second Advent and this has already lasted nearly 2,000 years. What has God done to fill the gap? The prison ministry of the Apostle Paul gives us this information. The Lord now reveals an aspect of truth which He had kept secret in His own counsels from all previous generations (the word “mystery” in the A.V. just means “secret”), and this concerned a “new creation” (not evolution) taken from Jew and Gentile, and blessed, not on the earth, but in the highest heavens where Christ is now enthroned in glory (Eph. 2:6; Col. 3:1,2). This is what the epistle to the Ephesians reveals and to its exposition we now address ourselves.

\* This question of Israel’s position in the Acts is dealt with more fully in the second part of the author’s *On Reading the Bible* and also his *The Unfolding Purpose of God*.

## CHAPTER ONE OF THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

Before we begin, we set out the structure or “backbone” of Ephesians, which is taken from the text, and not from human divisions or headings\*.

*The structure of Ephesians as a whole.*

\* This structure is exhibited by C. H. Welch in his book *In Heavenly Places*.

- A 1:1,2 EPISTOLARY a 1:1 PAUL'S COMMISSION  
b 1:2 SALUTATION  
Grace and Peace  
B 1:3-2:7 c 1:3-14 ALL SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS  
d 1:15-19 PAUL'S PRAYER  
{ That He may give  
{ That you may know  
The Hope, Riches, Power of  
the Mystery  
e 1:19-2:7 THE MIGHTY POWER IN-  
WORKED (*energeo*). Seated  
C 2:8-10 THE NEW CREATION Its Walk  
(Shortest doctrinal passage, as it really deals  
with the walk which is practical).  
D 2:11-19 THE NEW MAN Once aliens from  
Commonwealth (*apellotriomenoi*)  
E 2:19-22 THE TEMPLE FITLY FRAMED  
TOGETHER (*sunarmologoumene*)  
APOSTLES AND PROPHETS  
Foundation Ministry  
F 3:1-13 THE PRISONER OF CHRIST  
JESUS  
Threefold Unity (*verse 6*)  
G 3:14-21 THE CENTRAL PRAYER  
The Love of Christ  
The Fulness of God  
F 4:1-6 THE PRISONER IN THE LORD  
Sevenfold Unity (*verses 3-6*)  
E 4:7-19 THE BODY FITLY JOINED  
TOGETHER (*sunarmologoumenon*)  
Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists,  
Pastors and Teachers—Adjusting  
Ministry  
D 4:20-32 THE NEW MAN Once alienated  
from the Life of God  
(*apellotriomenoi*). (*See verse 18*)  
C 5:1-6:9 THE NEW CREATION Its walk  
(Longest practical passage, applying the  
doctrine to every department of life).  
B 6:10-20 e 6:10-13 THE MIGHTY POWER  
WORKED OUT  
(*katergazomai*) Stand  
c 6:14-18 ALL SPIRITUAL ARMOUR  
d 6:19,20 PRAYER FOR PAUL  
{ That utterance may be given  
{ That I may make known  
The Mystery of the Gospel  
A 6:21-24 EPISTOLARY a 6:21,22 TYCHICUS'  
COMMISSION  
b 6:23,24 SALUTATION  
Peace and Grace.

*Doctrine* (1:3—3:13)

- (1) THE THREEFOLD CHARTER (1:3-14)
  - (a) The Will of the Father
  - (b) The Work of the Son
  - (c) The Witness of the Spirit
- (2) THE THREEFOLD PRAYER (1:15-19)
  - (a) That ye may know—Hope
  - (b) That ye may know—Inheritance
  - (c) That ye may know—Power
- (3) THE THREEFOLD UNION (1:19—2:7)
  - (a) Quickened together
  - (b) Raised together
  - (c) Seated together
- (4) THREE WORKS (2:8-10)
  - (a) Not of works
  - (b) We are His work
  - (c) Unto good works
- (5) THREEFOLD PEACE (2:11-19)
  - (a) Far off nigh—Peace
  - (b) Two made one—Peace
  - (c) He came and preached—Peace
- (6) THREEFOLD UNION (2:19-22)
  - (a) Citizens together
  - (b) Framed together
  - (c) Builded together
- (7) THREEFOLD EQUALITY (3:1-13)
  - (a) Heirs together
  - (b) Members together
  - (c) Partakers together

*The Central Prayer* (3:14-21)

- (a) That He would grant strength
- (b) That ye may be able to comprehend
- (c) That ye might be filled unto all the fulness of God.

*Practice* (4:1—6:20)

- (1) THREEFOLD EXHORTATION (4:1-6)
  - (a) Walk worthy of calling
  - (b) Forbear in love
  - (c) Keep the unity
- (2) THREEFOLD MEASURE (4:7-19)
  - (a) The measure of the gift of Christ
  - (b) The measure... of the fulness of Christ
  - (c) The measure of every part
- (3) THREEFOLD APPLICATION (4:20-32)
  - (a) Put off old man
  - (b) Put on new man
  - (c) Put away the lie
- (4) THREEFOLD WALK (5:1—6:9)
  - (a) Walk in love
  - (b) Walk as light
  - (c) Walk circumspectly
- (5) THREEFOLD STAND (6:10-13)
  - (a) Stand against Devil
  - (b) Withstand evil day
  - (c) Stand having “worked out”
- (6) THREEFOLD EQUIPMENT (6:14-18)
  - (a) Girdle and breast-plate
  - (b) Shoes and shield
  - (c) Helmet and sword
- (7) THREEFOLD PRAYER (6:19,20)
  - (a) Open mouth
  - (b) Speak boldly
  - (c) As I ought

The reader will perceive from the chart on the previous page that there are seven threefold sections of doctrine balanced by seven threefold sections of practice, which should be the faithful response on the part of the believer.

The inter-relationship of the Prison Epistles of Paul.

A. *Ephesians. Seated together in the Heavenly Places in Christ Jesus.*

*Key words*

3:2 and 9 R.V.—Dispensation (ministry)

3:3—The Mystery (secret)

1:23 and 4:10—The Fulness

1:22—Christ the Head

1:22,23—The Church which is His Body

1:21—Principalities and Powers

B. *Philippians. The Prize.*

*Key words*

1:10 marg.—Try the things that differ

1:27—Strive

3:14—Press toward the mark and the Prize

1:23—Depart

2:17—Offered

A. *Colossians. Complete (filled to the full) in Him*

*Key words*

1:25—Dispensation (ministry)

1:26—The Mystery (secret)

1:19—The Fulness

2:19—Christ the Head

1:24—The Church which is His Body

1:16 and 2:10—Principalities and Powers

B. *2 Timothy. The Crown.*

*Key words*

2:15—Rightly dividing the Word of truth

2:5—Strive

4:7—Course finished

4:8—Crown

4:6—Depart and offered.

It will be observed that these epistles are in pairs, viz. Ephesians and Colossians, Philippians and 2 Timothy. The first pair make known God's secret purpose concerning the church, the Body of Christ (i.e. the Mystery, Authorized Version). The second pair reveal a prize or crown for faithful ministry and



witness in connection with this transcendent Truth and the Gospel of God's grace.

The epistle opens with the words:

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and the faithful in Christ Jesus: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 1:1,2 R.V.).

Verse one tells us that Paul's apostleship was no human innovation; it was a practical expression of the will of God as was the whole of his life and witness after his conversion. He did not run without being specifically sent.

God had saved him, called him, revealed the truth to him, equipped him and made known his sphere of service so that by voice and pen he could pass on these divine riches to the Gentile world, which in its abject darkness so badly needed them. He addresses this letter to *saints* and *faithful*. The word “saint” *hagios*, means *holy* and is so translated six times (1:4,13; 2:21; 3:5; 4:30; 5:27). It is also rendered “saint” nine times (1:1,15, 18; 2:19; 3:8,18; 4:12; 5:3; 6:18) but this is only another English word for holiness.

We hardly need state the fact that holiness is one of the sole attributes of God and that no human being is born into this world a *holy person*, but he can *become* so, by coming to a knowledge of salvation, which results from putting his faith or complete trust in the Lord Jesus Christ Who is pre-eminently the Holy One.

The holiness of God is then given by Him to the believer as a free and permanent gift. The saved one is placed by God IN CHRIST and is, as it were, clothed by this divine holiness which covers up all his sin and imperfection. However, we must distinguish between holiness given by God and practical holiness in the believer's daily life. The Corinthian church were all addressed as “saints”, “holy ones” (1 Cor. 1:2) but, as the epistle shows, were anything but *saintly* in their daily lives. They were “saints” because Christ had been *made to them sanctification* (or holiness) as well as redemption (1 Cor. 1:30).

Holiness in its primary sense is a gift of God like righteousness and eternal life, and then the concern of the believer should be to express *holiness practically* in his daily life in thought,



word and deed. The basic meaning behind holiness is *separation* to a holy God.

Faithful. The word *pistos* occurs nine times in the Prison Epistles as follows:

- “The faithful in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 1:1)
- “Faithful minister” (Eph. 6:21)
- “The faithful brethren” (Col. 1:2)
- “A faithful minister” (twice, Col. 1:7; 4:7)
- “A faithful . . . brother” (Col. 4:9)
- “Faithful men”, “faithful saying”, “He abideth faithful”  
(2 Tim. 2:2,11,13).

The usage here shows that Paul is not merely saying that the brethren he describes *possess* faith, but more, that they, by the evidence of their lives, are faithful, that is, loyal and trustworthy. Faithfulness is not an automatic attitude of mind, nor does it describe every believer, for alas it is possible for a believer to be unfaithful. It is significant that the companion epistle to Ephesians, namely Colossians, likewise includes the word “faithful” in the introductory verses (Col. 1:2), and this is peculiar to these two epistles.

Both contain untold spiritual wealth and are addressed to *trustworthy* believers. Can we truthfully number ourselves among these?

Grace and peace (verse 2) give the greeting to Gentile (grace, *charis*) and Jew (peace, *eirene*, Hebrew *shalom*).

*The will of the Father; the work of the Son;  
and the witness of the Holy Spirit (3–14).*

The next section (verses 3–14) is subdivided by the exultant refrain “the praise of His (or the) glory” in verses six, twelve, and fourteen, and bring before us the whole God-head actively engaged in blessing each member of the new man, the Body of Christ, with spiritual riches beyond all human conception. Verse three commences with the *Father*, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”, verses six and seven mention the *Beloved One, the Lord Jesus* in Whom we have redemption through His blood, while in verses thirteen and fourteen the *Holy Spirit* of promise is brought before us, giving the *earnest* of our inheritance here and now. Verse three reads:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (R.V.).

This verse calls us to bless and praise our God and Father Who has so wonderfully blessed us in the terms of this glorious epistle. Who among us will fail to do this if they have any conception of what this context reveals? We are assured that our heavenly Father has blessed us *with every blessing that is spiritual*; and that these are *in heavenly places in Christ*, which further on is identified with *the right hand of God* where the Lord Jesus is now enthroned. The phrase “in Christ” is fundamental to the truth revealed in this section and in fact right throughout this epistle. We find that the words “in Christ”, “by Christ”, “through Christ” occur some *twelve times* in this context. Nothing is seen in Ephesians for the believer apart from Christ. This is the first great truth to grasp. Those with a defective knowledge of the Lord Jesus will never adequately perceive the riches of this letter. “Christ is ALL”, Colossians 3:11 asserts, and this is where the believer must reach in his understanding if he is ever to grasp in any sense of fulness the wealth revealed in these two epistles.

*Every blessing that is spiritual.*

Here we have an initial difficulty, for we have no adequate conception of the words “spirit” or “spiritual” apart from what is revealed in the holy Scriptures. We note that it can be used of what is wicked as well as that which is good (6:12). We live in a material world of sight and sense and can well understand what an *earthly* blessing is. Such were the blessings given by God to Israel in the Old Testament times. They are described in Deuteronomy 28:2–6 as blessings of the field, cattle, basket and store, but of what use would these be in heavenly places where Christ is now seated? The Lord gave Israel *earthly* blessings because they were his earthly people whose destiny was to be fulfilled on earth. God suits the blessing to the sphere where it will be enjoyed. The Body of Christ constitutes His heavenly people and consequently they enjoy spiritual blessings because their eternal home is a heavenly one. They are “seated together in Christ in the heavenly places” where He now is (2:6) in a sphere far beyond the limitations of earthly things. We are assured that not one

of these blessings has been kept back by God. We are given *every* blessing that is spiritual and these will be enjoyed on resurrection ground. How vast this must be! At the very beginning of Ephesians we are met with staggering realities. If we wish to honour the Father Who has made this possible, the only thing we can do is to believe what He has revealed, even though we do not fully understand it, and then to respond to His claims day by day.

If we were to ask where all this treasure will be enjoyed, the answer would be in the next phrase “in the heavenly places”. This phrase occurs five times in this epistle and is unique (1:3; 1:20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12) in expressing location. The word “heavenly” is used elsewhere of things that are heavenly in *character*. We read in Hebrews six of those who had “tasted of the *heavenly* gift”, but they certainly did not taste it *in heaven*. Many things may be heavenly in origin and character that are not enjoyed *in heaven*. Some have objected to the addition of the word “places” in the Authorized Version and Revised Version. We have seen that these heavenly places are synonymous with the “right hand of God”. The Lord Jesus ascended not as a spirit but with a “body of glory” and is now seated at the Father’s right hand in the heavenly places (1:21). Our future resurrection bodies are fashioned in likeness to His (Phil. 3:20,21). Thus with a glorified body He must be *somewhere* and the addition of the word “places” is justified and indicates a sphere representing the highest conceivable position in glory. It is described as “far above all principality and power” (1:21) and “far above all heavens” (4:10).

*This* is where all our spiritual blessings exist, namely in the highly exalted sphere where our Saviour is enthroned and where our inheritance and eternal home is located with Him, and here they are both eternally secure.

Continuing the revelation of the good pleasure of the Father’s will, the Apostle Paul writes:

“Even as He (the Father) chose us in Him (Christ) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before Him in love” (verse 4 R.V.).

In this verse we have the Father’s choice, “even as He chose us”, then the Father’s object “that we should be holy and without blemish before Him”, and thirdly, the Father’s motive, “in

love". The word "chosen" means "elected" and we face election early in this epistle. Election in Scripture comes *after*, not *before* foreknowledge (Rom. 8:29; 1 Pet. 1:2), and this foreknowledge reveals the wondrous capacity of an omnipotent God Who knows all things before they come to pass and therefore is not limited in any way in His planning for the future. God the Father chooses or selects the part that all the redeemed shall play in His great plan of the ages, which finally will lead to a sinless and perfectly restored creation in a new heaven and earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. Instead of looking at this divine selection as something to argue and disagree about, let us see in it our divine security in Christ and that one day we shall fulfil just the role He intends for us "in the heavenly places, far above all".

In the verses we are considering, our heavenly Father is appointing His heirs to this heavenly inheritance. Men do this here on earth when they make a will and no one can criticize them for so doing or say that in doing so they are being unfair. Why should anyone therefore object to God doing the same thing? Let us revel in the fact that by grace we have been chosen by the Father. We say "by grace", for we can be certain of one thing, namely that we were *not* selected because of any goodness or merit on our part. Nothing but His "will" and the greatness of His love and grace come in here and this took place *before* creation and the ages of time. We can say that this is the longest look back in Scripture into the past in connection with the redeemed. The phrase "before the foundation of the world" is used elsewhere only of Christ Himself (John 17:24; 1 Pet. 1:20). Other aspects of God's redemptive purpose are linked with a period "*from* or *since* the foundation of the world" (Matt. 13:35; 25:34; Luke 11:50; Heb. 4:3; 9:26; Rev. 13:8; 17:8). It looks as though the Body of Christ was first in the divine thought and plan that was conceived in the mind of God before He created. This must therefore have an important place in His purpose for the heavens and even now, Ephesians assures us, heaven's nobility, the principalities and powers, are learning through this church the manifold wisdom of God (3:10).

Now follows the Father's object, "that we should be holy and without blemish before Him", and the Father's motive—"love". If we have a right estimate of ourselves, we know that



we are anything but “holy and without blemish”, for we are born into this world as sinners, lost and undone and under the dominion of death. Just as water cannot rise above its own level of itself, neither can we, however hard we may try. Reformation is no substitute for perfection, inside and out, and nothing less than this is God’s standard. God cannot lower this standard, otherwise His purpose in bringing all things in heaven and earth to perfection would be perpetually frustrated. One sinner in glory would nullify the divine plan and start the contamination of sin and death all over again. Concerning the new creation of heaven it is written “there shall in no wise enter into it *anything that defileth*” (Rev. 21:27) and this new heaven and earth will be one in which *dwelleth righteousness* (2 Pet. 3:13), that is a creation without a single blemish.

In view of the Father’s object that we should be as holy and spotless as He is Himself, our present sinful position calls aloud for the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ which is brought before us further on in this chapter of Ephesians. This is mentioned again in 5:25–27 where the words “holy and without blemish” are repeated. Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it, that it should be “holy and without blemish”. So what the Father willed, the work of the Son has brought to pass and one day every member of this gloriously favoured company of God’s children will stand before Him, “without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing” (5:27), or as Colossians 1:22 expresses it “to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouable in His sight”.

What a marvellous standing is described here, to be able to endure the all-searching eye of the thrice holy God, and to dwell with Him for ever, yet nothing less than this is the destiny of this church, *because the Father has willed it*. And what is the motive behind it all? Nothing but His matchless love, a love that Ephesians 3:19 declares to be “surpassing”, one that “passeth knowledge”. It is a veritable ocean without bounds that leaves us wondering with amazement. May we go on to know and experience more of it day by day for ourselves.

The Apostle Paul continues:

“Having foreordained (predestinated A.V.) us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will” (verse 5 R.V.).

Here we have three more distinct steps mentioned, the Father's foreordination—*us*, the Father's object—*adoption*, and the Father's motive "the good pleasure of His will". We have seen the Father's electing purpose in verse four, and this is now expanded in the opening phrase before us. We are not only chosen to be holy and without blemish, but also to occupy the glorious position of being sons of God with an inheritance in view. To understand this fully we must cast from our minds the modern ideas of adoption. No adopted child today can be a *real* child of the parents however much love and care is lavished upon it. But by redemption and grace we are most certainly *the real children of God*. "Beloved now *are we* the sons (children) of God (1 John 3:2 and see John 1:12). Sir William Ramsey has shown that the Greek *huiiothesia* (adoption) was the legal term for appointing the heir to the inheritance. He states in his *An Historical Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*:

"The idea that they who follow the principle of faith are sons of Abraham, whatever family they belong to by nature, would certainly be understood by the Galatians as referring to the legal process called adoption, *huiiothesia*. Adoption was a kind of embryo will; the adopted son became the owner of the property, and the property could pass to a person that was naturally outside the family only through his being adopted. The adoption was a sort of will-making; and the ancient form of will was irrevocable and public. The terms son and heir are interchangeable. . . . It is remarkable that the adopted son should have a stronger position than the son by birth; yet it is so".

Adoption in New Testament times appointed the heir to the inheritance and in practice such a one had the position of the firstborn. Thus we find in the *earthly* sphere of God's purpose that the redeemed nation of Israel has the *adoption* or the *firstborn's position* (Rom. 9:4; Exod. 4:22). In Galatians four the spiritual seed of Abraham are associated with the *heavenly* Jerusalem, which will eventually descend from heaven (Rev. 3:12; 21:2,10) to the new earth and they are the church of the *firstborn* (Heb. 12:23). In Ephesians and Colossians we have a company of believers who are as closely linked to the exalted Lord Jesus as the head is to the body and He is the *Firstborn* of all creation (Col. 1:15) and they are seen by God as seated with Him in the heavenly places "far above all" (Eph. 2:6).

Thus God has appointed an inheritance for His redeemed family from the highest place in glory down to the lowest earth, in this case the new earth and “wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Pet. 3:13).

For the Body of Christ the Father has determined that it will enjoy “the adoption” in the light of heaven’s “holiest of all”. What tremendous glory this involves we can have but little conception now. All heaven’s nobility will then yield to this church of glory, for ever linked to the One Who is above them all and above every name that is named (Eph. 1:21). Superabounding love and good pleasure are the only reasons for choosing and willing that we should have such an exalted destiny. No wonder praise follows: “to the praise of the glory of His grace” (and see verses 12 and 14). Eternity will never exhaust this anthem of praise to the God and Father Who has so wonderfully wrought for us, having made His will known and appointed us His heirs in glory. It is significant that the word “will” *thelema*, occurs *seven* times in Ephesians (1:1,5,9,11; 2:3; 5:17; 6:6).

This section, dealing with the Father’s will, ends with the assurance that He has made us “accepted in the Beloved One”, the Lord Jesus Christ. “Made us accepted” is *charitoo*, cognate with *charis*, grace, and this word only occurs in one other place, namely Luke 1:28 where the angel announces to Mary that she is “highly favoured . . . among women”. No woman, before or since, has been or could be so highly favoured by God as the one chosen to be the human mother of the Saviour, the woman through whom the prophecies of Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 7:14 and 9:6 were fulfilled. The margin of the Authorized Version in Luke 1:28 reads “graciously accepted (or much graced)”.

In like manner this church, the New Man, the Body of Christ, has indeed been much graced and highly favoured with such an overwhelming position in the heavenlies, because of the Beloved One, Whose redemptive work is the sole basis for such a goal. In Colossians we have the corresponding title “The Son of His love” in 1:13 and we are reminded of the voice at His baptism “Thou art My Son, *My beloved*, in Thee I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11). In this Beloved One “we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses,



according to the riches of His grace". The Father's will, that we should be "holy and without blemish" has been marred by the Fall with resulting sin and death, for "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). One thing is certain and that is that no one can extricate himself from this bondage, hence this second section of Ephesians 1:3-14 deals with the redemptive work of the Son Who alone can break the chains that hold us, remove our sins righteously, and give us a perfect standing in Himself.

Chapter five elaborates this, informing us that Christ gave Himself for His church, sanctifying and cleansing it so that it should be "holy and without blemish" (5:25-27). Thus the frustration of the Father's will as far as our failing is concerned has been cancelled, and one day, as we have seen, we shall be presented "holy, unblameable, unreprouvable in His sight" (Col. 1:22) just as He had us in His mind and purpose before creation. This redemption was costly to God, utterly beyond our assessment, yet to us it is free, without money and without price. Its accomplishment was by the life-blood of our Saviour, poured out on our behalf on Calvary's cross. "Him Who knew no sin He made to be sin (or a sin offering) on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21 R.V.). Truly the Lord "laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6), and so He bore the penalty of sin in our stead (1 Pet. 2:24).

All this was "according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:7). The Prison letters of Paul are full of spiritual wealth, the word riches occurring eight times, and we shall be noting the context of each of these occurrences as we come to them. Paul is pre-eminently the apostle of grace. Grace occurs 150 times in the New Testament. Peter uses the word 10 times, John 6 times, but Paul 95 times! Grace is God's favour to the undeserving. It saves us (Eph. 2:5,8) and to every member of the church grace is given to serve acceptably (4:7) and we look forward to experiencing "the exceeding riches of His grace in the ages to come" (2:7).

Furthermore this precious grace has been poured out "wherein He hath *abounded* toward us". The word translated "abound" is used of rivers *overflowing*. This grace then is no mere trickle, but since Calvary, is like an overflowing torrent

which leaves us, as the hymn writer expresses it, “lost in wonder, love and praise”.

It would be as well to put a full stop after the word “us” and connect the next phrase with making known the mystery of His will (verse 9), for punctuation is not inspired, there being none in the original Greek. God has revealed in His infinite wisdom something that belongs to His *secret* will. It is important to realize that the word “mystery” in the New Testament does not mean something that is puzzling or mysterious, but that which is *secret*. Till secrets are disclosed they are unknowable. When declared they can be apprehended and understood. The word has no connection whatsoever with the pagan mystery cults that flourished in Paul’s day. “Mystery” occurs six times in Ephesians (1:9; 3:3,4,9; 5:32; 6:19), and refers to some aspect of God’s truth which He had previously hidden, but now has chosen to reveal. When God hides, who can find? When He reveals and opens the eyes of our understanding we can know, but not till then. In the present context redemption is found in God’s *secret* will. When Adam was put to the test, God warned him that if he disobeyed he would surely die. But he was not told that, if this occurred, *God had provided a Saviour*, for that could have influenced Adam to take a light view of sin. Redemption therefore was kept by God in His *secret will*, Christ being foreordained as the slain Lamb and sin-bearer before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:19,20; Rev. 13:8). God was not taken by surprise by man’s sin and failure, but had wonderfully provided for the contingency in His wisdom, foreknowledge and purpose.

God’s good pleasure is brought before us in making the glorious fact of redemption, ransom and deliverance known, and then it looks forward to the distant future, when, in the dispensation of the fulness of times (or seasons), He (the Father) might gather together in one, all things in heaven and earth in Christ. With this mighty sweep we are carried forward to the goal of the ages. The phrase that “He might gather together in one” is literally that He might “head up again all things (*ta panta*) in Christ”. It is God’s purpose that the whole of His restored creation from the highest heavens to the lowest earth shall finally stand in the headship and almighty power of the Lord Jesus. Then the fulness or completion of the seasons

will have arrived. This will be God's guarantee that *the tragedy of sin and death can never be repeated*, for never again will creation stand in the strength of a created being. This is the mighty goal to which God is working, and in the calling of this church we have an illustration of this glorious consummation, for *now* Christ is *Head*, and we are the *fulness* of Him that "fillet all in all" (Eph. 1:22,23).

After bringing before us the fundamental work of redemption by the precious blood of Christ (His life poured out for us) in Ephesians 1:7-10, we are assured by Paul that "in Him we have obtained an inheritance". The Revised Version reads "in Whom also we were made a heritage". Both these translations are true, but if the usage of the word "inheritance" in the Old Testament is taken into consideration, then the Revised Version is preferable. Deuteronomy 32:9 states:

"The Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance".

This and other Scriptures clearly teach that while Israel *had* an earthly inheritance (this had been defined by God to Abraham and his seed and consisted of the "good land" to which the Lord led them from Egypt), *they themselves were the Lord's inheritance*. Both these facts must be held to get the complete truth and so it is with the Lord's heavenly people. We have a heavenly inheritance (Phil. 3:20) and at the same time we *are* the inheritance of Christ.

All the redeemed of God are assured of an inheritance *somewhere* in the restored universe when a new heaven and earth are created by Him. "If children, *then heirs; heirs of God*" (Rom. 8:17) is gloriously true of all who have come into family relationship with God through Christ. Redeemed and restored Israel will have their inheritance upon *earth* as their Old Testament prophets vividly portray and as the Lord, quoting from Psalm thirty-seven, asserted, "the meek shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5). The faithful overcomers from Abel onwards, those who are listed in Hebrews eleven, looked by faith to a higher sphere and a "better country" which is linked with the *heavenly* Jerusalem and their inheritance is *there* (Heb. 11:13-16; 12:22). This heavenly city does not remain in heaven in the plan of God, but descends to the new earth (Rev. 3:12; 21:2,10) and evidently becomes one with it.

This still leaves us with the new heavens above, and this is where the inheritance of the Body of Christ is found so closely identified with the exalted Saviour “far above all”. The glory and wonder of this inheritance cannot be measured in earthly terms or anything material. It is entirely beyond our present experience or understanding if only because it is *not* earthly and cannot be comprehended or summed up by the five bodily senses. God has made no attempt to describe it, for had He done so it would have been beyond our comprehension. We can be assured, however, that this glorious heavenly inheritance is absolutely real and is the highest and best that God has to give. Let us keep this permanently in mind. It will strengthen and cheer us through all the earthly trials through which we have to pass. The enemy may dangle his tinsel before our eyes, to turn away our gaze from this tremendous consummation, but let us not allow him to deceive or side-track us.

The Apostle Paul goes on to write:

“(we) having been foreordained according to the purpose of Him Who worketh all things after the counsel of His will” (verse 11 R.V.).

This verse brings before us again God’s foreordaining purpose which has been alluded to in verses four, five and nine. Ephesians truly reveals God’s plan for the heavenlies, just as the Old Testament reveals His plan for the earth. How assuring to realize that these can never miscarry for “He works all things after the counsel of *His own will*” (verse 11). All around us we see the wreckage that man’s sin and failure have brought. Trouble, uncertainty and distress are everywhere, but this divine plan goes forward silently and with absolute certainty. Nothing can frustrate it, for Christ’s risen power lies behind it all. These glorious facts bring us to the theme of praise again:

“to the end that we should be unto the praise of His glory, we who had before hoped in Christ” (verse 12 R.V.).

*Proelpizo* is the word translated “before hoped” (R.V.) or “first-trusted” (A.V.). *Pro* can stress either dignity of position, or time, or both, and it would seem that both meanings are intended here. If Paul is looking back in the past to the fact that Jewish believers had a prior hope both in time and position in contrast to the Gentiles, then this is only an illustration of the hope of the Body now, which being linked with the ascended



Christ, has this priority of dignity and time, there being no prophetic event revealed which must first be fulfilled before that hope can be realized.

The note on this occurrence of *proelpizo* in the *Arndt and Gingrich Greek-English Lexicon* is as follows:

“Ephesians 1:12 if *hemeis* (we) here refers to the Jewish Christians, as most scholars (from Chrysostom to M. Dibelius) prefer to take it, then *pro* would suggest ‘before the Gentiles’ or even ‘before Christ appeared’. If the *hemeis* are the Christians as a whole (E. Haupt; P. Ewald; Meinertz; H. Rendorff) then *pro* looks forward to the fulfilment of the hope in the future”.

Hope, in Scripture, looks forward to the fulfilment of a divine purpose or a calling of God, and the hope of the Body of Christ will place all members where they are now seen to be by faith, that is seated together with Christ in the heavenly places (2:6) to which He ascended “far above all heavens” (4:10). Then faith will be lost in sight, and we shall be “manifested with Him in glory” where He now is (Col. 3:4). This is truly a “blessed hope” and one that is beyond the expectation of the human mind (Titus 2:13). The joy of its anticipation should be constantly with us, urging us on to practical service while the day of opportunity lasts.

The epistle to the Ephesians continues:

“In Whom (Christ) ye also, having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, in Whom, having also believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise” (verse 13 R.V.).

We now come to the section (verses 13 and 14) dealing with the present work of the Holy Spirit on behalf of the Body. Thus the triune God is engaged in conceiving, calling out, redeeming and equipping this exalted company of God’s children. In Christ the Holy Spirit seals each member of the Body, and so the divine stamp is put on the whole wondrous transaction.

The reader will note the difference between the rendering of the Authorized Version and Revised Version here. The Authorized Version rendering places the sealing some time *after* both hearing and believing the gospel, whereas the Revised Version correctly connects the sealing with *the moment of believing* and of salvation in accordance with what Paul actually

wrote. The participle “having believed” is called by grammarians the “coincident aorist participle”, because it denotes an action *coincident in time with that of the main verb*. There is no justification whatsoever in these verses for what is sometimes called “the second blessing”, or filling of the Holy Spirit, or speaking in tongues, as a special experience subsequent to salvation. For another example of this kind of participle, see Acts 19:2, “Did ye receive the Holy Ghost *when ye believed?*” not “after ye believed”.

This divine sealing is referred to again in Ephesians 4:30 and it assures us that this aspect of God’s purpose, like a legal document, is signed, sealed and settled, and can never be frustrated or reversed. Moreover this sealing is “an earnest of our inheritance, unto the redemption of God’s own possession, unto the praise of His glory” (verse 14 R.V.). The word “earnest” *arrhabon* is the Hebrew *erabon* which seems to have found its way into Greek through Persian traders. It means a *token* or *pledge* and this work of the Holy Spirit is God’s pledge to us now that *the reality of this heavenly calling will surely be attained*. Those who teach that it is possible “to be saved today and lost tomorrow”, can have no conception of this truth. Alas, it is possible to “grieve the Holy Spirit”, and this will bring sorrow, disappointment and loss here and now and perhaps divine disapproval later on when our service is tested by the Lord, but *God’s seal cannot be broken*. We are sealed *unto the day of redemption*, and that day will surely be reached. The inheritance in all its fulness is now secure in Christ and will be entered in experience in resurrection glory. Till then we have the pilgrim pathway to tread leading towards our heavenly home, and it is *during this time* we can enjoy the *earnest* or *foretaste* of this inheritance as revealed by the Holy Spirit.

Just as God gave Israel a “first instalment” of the good land of promise before they entered it, by allowing the spies to bring back the enormous grapes of Eshcol and its luscious pomegranates and figs (Num. 13:17–27), so God the Holy Spirit is graciously pleased to give us, in our daily experience, glimpses of the coming glory. *Now* we have the *firstfruits* of the Spirit (Rom. 8:23). *Then* it will be the *reality*, where Christ is now enthroned and exalted to the Majesty on high at the Father’s right hand. All this is to the “praise of His glory” (verse 14)

and if we have any conception of what this purpose involves, can we ever praise enough?

*The prayer for divine illumination concerning the calling.*

Having stated the wonder of the Father's will in choosing a company of His children for the heavenlies, the Son's work in redeeming and making them holy, and the Spirit's seal in binding them to God for ever, the Apostle Paul starts to pray for those under his care at Ephesus and elsewhere. There comes a moment when teaching must stop, for unless there is a practical response to what has already been revealed, to add further instructions would be a waste of time. The position that prayer should occupy in the life and work of the believer is so important that we must pause to consider it.

(1) *Prayer is the realization of access to the Father.* Sin hinders access to a holy God and must for ever create a barrier between God and the creature He has made, unless it can be righteously removed. This has been accomplished by the redeeming work of the Lord Jesus Who has opened "a new and living way . . . through the veil, that is to say His flesh" (Heb. 10:20) and therefore we have "boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus" (19). The invitation follows in verse twenty-two, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith". This access is at all times and in all places, and is an inestimable privilege for all believers. Our heavenly Father encourages us to "come boldly unto the Throne of Grace" (Heb. 4:16) through the one Mediator, Christ Himself. How often do we avail ourselves of this glorious invitation?

(2) *True prayer gives fellowship with God.* With believers the thought of fellowship is often restricted to communion between themselves, whereas John in his first epistle says "Truly our fellowship is with *the Father*, and with *His Son Jesus Christ*" (1 John 1:3). To go to our heavenly Father only when we want something keenly or when we are in some special need, is a poor way of engaging in prayer. It should be our joy to talk to Him *at all times* and so make it the normal expression of our spiritual life.

(3) *True prayer puts God first—others second and self last.* The earthly kingdom prayer commences with "Our Father",



then *Thy Name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done . . .*” before the needs of the believer are mentioned. Prayer is not just a way of getting something from God for ourselves. It is a *means of intercession for the needs of others*. Does true unselfishness characterize our praying? Can we pray aright when dominated by self?

(4) *True prayer rests upon the promises of God*. David knew this. He said “Therefore now, Lord, let the thing that *Thou hast spoken* concerning Thy servant and concerning his house, be established for ever, and *do as Thou hast said*” (1 Chron. 17:23). Effective praying must be based upon God’s Word and here the injunction of 2 Timothy 2:15 is imperative. God will only answer prayer along the lines of truth revealed for this dispensation of grace, hence the need for getting to know the truth revealed to and for us Gentiles through Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles.

(5) *True prayer watches and waits for the Lord’s answer*. The Lord commanded His disciples to *watch* as well as pray (Luke 21:36). “Continue in prayer, and *watch* in the same with thanksgiving” (Col. 4:2). How easy it is to pray and then fail through inability to wait with patience for the answer! Or when the answer comes, not to recognize it!

(6) *True prayer has an intensity and earnestness behind it*. Epaphras in Colossians 4:12 is said to “labour fervently . . . in prayers” for the Colossian saints. The Apostle Paul prayed likewise for all those under his charge. The word translated “labour fervently” brings to the mind the picture of the athlete running a race with all the intensity of effort put into it. Do we pray like this? Apathetic and spasmodic praying accomplishes nothing.

(7) *True prayer is offered to God the Father in Christ’s Name*. In the New Testament prayer is always directed to God the Father (Eph. 3:14) in the Name of the Lord Jesus (Eph. 3:21). When we say as we conclude our prayers “for Christ’s sake, Amen”, let us not rush over it as though it was a formality—for no prayer can ever reach the Father except through the One Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ, and He is at the right hand of the Father making intercession for us (Rom. 8:34).

(8) *True prayer will conform to the will of God*. “And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing

*according to His will, He heareth us*" (1 John 5:14). This is one of the greatest lessons to learn. Prayer is not a means to get God to change His mind or alter His plans, but to *bring us into line with His will whatever that may involve*. It is when we want nothing so much as His will that we can begin to pray effectively. When we can truthfully say, as the Saviour did, "Not my will, but Thine, be done" (Luke 22:42) then we are well on the road for receiving wonderful answers to our petitions. And let us remember that all prayer is answered; "no" is as much an answer as "yes". But along the lines of the Divine will we are coming to the One Who can do "exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). May we learn to use this priceless privilege more and more.

There are two great prayers in the first three chapters of Ephesians. It will be helpful to compare them.

*The two Prayers.*

*Ephesians 1:15–19*

*Ephesians 3:14–21*

The prayers are addressed to

The God of our Lord Jesus  
Christ, the Father of glory

The Father of our Lord Jesus  
Christ

That He may give

A spirit of wisdom and  
revelation

Strength by the spirit in the  
inner man

That ye may know

Hope, riches, power

Love that passes knowledge

Something exceeding (*hyperballo*)

Exceeding power

knowledge—exceeding love

The means

We in Christ

Christ in us

The power is

The power wrought (*energeo*)  
in Christ

The power that worketh  
in (*energeo*) us

The might (*ischus dunamis*) is

The might exhibited at the  
resurrection

The might necessary to com-  
prehend with all saints

The goal in each case

The fulness of Him that filleth  
all in all

That ye might be filled up  
to all the fulness of God

Heavenly powers

Every name that is named

Every family in heaven  
and earth is named.

There is also a correspondence between the opening prayer of chapter one and the closing prayer of chapter six. In the first chapter the Apostle prays for the believer. In chapter six, he asks the believer to pray for him. In the opening prayer the theme is "that ye may know"; in the closing prayer "that I may make known". Thus these wonderful prayers are related. Chapter 1:15-19 is for *acknowledgement*, chapter 3:14-21 is for *comprehension*, and chapter 6:19,20 is prayer for *utterance*, thus making known the truth received.

*The first prayer.*

"For this cause I also, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which is among you, and which ye show toward all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers" (verses 15,16 R.V.).

Paul tells the Ephesian saints that he had heard of their *faith* and *love* and consequently prays concerning their *hope*, these three graces often being brought together in his epistles (cp. 1 Cor. 13:13). This constant intercession on behalf of others, this complete forgetting of self, is so typical of the Apostle and is a feature throughout all his epistles (Rom. 1:8; 1 Cor. 1:4; Phil. 1:3; Col. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:3; Philem. 4; 2 Tim. 1:3). What a model to each one of us who name the name of Christ! And of course this is as much a ministry as preaching the gospel, or helping those in need. Much Christian service and witness is spoiled by prayerlessness, and if we want to be "vessels meet for the Master's use" (2 Tim. 2:21), then a prayerful spirit must be constantly maintained.

In this prayer we find the Father *gives three things*: a spirit of *wisdom* and *revelation* (unveiling) leading to the *knowledge* or *acknowledgment* of Christ, in order that *we may know three things*—the *hope* of His calling, the *riches* of the glory of His inheritance, and *the exceeding greatness of His resurrection power* which brought the Lord Jesus from the grave and exalted Him in ascension "far above all" to the right hand of the Father. There is a lesson to learn in the divine order here. God must first *give*, before we can *know*. The revelation and understanding of God's truth does not and cannot originate from ourselves. He must give a wise and revealing spirit as a prelude

to the reception of what He wants to impart to us, otherwise we are not in the proper and necessary condition to receive it.

The first need is wisdom and this is an attitude of mind that is conspicuously lacking in failing humanity. How glad we should be to realize that the Lord is ready and waiting to give this to us the moment we feel our lack of wisdom and ask Him for it. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and *it shall be given him*" (James 1:5).

It is evident from the stress on faithfulness in the opening verses of chapter one, and on wisdom here, that the Father does not give His spiritual treasures to those who are untrustworthy and foolish. And who is in a position to criticize this? Would we entrust things that we deeply value to people of such poor character? Wisdom is a very important theme of the Prison Epistles and the reader should ponder over the nine occurrences (Eph. 1:8,17; 3:10; Col. 1:9,28; 2:3,23; 3:16; 4:5).

The next spiritual need of all believers is *revelation* or *illumination*. The knowledge of earthly things or facts can be obtained by education and diligent study. But the knowledge the Apostle is about to mention is of a different kind altogether. It is a personal knowledge of God and His ways. Such knowledge is impossible unless God is pleased to make Himself known. It is *spiritual* knowledge for "God is Spirit" (John 4:24 R.V. margin), hence the need for revelation and enlightenment by the Holy Spirit:

"... the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God",

"But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2:11,10).

It should be clear then that spiritual understanding is absolutely vital if we are ever to understand the holy Scriptures and God's truth contained therein. Human cleverness or education cannot give this apprehension and this fact cannot be too strongly stressed. The natural mind can learn a lot of facts *about* the Bible, but of itself can never perceive its spiritual wealth. This comes only from the enlightenment of the One Who wrote it, the Holy Spirit, the divine Author. The Psalmist



knew the truth of this, for he prayed “Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law” (Ps. 119:18).

This could be the reason why some Christians have a fuller knowledge and insight into God’s truth than others who read the Word of God with a veil over their eyes. *We must all have “opened eyes” and the veil removed*, in other words the “spirit of wisdom and revelation” leading to the knowledge of Him (Christ). Knowledge here is *epignosis*, the word *gnosis* prefixed by the preposition *epi*. It has different shades of meaning. Sometimes “recognition” is a good translation. When Christ spoke of John the Baptist, He said “. . . Elias is come already, and they *knew* him not”, that is to say, they did not *recognize* him. In Mark 6:33 it is evident that the people recognized the Lord at a distance and ran to meet Him. Luke 24:16; Acts 3:10; 4:13; 12:14; 19:34; 27:39 are other occurrences where “*recognize*” would be a better translation than “know”.

The verb *epignosko* is translated “acknowledge” in a number of passages (1 Cor. 14:37; 16:18; 2 Cor. 1:13,14), and *epignosis* “acknowledgment” in Colossians 2:2; 2 Timothy 2:25; Titus 1:1 and Philemon six. It is more than “full knowledge” in Ephesians and Colossians, being knowledge that acts powerfully on the recipient. It is one thing to *know* truth revealed in the Prison Epistles; it is quite another to *practically acknowledge* it in our daily life with the tests that will follow. *Epignosis* occurs twice in Ephesians (1:17 and 4:13).

Thus it is that, in our context, Paul is praying that spiritual wisdom and opened eyes will lead to a deeper knowledge of the Lord Jesus, a knowledge that will lead to acknowledgment each day of our lives in thought, word and deed.

The next petition is “that ye may know what is the hope of His calling”. Calling and hope are linked together in Scripture and one is the fulfilment of the other. The gracious plan of the Father made known in this epistle calls some of the redeemed to a position in the glory of heaven’s “holiest of all”, and hope, when realized in resurrection, is the fulfilment of such a calling. Consequently we must have a clear conception of our calling before we can embrace its hope. An earthly calling will have an earthly hope. “The meek shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5) will be literally fulfilled for those whom God plans to bless in



that “new earth” which He is yet to create. A heavenly calling (as is revealed in Ephesians and Colossians) will have a heavenly hope. Such is the one concerning which the Apostle prays in Ephesians. This church has no permanent ties with the earth; it is for ever linked with its glorious Head in the heavenlies. This tremendous calling has its origin solely in God. It is *His* calling first and foremost. We have until chapter four before we come to the phrase “the hope of *your* calling” (4:4). The Apostle prays further that the saints may know:

“What the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (verse 18).

The Prison Epistles abound in spiritual wealth as the following occurrences of “riches” show:

*Plousios* “God Who is rich in mercy” (Eph. 2:4)

*Plousios* (adverb) “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly”  
(Col. 3:16)

*Ploutos* “Forgiveness . . . according to the riches of His grace”  
(Eph. 1:7)

“What (is) the riches of the glory of His inheritance”  
(Eph. 1:18)

“The exceeding riches of His grace” (Eph. 2:7)

“The unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:8)

“According to the riches of His glory” (Eph. 3:16)

“According to His riches in glory” (Phil. 4:19)

“What is the riches of the glory” (Col. 1:27)

“Unto all riches of the full assurance” (Col. 2:2).

This indescribable wealth will never be fully plumbed with the limitations of the present life. We have riches of mercy and grace providing our salvation, and riches of glory related to our inheritance, the supply of all our needs and the special character of the Body of Christ which before the proclamation of Paul the prisoner, had been hid in God and kept secret.

We note that the “riches of glory” occur again in Ephesians 3:16 and also in Colossians 1:26,27. We have already seen that not only has this church an inheritance, but the Body also constitutes an inheritance for God (verse 11). These two aspects of truth must be kept in mind constantly. There is possibly much more in the phrase “His inheritance in the saints” than appears on the surface. *Ton hagion* can be either masculine, feminine or neuter in Greek. Nine times it is used in Hebrews in the neuter, referring to the “holy place” and “holiest of all” in the

Tabernacle (Heb. 8:2; 9:2,3,8,12,24,25; 10:19; 13:11). Now we know that the earthly Tabernacle was a picture of the reality in heaven (Heb. 8:5; 9:23,24), a picture of heaven itself. This is where the Ephesian inheritance exists, not in any sense on the earth. The Lord's inheritance and the Body's inheritance are in the real heavenly "holiest of all". The Body itself is now being prepared to be "a holy temple" (*naos*, the innermost shrine) for God's habitation (Eph. 2:21,22). Colossians 1:12 reveals that the Father has made us meet to be partakers of the saints (or the holiest of all) *in the light*, surely a reference to the shekinah-glory of the holy of holies in the Tabernacle, only here we have the heavenly reality. This is the "glory of His inheritance" and the church linked with it, that the Apostle prayed the recipients of his letter would get to know.

Aaron of old had no earthly inheritance, for God had said "I am thy part and thy inheritance among the children of Israel" (Num. 18:20). Aaron had something more wonderful than any Israelite with his portion in the promised land. *He had an inheritance in God Himself*. Members of the Body of Christ are like this. The Lord finds His inheritance in us and we find ours in the ascended Lord at the Father's right hand.

The third fact that Paul prays for is that believers might know:

"What is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe" (Eph. 1:19).

Paul is the only New Testament writer to use the word translated "exceeding" and it is used three times in Ephesians:

- (1) The exceeding greatness of His power (1:19)
- (2) The exceeding riches of His grace (2:7)
- (3) The love of Christ which exceeds (passeth) knowledge (3:19).

In our context we are called to consider the surpassing greatness of His power. We are living in an age of *power*. Men are discovering the tremendous power that the Creator has locked up in matter. This would be safe if man had an unfallen nature, for in this case he would never misuse it. But alas, we know only too well the gigantic problems that the discovery of atomic power has made, so much so that man has now the power to annihilate himself. But great though atomic power is, it is

impotent in one thing. *It cannot give life to a dead body; it cannot conquer death.* But the almighty power to which Paul referred *can do this* and actually did so when the Lord Jesus was raised from the dead. We do not worship a dead Christ, rather One Who “ever lives to make intercession for us” (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25). He burst the bonds of the grave and for ever conquered death, not only for Himself but for His people. It was this colossal power that Paul sought to know for himself (Phil. 3:10) and desired that believers should get to know too.

To describe it Paul piles synonym on synonym. This power (*dunamis*) operates according to the inworking (*energeia*) of the strength (*kratos*) of His might (*ischus*). It is clear that human language cannot adequately describe the resurrection power of God, yet it is for us (“us-ward who believe”) as we walk the pilgrim way to our heavenly home and seek to serve Him faithfully. What problem or difficulty is there then that cannot be solved with its almighty aid?

Let us note it is “to us-ward *who believe*”. Not merely to believers, but to those who have learned to have “no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3), but every confidence and complete trust in its glorious outworking in and through us.

Paul himself had learned the truth of this, for he said:

“We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead” (2 Cor. 1:9).

A person may live next door to a power station and yet be without its benefits; one must be connected to the source of supply and the switch pressed before the power can be used. Simple faith is like the cable that links up with the power supply. It appropriates the tremendous force of the resurrection power and relies on it to work according to our needs. It is indeed “to us-ward who believe”. So, unseen and unfelt by the senses, we shall find it sufficient for the problems of every day and be able to say “I can do all things through Christ Who strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13). Let us not fear then for the future. Great difficulties may come, difficulties that seem like mountains and impossible of solution, but before this almighty power they can become a “plain”.

We can therefore go forward in confidence, realizing afresh that, if Christ and His resurrection power are “for us”, on our side, who or what can be against us? (Rom. 8:31). What a mighty sweep this first prayer of Ephesians covers! May we be wise enough to pray like it more often and so experience the joy of its practical outworking.

The first chapter of Ephesians ends with the glorious fact that the almighty resurrection power which brought Christ from the grave did not stop there, but took Him in ascension to the highest pinnacle of glory, at the Father’s right hand, far above every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the coming one. In this highly exalted position, He has been made Head over all things to the church which is His Body, His fulness, a glorious foreshadowing of the goal of the ages when all things in heaven and earth are gathered under His headship (Eph. 1:10). Then every knee in heaven, earth and under the earth shall bow to Him and confess that He is Jehovah, Lord of all.

Now “we see not yet all things put under Him” (Heb. 2:8), but this shall be *manifestly* so in that day over the whole universe. The Church of the One Body is the great outstanding anticipation of God’s triumphant goal of the ages and is itself called “the fulness of Him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:23).

*Pleroma* (fulness) occurs in the Prison Epistles six times, four in Ephesians (1:10,23; 3:19; 4:13) and twice in Colossians (1:19 and 2:9). It first occurs in the Gospels (Matt. 9:16; Mark 2:21) of the patch which “fills up” the rent in an old garment. In Colossians it is applied to Christ in Whom the fulness of the Godhead is embodied (Col. 2:9). Its meaning is entirety of content, “sum-total”.

In Ephesians 1:23 we believe the word “fulness” refers to the Body, rather than Christ Himself as some expositors teach. We must remember that Head and Body are relative terms. The head must possess a body in order to constitute a whole. The one cannot exist or function without the other. The Lord Jesus Christ as Head, needs the complement of His Body, just as surely as the church, His Body, needs the complement of the Head. This, of course, does not touch His essential Deity. We have referred to the goal of the ages, and this very fact



implies that this relationship of the redeemed with the Redeemer is essential to its glorious achievement.

The Apostle Paul refers to Psalm eight when he states that all things are under the feet of Christ. But when we read the context in the eighth Psalm and compare its extent with Ephesians what a difference we find! "All things under His feet" in Psalm eight is limited to *earthly* things, "all sheep and oxen, yea and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea". But in the Ephesian context the phrase is expanded to include the whole universe, and this is confirmed by chapter 4:10: "He that descended is the same also that ascended far above all heavens, *that He might fill all things*". "Fulness" is used in three different ways in Ephesians and Colossians. In Christ dwells *all* the fulness of the Godhead in bodily form (Col. 2:9) and He also fills the entire universe (Eph. 4:10). The Body of Christ is His fulness and each member is "filled to the full" (complete) in Him (Col. 2:10). What a magnificent theme, and how we need expanded minds to grasp it in any measure!



## CHAPTER TWO OF THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

*The contrast between spiritual death and spiritual life in Christ.*

In order to set forth the magnitude of the change wrought by Christ's redemptive work for the believer and his present position in Christ's exaltation, Paul now takes two glances back into the past. This is indicated by the word *pote*, "once", or "aforetime", in verses two and eleven, and these references to the past are from two different angles. One is basic, reminding us of our dire need as sinners under the dominion of sin and death. The other is dispensational, showing the great disability of not belonging to the covenant nation of Israel who were so richly blessed by God (Rom. 9:3-5).

The supreme exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ to the highest pinnacle of glory and the church which is His Body linked with Him there, is like an exceedingly precious jewel that shines all the more resplendently when set against the darkness of sin and death and the power of Satan with the accompanying terrible bondage. But this describes accurately the condition of all men by nature, whether they know it or not. Paul reminds us that we once lived our lives quite oblivious to the fact that we were sinners, walking according to the course of this world system, under the domination of Satan "the ruler of the authority of the air", fulfilling our own desires, which in reality were Satan's, but we did not realize this to be so because this great power is not perceptible to the senses. In other words, we were children of wrath even as others who know not God and His salvation which is found alone in Christ Jesus:

"And you did He quicken, when ye were dead through your trespasses and sins, wherein aforetime ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience; among whom we also all once lived in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest" (Eph. 2:1-3 R.V.).

There is obviously a contrast here with the overwhelming

resurrection power that worked in (*energeo*) Christ when He was raised from the dead, and the Satanic power that works in (*energeo*) all the unsaved. We would remind the reader that the Satan of Scripture bears no relation to the mediaeval conception of him as a horned and hooved monster who is constantly urging men and women to gross acts of wickedness. He is the “angel of light” of 2 Corinthians 11:14 who is quite willing for all to go on even in respectability and refinement of outlook, *providing they do not come into contact with the Saviour of sinners Who is the only One Who can break Satan's domination*. Christ is still the Saviour and Deliverer Who can give *real* freedom. “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36). And this complete freedom can be experienced by all who put their whole trust in Him. No one is forced to remain in bondage to Satan. The great deliverance from this helpless and hopeless state is made clear by the Apostle Paul in the verses that follow:

“But God, being rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, quickened us together with Christ (by grace have ye been saved), and raised us up with Him, and made us to sit with Him in heavenly places, in Christ Jesus” (verses 4–6).

The word “but” indicates a sweeping change. Here is the great reversal, worked out by God, which bursts in with its mighty upward sweep to the heavenly places where Christ is now supremely exalted and enthroned. God Himself, animated by His exceeding great love and grace, makes us alive spiritually, raises us up together and seats us together in the glory of heaven's holiest of all in and with Christ Jesus. No greater wonder or contrast can be imagined. This constrains the Apostle to slip in one of his characteristic parentheses, “by grace ye are saved”, for surely nothing but exceeding grace could accomplish anything so stupendous! This is unique in the realm of Scriptural revelation. Never before had any company of the redeemed been so favoured as to be blessed in the highest heavens where God is enthroned. This is the climax of revelation for God's children, because no one can be in a higher position than God Himself.

In the Old Testament days Israel were greatly honoured by God and Paul piles up their God-given blessings in Romans

9:3–5, but never in their wildest dreams could they have imagined that they, as a nation, would be blessed in the highest heavens! This is reserved for the Body of Christ. Yet how few seem to rejoice in such riches of grace and glory! What so many believers need today is a spiritual hunger to seek after and realize these things, and deliverance from blinded eyes and a heart of unbelief that fails to take God at His word.

Even the height of glory made known in Ephesians two is not the end, for verse seven goes on to say:

“that in the ages to come He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus”.

If redemption sprang from *the riches* of God’s grace (1:7), what can be involved in these *exceeding riches* that are to be manifested in the coming ages? Our minds are overwhelmed by the greatness of it all and what a marvellous future we have in store!

Note the word *ages* in the plural, which shows that the millennium is not the last age, nor is the Jewish conception of two ages correct. Just how many ages there are to come in the future we do not know, but we can be certain of one great fact, namely, that as each age succeeds age, the crowning display of God’s grace will be shown in His kindness towards us, revealed in increasing measure in all its fulness and wonder.

The little parenthesis of verse five concerning grace is now enlarged. For Paul grace was inexhaustible, and he speaks more of grace than any other New Testament writer. Verses eight and nine give perhaps the most concise summing up of the gospel of grace contained in the New Testament:

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (verses 8,9).

The sinner’s salvation springs solely from the grace of God and is made his possession by faith or trust in Christ alone quite apart from any Christian acts the sinner may have performed. Christ has accomplished our salvation, and *faith* in Him is the channel by which we receive it and make it our own possession. It is “not of works, lest any man should boast”.

If man was able to do anything in connection with his salva-

tion he would have something to boast about, but God has so arranged it that this is impossible, for He alone must have all the glory in saving mankind. This is a divine gift, not just faith alone but the whole, grace-by-faith salvation. How many today stretch out the hand of simple faith and take it? People are more concerned in trying to work out their salvation by their own efforts, not realizing that these are all doomed to failure. God's way of salvation seems to them to be too easy, too simple. Yet it remains ever true, and He is still sitting on a throne of grace and mercy awaiting the repentance and trust of those for whom the Lord Jesus died. "Behold, *now* is the accepted time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). There is an urgency about this that should not be ignored, for there is an end to this age of grace and patience of God towards sin, and the day of opportunity can be lost for ever.

The high calling of God in Christ Jesus commences with grace and continues with it throughout the coming ages. Grace and faith are opposed to works or human effort as Romans 11:6 (R.V.) makes clear. "If it is by grace, *it is no more of works*: otherwise grace is no more grace". "But to him *that worketh not*, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness" (Rom. 4:5 R.V.).

While this is true, we must not make the mistake that there is no place for good works in God's reckoning. While we cannot be saved *by* our good works, we are most certainly saved *for* good works. This is one of the purposes of God's new creation:

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them" (verse 10 R.V.).

In other words, good works can never be the *ground* of the believer's salvation, but they should be the *fruit* or *result* of it in his daily life, so verse ten must never be divorced from verse nine to get the complete truth. Thousands never get this clear, stressing one at the expense of the other, or getting them in the wrong order. We must be careful not to get fatalistic ideas about these good works. The Lord does not force the believer to produce good works, but He prepares him by redemption and grace so that he can produce these acceptable works called the fruit of the Spirit which are according to His



mind and will. So Paul could write to Titus without in any way contradicting himself:

“This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which *have believed in God* might be careful to *maintain good works*” (Titus 3:8).

*The contrast between distance from God of the Gentile in the flesh and the nearness in Christ Jesus.*

Verse eleven commences another section and looks back into the past once more, but from a different angle and deals with the condition of the unsaved Gentile, not as a sinner in the sight of a holy God, but as one that was outside the chosen race of Israel:

“Wherefore remember, that aforetime ye, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called Circumcision, in the flesh made by hands; that ye were at that time separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:11,12 R.V.).

As we have seen, in the human realm of the flesh, Israel had all the earthly blessings, and again the reader is referred to Romans 9:3–5 where Paul refers to them in detail. This nation, chosen by God, and separated for His service to take the knowledge of Himself and His truth to the ends of the earth, were in a unique position. They were to be a holy nation, a kingdom of priests (Exod. 19:4–6). To them alone God committed the sacred Scriptures (the Old Testament, Romans 3:1,2). They were in close covenant ties with Jehovah, and circumcision was the external sign of their participation in these covenants (Gen. 17:10–14) and the wonderful unconditional promises that God made to Abraham and to them, his posterity. The climax came with the coming of Christ in the flesh to Israel, “Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, Who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom. 9:5; 15:8 and compare Matt. 15:24). No wonder the Psalmist wrote:

“He sheweth . . . His statutes and His judgments *unto Israel*. *He hath not dealt so with any nation*: and as for His judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the Lord” (Ps. 147:19,20).



To all this the unsaved Gentile was a stranger and an alien and as far off as it was possible to be. Great Gentile civilizations arose and passed away, making their mark on human history, but not one of them could compare with the elect nation of Israel in divine privilege, and the only hope of cancelling this was to become a Jewish proselyte and forsake the Gentile status. Apart from this, the Gentile was out of covenant relationship with God (the uncircumcision). He had no Messiah (Christ) as Israel had (Rom. 9:5) but was in a state of hopelessness and Godlessness in the world which lies in Satan's power (1 John 5:19). Could anything be worse? As we have before seen, unless God steps in there could be no possibility of deliverance and this distance from Him cancelled. And this is what happens as verse thirteen shows. Just as the word "but" showed the great reversal by God in verse four, so here the word "but" leads us to see how God has cancelled this alienation in Christ:

"But now in Christ Jesus ye that once were far off are made nigh (near) in the blood of Christ" (R.V.).

It is the Lord's redemptive work on the cross that alone can cancel the appalling state of the Gentile unbeliever. What is utterly impossible by human ability or effort, God has wonderfully accomplished by the offering of His beloved Son on their behalf. In the Body of Christ Gentile believers are identified with Him in death, burial, resurrection and ascension and are so near to Him that this can be illustrated by the closeness of the figure of Head and Body.

"So near, so very near to God,  
I cannot nearer be;  
For in the person of His Son,  
I am as near as He"  
(Catesby Paget).

Verse fourteen continues:

"For He is our peace, Who hath made both (Jew and Gentile believers) one, and brake down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; that He might create in Himself of the twain (Jew and Gentile) one new man, so making peace" (verses 14,15 R.V.).

No colour bar or class distinction was ever so great as the

separation between Jew and Gentile previous to the revelation given in the epistle to the Ephesians. One of the great features of the distinctive teaching of Ephesians relating to the Mystery or Secret made known in the third chapter is the cancellation of this great estrangement by Christ in the creation of this "new man", the joint-Body of which He is the Head. Verse fourteen explains it further as the breaking down of the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile.

This is an allusion to the literal wall of partition in the Temple area at Jerusalem which separated the outer court of the Gentiles from the inner courts of the Temple itself into which only Jewish worshippers could enter. Notices were displayed in Greek and Latin warning Gentiles to keep out or suffer the death penalty. Two copies of the actual inscription have been found, one in 1871, and the other in 1935. Paul himself had a vivid experience of this when, a few years earlier, it was rumoured that he had taken a Gentile into the holy place of the Temple and violated its sanctity, thereby narrowly escaping death himself (Acts 21:28).

This "middle wall of partition" was a symbol of the tremendous barrier between Jew and Gentile represented by the law of God given through Moses to Israel, whether considered in its moral, ceremonial, or civil aspects. It also included the special "decrees" or ordinances instituted by the Hebrew church at Jerusalem in accordance with God's will (note Acts 15:28), which represented the minimum of the law that the Gentile convert was expected to observe (Acts 15:28,29; 16:4), in order to avoid giving offence to the Jewish believer. These and the law itself are the "ordinances" of Ephesians 2:15. They have no reference to the Lord's Supper or water baptism. They caused the "enmity" which verse fifteen tells us has been abolished by Christ in this new calling.

In a similar way, Colossians 2:14 shows that the "hand-writing of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us" has been cancelled by being nailed to the cross of Christ. Having disposed of these insurmountable barriers "in the flesh" or the human sphere, God has now in Christ Jesus *created* (not just "made" as the A.V.) in Himself of twain (literally "the both", that is the Jewish and Gentile believer) *one new man*, so making peace (verse 15).

Let us get this quite clear. The calling revealed in Ephesians after Acts twenty-eight is *something new*. It is not an evolution or merely an improvement of the position during the Acts, where the Gentile was likened to a wild olive grafted into the true olive tree of Israel (Jer. 11:16,17; Rom. 11:17-22), and shared Israel's "spiritual things" (Rom. 15:27). In this new calling Israel as a nation with all its covenant blessings has no place, neither has the Gentile as such with his great disability which we have been considering. In this "new man" there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision or uncircumcision (Col. 3:11).

The newness of this calling revealed in Ephesians is further stressed by the word "create" rather than "make". Wherever we read of a new creation in Scripture, we find essentially connected with it the passing away of "former things".

"If any man be in Christ, there is a new creation: old things are passed away; behold, new things have come into being" (2 Cor. 5:17).

"I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away . . . the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:1,4).

"Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind" (Isa. 65:17).

The essence of divine creation is that old things have passed away and new things have come into being. The Ephesian revelation of the church or out-calling is a new beginning, a new creation, though doubtless at the commencement consisting of believers of the Acts period whose eyes had been opened by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:17,18) to appreciate the wonders of this new calling where the earthly privileges of Israel and the Gentile with his helpless and distant condition cease to exist.

The goal of this "new man" is to grow up to a "full grown male" ("perfect man" Eph. 4:13 A.V.). This is the word translated "husband" in Ephesians 5:25 and can never represent a woman or a bride. God never mixes His metaphors and we have no right to make Him do so by teaching that this church can be the same as the Bride of the Lamb, which largely consists of the faithful remnant and overcomers from Israel as listed in Hebrews eleven. Believers who do this are confusing

the callings of God and this can only lead to a lack of appreciation and insight into the various aspects of the “purpose of the ages” in Christ (Eph. 3:11). This idea confuses a calling where those from Israel are prominent (Rev. 21:12–14) with one where Israel as such has no existence, to say nothing of blending the heavenly Jerusalem whose goal is the *new earth* (Rev. 21:2, 10) with a position “far above all heavens” (Eph. 4:10) where the Lord Jesus is now exalted.

The removal of the “wall of partition” and everything that divides the members of the joint-Body of Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, leads to reconciliation, the removal of all barriers:

“That He might reconcile both unto God in one Body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby” (verse 16).

Here is another aspect of the Lord’s great reconciling work on the cross, dealing not only with the relationship of God to the sinner, but the relationship of every member of this new calling to each other and the Father. This leads to the widest aspect of reconciliation, that of the Body of Christ and all the heavenly beings (principalities and powers). The removal of all “enmity” and differences of position and blessing results in “peace to you which were afar off” (the Gentile) and to “them that were nigh” (the Jew).

All things finally bring us to unrestricted access to the Father:

“For through Him we both have our access in one Spirit unto the Father” (verse 18 R.V.).

To appreciate this tremendous position properly, we should again refresh our minds with the privileged position of Israel in covenant relationship with God. Their blessings were “in the flesh” that is in the realm of the earth. Here Israel can have no rival, for God ordained that this nation should be “the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath” (Deut. 28:13). “God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth” (28:1), and when we add to this all the other spiritual and natural privileges which are stressed in other Scriptures we have already quoted, we can see that Israel had the first place on earth and in this respect was unique.

But in the heavenly calling we are considering, all its blessings are “in the spirit”, not only in and through the Holy Spirit



but in the spiritual realm of the heavenlies “far above all”, and this means that through the one offering of Christ each member can have unrestricted access to God.

With all the advantages that Israel possessed, such access did not exist for them. In Old Testament times God condescended to dwell with His people in the Tabernacle and Temple of which the holiest of all was filled with His divine Presence (Exod. 25:8). Yet Israelites lived and died *without having once had access to the presence of God in this most holy place*. The tribe of Levi came nearer and served in the holy place of the Tabernacle, but *never* did they enter beyond the veil into the holy of holies. Aaron, the High Priest, as a type of Christ did so, but *only once a year* on the day of Atonement (Lev. 16). Thus we see that free access to the presence of God was practically unknown during the time covered by the Old Testament. God deliberately hedged Himself round with all sorts of barriers to impress upon His earthly people the inestimable privilege of approaching Him and coming into His holy presence, lest this should become cheap and under valued.

For us who belong to the Body of Christ revealed in Ephesians, all such restrictions are gone and we can come boldly to Him through the one Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ, *at any time and with any frequency*. Do we really appreciate this and avail ourselves constantly of such a precious privilege? The Apostle further reminds us that we are “fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (verse 19). The Greek reads “fellow-citizens *of* the saints” and while it is perfectly true that in the calling of the Body of Christ we are all fellow-citizens, sharing together in equality our heavenly citizenship (Phil. 3:20), yet possibly more than this is intended. We have already shown that the word translated “saint” or holy one, is not necessarily restricted to a believer, it is used of a holy place as well as a holy person. While the epistle to the Hebrews represents the Lord *alone* in heaven’s holiest of all, Ephesians reveals that each member of the one Body is potentially seated together *there*, that he has an inheritance *there*, and that he is a fellow-citizen *there*. We can see therefore that Paul is stating something higher and more wonderful than that the Gentile is now being blessed with the Jew, for this had clearly been revealed as God’s purpose through Abraham, and was always



true of Gentile proselytes. He is now revealing that Gentile believers, once so far off and distant from God, are now so near to Him that they belong to the very holiest of all, the most holy place in heaven where the ascended Christ has now entered (Heb. 6:19,20). What an overwhelming change God's abounding grace has made!

Thus it is that the figure of a Temple is now developed by the Apostle and this has an eternally secure foundation, "having been built (literally) on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the chief corner stone", the Greek term being derived from the Septuagint of Isaiah 28:16. Does this mean the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, or are they themselves the foundation? In chapter 4:8-11 it is made clear that, at His ascension, the Lord Jesus gave a new order of apostles and prophets which must not be confused with the calling of the twelve apostles in the Lord's earthly lifetime, whose ministry was taken up with Israel (Matt. 10:1-8). Nor are the prophets those of the Old Testament. We should note the order of the words, not "prophets and apostles", but "apostles and prophets", and New Testament prophets are in view here. The ministry given through the new order of apostles and prophets of which Paul was chief, was a foundation ministry serving the people of God until the New Testament, the written Word of God, was completed. This ministry rested upon the one foundation, Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11) for other foundation can no man lay. He is the chief corner stone upon whom the whole Temple building rests and in fact the whole purpose of God embracing heaven and earth. Consequently Peter also speaks of the Lord with the same title (1 Pet. 2:6,7).

It is important to note that the emphasis here is not on this Temple's magnificence, like Solomon's, but upon the fact that it is designed to be a *habitation* or *home*. A dwelling place for God is an objective that never seems to be far removed from any part of Scripture. We may say reverently that when Adam and Eve were turned out of Paradise, God Himself found no further delight therein. Noah, in a way a second Adam, declared prophetically that God would dwell in the tents of Shem. Moses is instructed by God to erect the Tabernacle that God may dwell among His people. Solomon builds a Temple accord-

ing to divine plan which is indwelt by God, and Ezekiel sees a future day afar off when the very name of Jerusalem shall be “Jehovah-Shammah”, “The Lord is there”, and the present creation was brought into being for God’s dwelling place (Isa. 40:22). The book of the Revelation, at its climax states, “the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them” (Rev. 21 :3).

The one thing that has spoiled all this is *sin*, for it has made a great barrier between a holy God and sinful men, making such a close unity impossible. But in the church with which we are dealing, all barriers of any kind have been swept away by the redemptive work of the Son of God, so that at last *God can have a permanent home* with them and in them, all previous ones being anticipatory and temporary. When completed, this living Temple will be a dwelling place (habitation) for God! (Eph. 2:22). What a goal, a home for God in the highest glory! A holy Temple in the Lord (verse 21)!

In this section of the epistle the thought of a *home* is emphasized by six Greek words containing the word *oikos*, house:

- Foreigner (2:19) *paroikos*—alongside the house
- Household (2:19) *oikeios*—the family side of the house
- Built (2:20) *epoikodomeo*—to build upon as on a foundation
- Building (2:21) *oikodome*—the building as a house
- Built-together (2:22) *sunokodomeomai*—to build together as a house
- Habitation (2:22) *katoiketerion*—a durable dwelling.

Thus it is that God brings before us the culmination of one of the great aims of His purpose in Christ. This church will have found its permanent home in the heavenly holiest of all and the Lord Jesus will have found His home in this church of glory, transformed into a holy Temple for His dwelling place. Just as the earthly Temple of Solomon when completed was entered into by God and filled with His glory (2 Chron. 5:13,14), so the Body of Christ, when the last “member” has been placed in this spiritual building (“fitly framed together” compare the same word in 4:16), it will merge into the holy Temple and in a richer sense, become “the fulness of Him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:23). The word “temple” is not *hieron* which indicates the Temple as a whole, but *naos*, the innermost shrine, the holy of holies, which we have already considered in connection

with the word “saint”, “holy”, referring to place as well as people.

Surely in this context we are dealing with the “surpassing” things of God, for this is *the high water mark for the redeemed in Scripture*. Who can get higher than God Himself or any nearer to Him than this church? We do well to pause, consider carefully and pray for “the spirit of wisdom and revelation” (Eph. 1:17), for if we miss what God has for us here, *we have missed God’s best*.

## CHAPTER THREE OF THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

*The dispensation of grace, the Secret (Mystery),  
and Paul's second prayer.*

This chapter commences with the words:

“For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus in behalf of you Gentiles” (3:1 R.V.).

The words “for this cause” “*touton charin*” are repeated in verse fourteen where Paul commences his second prayer. The verses in between are a parenthesis, an explanation of his title “the prisoner of Christ Jesus in behalf of you Gentiles” and his new ministry in connection with them. If we omit this parenthesis for a moment, the sense will be “in view of all the foregoing revelation of exceeding spiritual riches I fall on my knees and pray”, which, stresses to us once more the importance of prayer, which, as it were, explores the doctrine from a personal standpoint so that it becomes one's own possession by faith. As we have pointed out before, there comes a time when doctrine must stop and personal appropriation must begin, for God does not pour His truth into the minds of believers irrespective of their condition or their attitude of mind.

Why was Paul in prison? Certainly not because of any wrongdoing on his part, but rather as the culmination of his Christ-directed ministry to the Gentiles and this lifted him above self-pity or any conception of himself as the prisoner of Caesar. He was indeed the Lord's prisoner (2 Tim. 1:8). Verse two does not express doubt as to whether these Gentile believers had heard of his ministry. Rather it is a rhetorical way of reminding them of what they knew already. It could be rendered “seeing that doubtless . . .”:

“If so be that ye have heard of the dispensation of that grace of God which was given me to you-ward; how that by revelation was made known unto me the Mystery” (Eph. 3:2,3 R.V.).

The Revised Version margin points out that the word “dispensation” could be rendered “stewardship”. It is important to avoid



the common error of treating this word as though it merely meant a period of time. Its basic meaning is "the administration of a stewardship" as we have already seen. As regards the word "Mystery", it does *not* mean something puzzling or mysterious such as is conveyed by the Elizabethan English of 1611. There are three stewardships or dispensations in Ephesians, (1) that of the fulness of the seasons (1:10); (2) of grace (3:2); and (3) the great secret of 3:9 (Revised Version.) God in His wisdom keeps some aspects of His great purpose hidden, so that the great enemy, Satan, shall not have the advantage. In the realm of human affairs, the same thing happens during war and times of stress. Knowledge that would be valuable to an enemy is kept secret.

There is another reason too, namely that there is *a right or fitting time* for the revelation of a particular phase of truth. Before or after this time would be out of keeping with such truth and we may be sure God makes no mistakes in His timetable. Satan must have thought he had dealt a deadly blow to the purpose of God, when, through his deceptive and blinding power, Israel became unusable by God at Acts twenty-eight.

But at this very time God saw fit to reveal His brightest jewel, related to a part of the plan He had kept hidden in Himself up to this point, namely the calling out of a *heavenly* people who were to form an everlasting habitation for Himself in the heavenlies. This secret He first of all imparted to the Apostle Paul and then commissioned him to make it known from his prison: it is the prison letters to the Ephesians and Colossians which disclose this previously hidden truth which fills up the gap between the laying aside of Israel in unbelief at the end of the Acts and their being taken up by God at the end of the age at Christ's Second Coming (Rom. 11:25-29). This is indeed a dispensation of grace abounding.

It is significant that Paul, alone of New Testament writers, claims to be "a steward of the secrets (mysteries) of God" (1 Cor. 4:1) and Peter, James, John and Jude could write their epistles under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, giving the truth which God willed they should do, *without using the word "mystery" once*. The last book in the Bible uses it, but this is not an epistle, and in its complete fulfilment, looks forward to the end of the age when the mystery (secret) of iniquity is rife and

world-wide, and Christ's return as King of kings and Lord of lords is near.

During the Acts period Paul was used by the Lord to make known other divine secrets such as the one we have just mentioned (2 Thess. 2:7), the secret of Israel's blindness (Rom. 11:25), and the secret of the instantaneous change of the living believer at the Lord's coming (1 Cor. 15:51). But in Ephesians it is **THE SECRET** par excellence which contains the greatest and most profound truth that God wills to make known to saved sinners (Col. 1:26,27).

When the Apostle states "as I wrote afore in a few words" or "in brief", he is not looking back to his earlier epistles, where we shall search in vain for such teaching, but the reader is being referred to what he had written in the first two chapters of this Ephesian letter. The Mystery has two parts:

- (1) Relating to the Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the mystery of Christ (verse 4).
- (2) Relating to His Body, the church revealed in the same context—the Mystery itself.

"Whereby *when ye read*, ye can perceive my understanding in the mystery of (or concerning) Christ" (verse 4). Note that this understanding comes *by reading* what Paul wrote in this letter and then carefully pondering and praying over these divine words. So many believers do not do just this. How can they therefore expect "the spirit of wisdom and revelation" that will enable them to grasp for themselves the spiritual treasures revealed therein?

The mystery of Christ has already been alluded to in chapter one where we have the surpassing glories of the Lord's Resurrection and Ascension "far above all". It concerns the centrality of Christ in the great redemptive purpose of God and His exaltation and glorification in the heavenly places where He is now enthroned. It could now be truly stated that it was not made known to previous generations *as it is now revealed* to his holy apostles and prophets (i.e. New Testament apostles and prophets 2:20). Others shared with Paul in this knowledge, but doubtless he eclipsed them all.

The unique place that the Lord Jesus Christ has in the plan of the ages commenced in a small way in Genesis with the

foreshadowing of the Seed of the woman that should bruise the serpent's head. Gradually through the unfolding of type and shadow made known in the ministry of prophet, priest and king, this revelation grew like a great river and came to its climax in the captivity epistles of Paul. These epistles portray Him as seated far above all heavens, as Head of principalities and powers, the One Who has the first place (pre-eminence) in all things whether in heaven or on earth (Col. 1:15–18). Having dealt with the mystery or secret concerning the Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul now refers to the other aspect of this great secret, namely that concerning the church which is His Body. In this Paul is not associated with anyone else:

“To wit, that the Gentiles are *fellow*-heirs, and *fellow*-members of the Body, and *fellow*-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, *whereof I was made a minister*, according to the gift of that grace of God *which was given me* according to the working of His power” (verses 6 and 7 R.V.).

To express this secret, Paul is inspired to use three words compounded with the prefix *sun*, “together with”, “on an equality with”; and this is by no means easy to convey in English. The Authorized Version makes an attempt with the first two words, “*fellow*-heirs”, “of the *same* body”, but gives up with the third word “partakers”. The Revised Version improves this by using the prefix “fellow-”. J. N. Darby and J. B. Rotherham do this another way by rendering “*joint*-heirs, a *joint*-body and *joint*-partakers of His promise in Christ Jesus . . .”.

These words are of great importance in the revelation of the Mystery. For, as we have pointed out previously, the Gentile could never be on a perfect equality with the Jew; as long as this nation was in covenant relationship with God *it had to have the first place*. “To the Jew first” must be the order.

Now, for the first time, in this new and exalted calling made known through Paul the prisoner, Jew and Gentile believers are on a perfect equality *from every angle*. As we have seen, they lose their natural status as Jew and Gentile and become members of a newly-created company who are closely linked as head to body with the enthroned Christ in glory.

The word *sussoma*, “joint-body”, is unique and evidently

coined by Paul under the Spirit's guidance, for he was revealing a church that was different in constitution and destiny from any other company of believers. No one has ever seen an earthly body in which each member is on absolutely equal terms in importance and in all other respects with every other. Therefore there is nothing on earth which can adequately illustrate the joint-Body of Christ.

With such a spiritual treasure in his possession Paul is now anxious to spread its knowledge to all who have ears to hear among the Gentiles:

“Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, was this grace given, to preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the dispensation of the Mystery (secret) which from all ages hath been hid in God Who created all things” (verses 8 and 9 R.V.).

But he still marvels that God should choose such an unworthy channel as himself to make it known. One cannot very well get lower than “less than the least”. Here is a double diminutive, lower even than 1 Corinthians 15:9 where he describes himself as “the least of the apostles”. To one who estimated himself as “the chief of sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15) it was a perpetual wonder that God should stoop to entrust to him this sacred “deposit of truth” (2 Tim. 1:14).

*Anexichniastos*, “unsearchable”, had already been used by the Apostle in Romans 11:33 of the ways of God in dealing with Jew and Gentile. It literally means “untraceable”, and the riches he was making known at this time were certainly untraceable, for they were contained in this great secret which he states God had completely hidden in Himself in the past ages and from past generations. If God hides, who can find, until He chooses to reveal what He has hidden? Yet it is often claimed by believers past and present, that they can find the Mystery in the Old Testament and anywhere in fact but in the writings of Paul, the Lord's prisoner and channel for making it known!

At this point it may be helpful to state what the Mystery is *not*. That God intended to bless the whole of mankind, Gentiles as well as Jews, was clear from His promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 and many Scriptures afterwards. Paul does not hesitate to quote from the three divisions of the Old Testament (Law, Prophets and Psalms) to underline his ministry to the



Gentiles (Rom. 15:9–12). In Acts 13:47, he quotes from Isaiah 49:6 and says:

“For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee (Israel) to be a light *of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth*”.

Consequently, that the gospel ministry should widen in the Acts to include Gentiles was no secret, nor does it prove that Paul was making known the Mystery concerning the Body, the new man during this period. Rather, it was all in line with his statement in Acts 26:22 that his ministry had not gone further than Moses and the prophets, i.e. the Old Testament. Again and again we have read that the preaching of the gospel to the Gentile was the revelation of the Mystery or secret. Those who make these unscriptural statements can have no real conception of what the Mystery involves. We hope that the consideration of the Ephesian epistle so far has made clear that what was hidden by God in Old Testament times was that out of Jew and Gentile, He would create an entirely new company of believers who formed *the new man*, and they would be blessed, not on earth as Israel and those associated with that nation, but in the highest heavens, in the light (Col. 1:12) of heaven’s holiest of all.

Paul calls this new revelation made known to him by Christ a “dispensation”, a stewardship. At Paul’s conversion the Lord Jesus had made known to him the scope and contents of his ministry, and promised him a further revelation later on, “those things in the which *I will appear* unto thee” (Acts 26:16). There can be no doubt that his prison ministry which we are considering is the fulfilment of this promise.

“It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful”, Paul had stated in 1 Corinthians 4:2. Who is going to give precious things to those whom they cannot trust? The Apostle was indeed a faithful steward as his prison letters testify. But we may ask, how many responded in his life-time, and how many who claim to know Christ as Saviour, have responded faithfully to all the revelation of God since? As we look round on modern Christendom, how often is this great secret which God wills to make known to His saints (Col. 1:27), preached from the pulpit and elsewhere? And how many are rejoicing in its exceeding riches? From the meagre response we see all around us, we may well ask, what has gone wrong?

Paul's aim was to "enlighten all" (verse 9). We must not deduce from this that the Apostle expected that all mankind would respond to his ministry. He had already revealed in chapter one that every member of this new man had been chosen in Christ before creation (1:4). Just how many this involved, he doubtless did not know, but his object was to reach *all* who constituted the joint-Body of Christ, and his gospel was not only good news for the unsaved, but exceeding good news for the saint who had come under his ministry.

It is a great mistake to restrict the "gospel" as Paul uses it in his Prison Epistles, to making known salvation by grace to the sinner. The *whole* of the revelation he was giving from his Roman prison (including salvation) was the gospel of which *he* was made a minister (Eph. 3:6,7; Col. 1:24-27) and this fact must never be forgotten. If the gospel proclaimed by the Apostle is restricted to the sinner, is it any wonder that the unsearchable riches of Christ revealed in Ephesians and Colossians are so little known amongst believers?

There may be other reasons too. Too few leaders and teachers today know and acknowledge this "high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14). This may be due to blinded eyes which have not experienced the "spirit of revelation" (Eph. 1:17), or it could be the structure of modern Christendom into which the truth of the Mystery and its outworking scarcely fits. Another reason is the immature condition of believers which, as in the church at Corinth, limits the truth to the ABC, the "milk" of the Word (1 Cor. 3:1,2) and makes further revelation impossible. Then there is the confusion between the Hebrew church formed on the day of Pentecost which *was a fulfilling of Old Testament prophecy* (Acts 2:16-21) and was therefore *not* a secret, and the new man, the joint-Body of Ephesians, which *was* a secret, which we are now considering.

Lastly, there is the "fear of man that bringeth a snare". Some leaders who do know the truth of the Mystery keep quiet because they are afraid of offending their congregations and other leading teachers and perhaps losing their jobs. Their reputation in evangelical circles must be kept at all costs, and they realize that if they gave a full and faithful witness to this Truth, they would be dubbed as being in error and then dropped from well-known platforms. It would mean excommunication.

This is too big a price to pay and so they keep silent. We must face the fact that there is an offence connected with Paul's prison ministry and it is as real as the offence of the cross (1 Cor. 1:17-23). We remember however that the Mystery concerning the Body of Christ is addressed to *faithful* believers (Eph. 1:2; Col. 1:2) who will always keep in mind the future assessment of their witness by the righteous Judge. Like Paul, they will declare *all* the counsel of God in wisdom and keep back *nothing* (Acts 20:20,27).

Coming back to our context in Ephesians, the Apostle gives another reason for his desire to "make all see". In the tenth verse of chapter three he states:

"To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in the heavenly places might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God" (verse 10 R.V.).

In other words, there are heavenly scholars as well as earthly ones. How vastly important this part of God's great plan must be when we realize that the very aristocracy of heaven is having an object lesson as they watch the divine building up of this company of the redeemed! They are noting every detail of this masterpiece of God's manifold wisdom. Paul uses a rare word for manifold, *polupoikilos*, literally "many-coloured" or "diversified". Nothing less than this could have conceived such a creation, and it is all "according to the eternal purpose ('the purpose of the ages' R.V. margin), which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:11).

God not only brought into being the physical creation; He also made the great platform of time, subdivided into ages, upon which He is working out His vast redemptive plan which embraces the highest heaven as well as the earth, and the Word of God is the written record of this plan which is centred in Christ Jesus. When we get an insight into this, the Bible becomes transformed. Without such a knowledge it is just a collection of religious books in one volume and alas, this is how it appears to be regarded by many Christians. God's plan has a goal of perfection and glory that nothing can finally frustrate. What an unspeakable privilege it is to have any part in it!

Not only is this so, but the Body of Christ, as we have already seen, has unrestricted access to God, "In Whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him"

(verse 12). Paul has already stressed this in 2:18. The Lord Jesus is the one and only way to the Father, the one Mediator or go-between as far as men and God are concerned (1 Tim. 2:5). This means that all other intermediaries, whether religious or otherwise, are dispensed with, and away go all Romish pretensions of human priesthood and glorified saints on the one hand, and the false mediation of Gnosticism on the other, whether in ancient or modern dress.

Verse twelve not only assures us of continual access through Christ, but tells us that in coming into God's holy presence, we do not have to fear or cringe, but can approach with "boldness" and "confidence". This does not mean we can swagger into the presence of God. There must always be deep reverence and consciousness of what we are doing, and this will be easier to preserve if we constantly remember that it is all "through the faith of Him", that is of the Lord Jesus, and without Him such an approach would be impossible. We should not read "the faith *of* Him" as though it meant "our faith *in* Him", for this would shift the basis of access away from the Lord to ourselves and our puny faith. And what would happen to access if our faith failed? Behind the word "faith" is the thought of "faithfulness" and it is the Lord Jesus and His utter faithfulness which alone can give us confidence and boldness when we approach God. He is pre-eminently the faithful One (Rev. 19:11).

The Apostle continues:

"Wherefore I ask that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which are your glory" (verse 13 R.V.).

What Paul's tribulations meant to him we can never know, but he does not complain, rather he exults in them, realizing that they were the Lord's will for him, so that he could be the prisoner of Christ Jesus *for us Gentiles* (3:1). He desires that this shall be the attitude of the Ephesian believers and that they should not faint or be discouraged by these sufferings which were a necessary part of his ministry on their behalf (Col. 1:24,25).

*The second prayer of the Apostle*  
*"Filled unto all the fulness of God".*

Paul has now finished the digression in which he explains his



prison ministry, so closely related to the secret of Christ the Head, and the church, His Body. He now picks up the thread in verse fourteen from verse one by repeating the words “for this cause”, that is, the greatness and wonder of God building this church as a dwelling place for Himself (2:20–22). This leads immediately to his second great prayer, just as the revelation of the Father’s choice and will, the Son’s redemptive work, and the Spirit’s present witness led to the first prayer in chapter one.

Earlier on (p. 35) we compared these two prayers and noted that the direction of the first prayer is *upward* and largely concerns the exaltation of Christ in the heavenly places “far above all”. The second prayer has a *downward* direction, bringing before the Ephesian saints what this highly exalted Christ can be to each member of the Body, the fact that he can dwell in their hearts by faith and fill them up to the brim with His fulness.

This prayer commences with the words:

“For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father, from Whom every family in heaven and on earth is named” (verses 14,15 R.V.).

“Every family” is better than “the whole family” (A.V.) which would require the definite article in the Greek. The Revised Version margin points out that the word “family” is more literally “fatherhood” which better shows the link in the Greek of the words “Father” and “fatherhood”. All fatherhood is derived in character from the Fatherhood of God, although the human version is often very far off from the divine original. God’s great family here has its earthly and heavenly sections, neither of which gives the complete picture by itself, so we need to take care that we do not narrow down the plan of the ages to either earth or heaven as so many theological schemes do.

Verse sixteen continues:

“that He would grant (give) you, according to the riches of His glory, that ye may be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inward man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (verses 16,17 R.V.).

Again Paul begins to pile up words which emphasize the greatness of the experience he desires the Ephesian believers to

share. They would need divine strengthening for what follows. Human strength and ability would be less than useless here. This empowering would be measured by no less than the overwhelming riches of God's glory, which measure defies description or explanation. The "inward man" describes the new nature given to the believer by the Holy Spirit when he is saved. This is opposed to the sinful old nature or "flesh". This great preparation by God is with a view to Christ dwelling in our hearts by or through faith (verse 17). To dwell means to take up one's abode and here is an anticipation of the permanent dwelling of Christ, the holy Temple (*naos*) which He is now building and will occupy when it is complete. Each individual member of this Temple can be an illustration of that future goal and become miniature temples into which He is graciously pleased to enter and make His home.

Let us not pass over this lightly. It is all very well to teach children and young people to sing "Come into my heart Lord Jesus, there is room in my heart for Thee". But such an experience in the light of this epistle, is not for children or the immature, still less for those who are unsaved. It is rather for those who are growing up spiritually and have had the necessary preparation of divine strengthening, for without this who would be adequate to receive as a permanent dweller, such an exalted Guest? We do well to remember the practical consequences of this indwelling. We may be sure that the Lord Jesus Christ will not take up His abode within us in any other way than being *the first and foremost*, with His rightful place as *Lord*, the One Who completely controls us. Are we willing to accord Him this pre-eminence, the first place in our lives, when everything is yielded to Him? (Col. 1:18).

One might think that the indwelling of the Lord would be the climax, but there is a further purpose in view:

"to the end that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge" (verses 17-19 R.V.).

In 2:21 we have the two figures of building and growing and similarly here the Apostle uses "rooted" as of a plant, and "founded" (better than "grounded") as of a building. Colossians 2:7 is a parallel passage. In Ephesians 3:17 the rooting and

founding is in and upon love, the love of God shed abroad in our hearts. Inexhaustible love begins and ends this section of the prayer. It forms the *ground and root* of our spiritual life and stretches out in a limitless expanse before us. This founding and rooting in love has been accomplished by the Lord and forms the basis for two more things (1) to apprehend and (2) to know more fully.

Here is no sentimental thing. The great characteristic of divine love is that it continually gives and spends itself for others and this is shown best of all in the greatest of all gifts, the unspeakable gift of God's beloved Son (John 3:16; 2 Cor. 9:15). The realization of such love prepares us to apprehend "the breadth and length and depth and height". C. H. Welch has a helpful comment here:

- (1) "The earthly inheritance promised to Abraham is defined by two measurements only, 'the breadth and the length'.
- (2) The heavenly city, the new Jerusalem, the heavenly side of Abraham's inheritance is defined by 'breadth, length and height', three measurements.
- (3) The inheritance of the Mystery appears to have been in the Apostle's mind when he spoke of 'breadth, length, depth and height', four dimensions, and so something spiritual and not associated or confined by the limitations of our present three dimensional existence. Philosophers speak of 'the fourth dimension', but for all practical purposes we live in a world of three dimensions: breadth, length and height" *In Heavenly Places*, p. 316.

Thus, in the heavenly calling of the Body of Christ we have a spiritual fourth dimension which in its fulness is beyond us with our present limitations, just as the love of Christ which follows, surpasses knowing completely. Here is a seeming paradox, to know what surpasses knowing; but this can be understood when we comprehend that, while it is impossible to grasp *fully* what is infinite, yet each one of us can be filled up to our capacity whatever sized vessel we are. This is further expressed in the last phrase of this great prayer:

"that (in order that) ye may be filled *unto* all the fulness of God" (verse 19 R.V.).

The Revised Version is much to be preferred to the Authorized Version for the latter makes Paul state something that is impossible, namely that we can be filled *with* all the fulness of

God. How can any puny finite sinner contain all the fulness of God which is limitless? Not even principalities and powers, nor any other created being could experience this. There is only One concerning Whom this could be true, namely the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, for “in Him dwells *all the fulness* of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9). We however as vessels meet for the Master’s use can be filled to the brim, filled *unto* or *with a view to* all the fulness of God and nothing less than this is God’s will for us individually. Colossians 2:10 assures us that “we are complete (*filled full*, literally) in Him”, and if this is true, then it means we have everything that is of eternal value, nothing has been held back. In experience we cannot get further than this in the present life. Professor F. F. Bruce well sums it up in these words “Filled unto all the fulness of God, nothing can exceed this, here every other blessing is comprehended and crowned”.\* No wonder Paul closes the foundational section of this epistle with a glorious doxology, and these doxologies of the Apostle are not just pious statements, they are rich in doctrine:

“Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or (even) think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever. Amen” (verses 20,21 R.V.).

Paul has not finished with his superlatives. If any feel that all this language is far above them and beyond their understanding he reminds them that they are dealing with One Who is able to do *superabundantly* and transcend all our thinking and asking. He coins this word *huperekperissun*, to try to express this, and it all comes to pass by means of the mighty resurrection power which as 1:19 reminds us is to us-ward who believe and works in and through us. It is therefore only fitting that the last thought of this section of the epistle should be of the *Lord’s glory*, both in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout the coming ages, “unto all generations of the age of the ages” (literally R.V. margin). What this last statement means is perhaps beyond our present ability to grasp fully. There are ages that are past; there is the present age which in God’s estimate is evil (Gal. 1:4) because of its rejection of Him. There are “ages to come” (Eph. 2:7) which, as they run their course, give a continual unfolding of God’s exceeding kindness towards us. And then

\* *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 69.



comes the crowning age, the age of the ages which represents the climax and the crown of time, when God's great purpose for heaven and earth comes to fruition, sin and death are banished for ever and God is all in all. Well may Paul write as his last word in this first half of the epistle, Amen! That is, Truth! For this goal is no empty dream, it will certainly be attained in spite of Satan and the powers of darkness, man's sin and the dominion of death and all that opposes the will of God!

To complete this section, we bring before the reader once again the seven triads of doctrine revealed therein:

- (1) THE THREEFOLD CHARTER (1:3-14)
  - (a) The Will of the Father
  - (b) The Work of the Son
  - (c) The Witness of the Spirit.
- (2) THE THREEFOLD PRAYER (1:15-19)
  - (a) That ye may know—Hope
  - (b) That ye may know—Inheritance
  - (c) That ye may know—Resurrection power.
- (3) THE THREEFOLD UNION (1:19-2:7)
  - (a) Quickened together
  - (b) Raised together
  - (c) Seated together.
- (4) THREE WORKS (2:8-10)
  - (a) Not of works
  - (b) We are His work
  - (c) Unto good works.
- (5) THREEFOLD PEACE (2:11-19)
  - (a) Far off, nigh—Peace
  - (b) Two made one—Peace
  - (c) He came and preached—Peace.
- (6) THREEFOLD UNION (2:19-22)
  - (a) Citizens together
  - (b) Framed together
  - (c) Builded together.
- (7) THREEFOLD EQUALITY (3:1-13)
  - (a) Heirs together
  - (b) Members together (joint-Body)
  - (c) Partakers together.
- THE CENTRAL PRAYER (3:14-21)
  - (a) That He would grant strength
  - (b) That ye may be able to comprehend
  - (c) That ye might be filled unto all the fulness of God.

## CHAPTER FOUR OF THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

### *Practical Section. The worthy walk.*

We have now traversed three glorious chapters of doctrine. Instruction must now give place to practice, not that doctrine is absent from chapters four to six, but it is predominantly the practical response of the believer that is stressed. The first three chapters are entirely devoted to the revelation of the plan of the triune God as it concerns the church of the one Body. There is not one practical exhortation in it, but the truth of God is nothing if it is not *balance* from start to finish; not all doctrine and little or no practice; or all practice and little or no doctrine. By themselves, each of these would lead to lop-sidedness. God's order is first of all doctrine—His instruction to His children; then practice on their part. If we do not first of all consider God's doctrine, how do we know what to practise or what will please Him? Too often Christian practice is merely the carrying out of the person's ideas and inclinations and so is based upon a human and fallible foundation. The wise believer will give careful first consideration to God's teaching contained in His Word and then diligently seek to make it practical in his daily life. Consequently in Ephesians 4:1 we read:

“I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called” (4:1 R.V.).

We note that Paul uses the word “therefore”, “because of all that has gone before in wondrous revelation” a worthy walk should most surely result. The word worthy, *axios* occurs three times in the Prison Epistles, the other two occurrences being Colossians 1:10, “that ye might walk *worthy of the Lord* unto all pleasing”, and Philippians 1:27 “let your conversation (manner of life) be *as it becometh* (worthy of) the gospel of Christ”. This word has in it the thought of *balance*, one thing being compared with another, and this aspect comes out in Romans 8:18 “the sufferings of this present time are not *worthy to be compared with* the glory which shall be revealed in us”. We are now asked to walk in our daily life in such a way that

it may be compared with the glorious heavenly calling revealed in the first three chapters of this epistle.

This, when properly understood, will occupy all our thought and attention. We shall not have time to criticize others. If we are wise we shall rather turn the criticism on to ourselves. We shall seek to “walk worthy” not in any legalistic way, but because *we want to do so* out of sheer gratitude to the Lord for all the exceeding spiritual riches He has showered upon us. Our attitude will be that of the Psalmist, “what shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?” (Ps. 116:12). And so, remembering that we have a holy calling (2 Tim. 1:9), we shall be concerned that our daily life is in correspondence with it.

How shall we accomplish this? By being guided by the second verse of the chapter :

“with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love”.

This worthy walk is exhibited by four Christian graces, humility, meekness, patience and forbearance. We do well to remember that we walk with our *minds*, and not primarily with our legs or anything external. The word humility is used by the Apostle himself in Acts 20:19 where he reminded the elders of the Ephesian church how he had been with them, serving the Lord with all *humility of mind*. At the very outset of a worthy walk we are brought face to face with the necessary mental attitude which will make such a walk possible. Whatever directions we are given in chapters four to six, none will deviate from this great characteristic, true and genuine humbleness of mind and outlook. This is quite foreign to the thinking of this age with its self-assertion and self-centredness and self-exaltation and is the opposite to the parent sin of pride, which was the cause of Satan’s downfall and has been the downfall of many a believer since. We have no truer saying than “pride goes before a fall”. God cannot use a proud person, and the Word of God makes clear His hatred of this basic and deceptive sin:

“Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord” (Prov. 16:5).

“A high look, and a proud heart . . . is sin” (Prov. 21:4).

“God *resisteth the proud*, but giveth grace unto the *humble*” (Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5).

It is possible to make a “fair show in the flesh”, even in

Christian affairs, to want to be in the limelight. It is possible to be proud of our Christian service and even of a measure of saintliness! Anything that savours of swank or the lifting up of self must be avoided by all those whose principal desire is to walk worthy of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. John the Baptist was described as being only a “voice” for the Lord. May we always be able to say with truth, “not I, but Christ” in all we seek to do for Him.

Lowliness of mind or humility is followed by meekness in Ephesians 4:2. This word is only used by Paul and occurs nine times. It is part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23) and is seen in all its perfection in the person of Christ; the One Who was “meek and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:28–30). The Apostle could beseech the Corinthian church by “the meekness and gentleness of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:1). The world exhorts its followers to think a lot of themselves and to acquire much self-confidence, but those who are being led along the pathway of truth by the Holy Spirit will have “no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3). Their boasting will be in Christ Jesus alone (Phil. 3:3). The world misinterprets meekness as weakness. Nothing could be further from the truth. Moses we are told, was “very meek, above all men which were upon the earth” (Num. 12:3), but he was certainly not *weak*. We can be “strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might” (Eph. 6:10) and yet exhibit this humility which will glorify Him.

Humility and meekness are followed by *longsuffering and forbearance*. Longsuffering means to be long before getting angry, to endure people or things patiently. Like meekness it is part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). Its opposite, impatience, has been the cause of much spoiling of Christian witness. The impatient believer will get little or no response from others. Like the gardener and farmer, we may have to wait a long time for results after sowing the good seed of truth, and it is patient endurance that we shall need to prevent us from being discouraged and perhaps giving up in despair. We shall be helped if we remember how patient our heavenly Father has been with us. He is indeed the God of patience (Rom. 15:5) not only with us, but with the unbelieving world at large (1 Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 3:8,9).

Not all the members of the Body are likeable. Some may have



the tendency to rub us up the wrong way, but grace and forbearance will teach and enable us to bear with such in love. What volumes could be written on the greatest of all graces, namely Christian love! It is entirely opposed to the conception of it by an unbelieving world which has drifted far from God, and we must always be on our guard to prevent such ideas entering our mind. The love of God which should be manifest in the Christian is not just an emotion or feeling. It is a constant unselfish attitude of mind which is always ready to spend itself in the interests of others. Let us ask the Lord to keep this continually before us, for we cannot “walk worthy” or serve acceptably unless this is constantly true in our experience.

*The sevenfold Unity of the Spirit.*

The Apostle continues in verse three:

“Giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (R.V.).

Note well that we are not asked to *create* a unity. This unity has already been made by the Holy Spirit Who unites all true members of the Body of Christ. We are, however, enjoined to *guard it with diligent watchfulness*. We can *break* this unity in witness, but we cannot *make it*. Now unity is strength and the devil knows this well, hence one of his chief aims is to shatter this unity and divide the people of God who constitute this Body. If only believers realized this more, they would not indulge in differences and misunderstandings, so giving him the opportunity to do his disruptive work.

Another thing we must guard against is mistaking *outward conformity* with this inward unity. In Christendom around us the movement is towards the uniting of all sects. But so wide is the variation between them all, that this is impossible unless some vital truth is given up, and so, even if achieved, it will only be a caricature of the real unity of Ephesians 4. Many are deceived into thinking this will be the unity spoken of by the Lord in John 17:20–23! But God’s unity rests on the bed-rock of the truth of His Word (John 17:17) and this is counted of little value today.

We should rejoice in the fact that in Christ God has done the

uniting of each member of the Body, and our duty, made clear in this context of Christian practice, is to guard it jealously. This sevenfold unity is held together by the “bond of peace”, which peace has been explained in chapter 2:14,17. Love is the other great bond (Col. 3:14) that ties all the Body of Christ together and should therefore be constantly exhibited one towards the other. Members of this company may be isolated and scattered, but it is glorious to realize that these wonderful unities annihilate distance and all circumstances that are adverse.

The sevenfold unity of the Spirit is now described in verses four–six and has a disposition well known in Hebrew parallelism, namely that of introversion:

- A One Body
- B One Spirit
- C One hope of the calling
- D ONE LORD
- C One Faith
- B One Baptism
- A One God and Father.

It is significant that right in the middle stands the One Lord Who alone makes the other items real and possible and holds them all together. Let us consider each item separately, for we cannot keep or guard something that we do not know or understand.

### *One Body.*

The second chapter of Ephesians has already taught us “that He might reconcile both (i.e. Jewish and Gentile believers) unto God *in one body* by the cross . . .”. He has made both *one*, by creating in Himself of the two, “one new man”. Colossians 3:15 reminds us of the same fact that we are called *in “one Body”* and this Body is described as a “joint-Body” in 3:6, forming one of the features of the Mystery which had been kept hidden in God (3:9). All man-made bodies and groups pale into insignificance beside this divinely created company.

The figure of a human body had been used previously during the period covered by the Acts to describe the assemblies that then existed with their diversity of supernatural gifts (1 Cor. 12). We should carefully note, however, that Paul uses the *whole* of

the human body, including the head, to illustrate the relationship of believers at that time. Some believers were likened to the comely parts of the body (1 Cor. 12:24) and some to the parts which are less honourable (verse 23). Others are likened to the feet and even the head (verse 21).

This should show us that we have not yet reached the revelation given in Ephesians where the Lord Jesus Christ alone is the Head, and as for uncomely parts, there are none (Eph. 1:6; 5:27). We dare not ascribe the teaching given in 1 Corinthians to a lack of knowledge on Paul's part, for this would cut across the whole of his Christ-given ministry for the church (Eph. 3:6,7; Col. 1:24–26) if this was so. The difficulty is of our own making and comes from confusing what appears to be similar.

### *One Spirit.*

This is referred to in chapter 2:18 “for through Him (the Lord Jesus) we both (Jew and Gentile) have access *by one Spirit* unto the Father”. We have sought to show previously that the words *en pneumatī* refer not only to the Holy Spirit but to the realm which is separated from flesh and blood and things earthly and described as the sphere of heavenly places “far above all”. Thus the goal of this church is to be a dwelling place of God *in spirit* (literally). The Holy Spirit is the One Who seals us and makes the divine transaction sure until the day of redemption (1:13; 4:30). He also gives us during our present pilgrimage the earnest or foretaste of the glorious heavenly inheritance that awaits us.

### *One Hope of your Calling.*

Hope and calling are inseparably joined in Scripture as we have seen. The calling and destiny of Israel is an earthly one, and will be realized when the Deliverer returns to Zion, saves the nation and puts into operation the New Covenant on their behalf (Jer. 31:31; Rom. 11:26–29). Consequently the “hope of Israel” which of course is based on the Lord Jesus and His redemptive work, will be the fulfilment of God's unconditional promises to the patriarchs concerning their *seed* and the *land* described in Genesis 15:18, as Paul made clear in Acts 26:6,7. This will be an earthly one of great joy and blessing and Israel

will then be like resurrection life to a dead world (Rom. 11:12–15).

The calling of the one Body of Christ is entirely disassociated from the earth. It is identified with Christ in His death, burial, quickening, raising and seating at the Father's right hand in the heavenly places, above principality and power and every name that is named. Its members are therefore exhorted to direct their thinking away from earthly things to this exalted sphere where the Lord Jesus is enthroned in the highest glory (Col. 3:1–4). Obviously then its hope cannot be an earthly one, for this would be entirely out of harmony with its heavenly placing by God. As a consequence its members are warned against minding earthly things (Phil. 3:19,20).

Hope we have already considered as the fulfilment of the plan of God for the company of His people under consideration. For the Body of Christ it is the manifestation of the glory where He now is (Col. 3:4).

#### *One Lord.*

The One Lord holds the central place which is His right, for without Him the unity would fall to pieces and the whole redemptive plan of God would collapse. He is the centre and circumference of it all and we can never overstress this tremendous truth.

In the Old Testament the unity of the Godhead is emphasized "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is *one Lord*" (Deut. 6:4). The word Lord is Jehovah in the Hebrew and this is unreservedly applied to the Lord Jesus Christ and is one of many Scriptural evidencies of His Deity. From this it is clear that we cannot keep the unity of the Spirit unless we give Him His rightful place as one Lord. Indeed, He is Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 19:16) and in the future every knee shall bow, in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue shall confess Him as LORD (Phil. 2:9–11). Once despised and rejected, He will come into His own at last and receive universal homage, the whole creation manifestly giving Him His rightful place as Lord of all.



*One Faith.*

Sometimes in the New Testament the word faith is equivalent to truth. In Acts 6:7 we read of a great company who were obedient to *the faith* (see also Acts 16:5; Gal. 1:23). Some “denied the faith” (1 Tim. 5:8), but Paul could say at the end of his life, “I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7). The one faith in Ephesians is the “good deposit” of Truth passed on to Paul by the risen Christ, and it is this body of truth that Timothy is exhorted to guard (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:14) and pass on to others (2 Tim. 2:2). Paul describes it as “the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me” (2 Tim. 1:13). We can never understand the Apostle’s constant reference to himself, unless we see that he is not thrusting himself forward, but pointing directly to the special deposit of truth that Christ had revealed to him to pass on to the Gentiles. Note the “I” and “me” in 2 Timothy 1:5,11,13,15; 2:2,8,9,10; 3:10; 4:17.

The faith and the truth go together like a coin, they are two sides of the same thing. The “one faith” then that the Lord exhorts us to guard is the whole content of this “good deposit” relating to the Body of Christ, of which Paul was divinely chosen to be the minister (Eph. 3:4–7; Col. 1:24–27).

*One Baptism.*

The first thing to realize about baptism, a subject which has often been controversial, is that it is not exclusively a New Testament doctrine. It has its roots in the Old Testament, being used both before and after the inauguration of the Tabernacle and its ritual. In this connection the main thought is that of washing and cleansing. Thus we have the washing of the priests, the parts of the sacrifices, the leper etc. This conception of cleansing still adheres to the early usage of baptism in the New Testament. At his conversion, Paul relates how Ananias said to him, “Arise, and be baptized, and *wash away thy sins*, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). Hebrews 9:8–10 refers to the Tabernacle type and shadow “which stood only in meats and drinks, and *divers washings (baptisms)*, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation”.

One thing, however, is perfectly clear. These baptisms *must*

*be left*, the object being to leave spiritual infancy behind and to go on to maturity:

“Therefore *leaving* the beginnings (principles) of the doctrine of Christ, *let us go on to full growth* (perfection), not laying again the foundation of repentance . . . and of the doctrine of baptisms . . .” (Heb. 6:1,2).

When we come to the usage of the word in the New Testament, we find that more than one baptism is brought forward.

(1) *The baptism administered by John.*

“John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness (remission) of sins” (Mark 1:4).

John likewise baptized the Lord Jesus, and the reason is given in John 1:31,33,34:

“And I (John) knew Him not: but He that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, upon Whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, the same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God” (John 1:33,34).

“... That He (Christ) *should be made manifest to Israel, therefore* am I come baptizing with water” (John 1:31).

This is the divine explanation of John’s baptism of the Lord Jesus, very different from many put forward today. We are often told He was baptized in water as an example for the believer to follow. But He was also circumcised; He kept the sabbath day (the seventh day); He kept the feasts of the Lord as detailed in Leviticus twenty-three and attended the Jewish synagogue, but we have yet to meet the believer who practises these things because the Lord did them. And if water baptism is incumbent upon Christians today, why not these items as well? John’s baptism identified the repentant ones with *the remnant of Israel*, and the Lord’s baptism was a confirmation of His manifestation to Israel. Why are we not content to accept divine explanations?

(2) *The baptism of the Holy Spirit and with fire.*

John said:

“I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, Whose shoes I am not

worthy to bear: *He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire*" (Matt. 3:11).

This baptism is linked with *judgment*:

"Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (verse 12).

We see it taking place at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), and the fearful end of Ananias and Sapphira is one example of its outworking. We should like to see this kept in mind by those who desire this fiery baptism of the Holy Spirit today.

(3) *The baptism administered by Peter.*

"Then Peter said unto them (the convicted ones of the previous verse) repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission (forgiveness) of sins" (Acts 2:38).

This is similar to the baptism of John and is in harmony with Mark 16:15-18, but added to it were the evidential miraculous gifts, the purpose of which we have already considered in earlier chapters.

(4) *The suffering and death baptism of the Lord Jesus.*

He said:

"I have a *baptism to be baptized with*; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished" (Luke 12:50).

The intense sufferings of the cross that lay ahead, were described as a "baptism" by our Saviour.

So far then we have had (1) the ceremonial baptisms of the Old Testament. (2) The water baptism of Israel's repentance and forgiveness of sins and Christ's manifestation to Israel. (3) The Spirit baptism of power and evidential miraculous gifts which are described in Hebrews 6:4,5 as "powers of the age to come", the earthly kingdom reign of Christ. (4) The suffering and death baptism of Calvary. Both (2) and (3) were in evidence during the period covered by the Acts.

Now, we ought to ask ourselves, *to which of these baptisms does the ONE baptism of Ephesians refer? Faithfulness*, not to say common sense, demands that we do not make *one* into *two*

here any more than with the other items of the Unity of the Spirit, and so speak of two Lords, or two faiths or two Spirits.

But there is yet another baptism to consider and one of the utmost importance. In 1 Corinthians 10:1–5, the Apostle writes:

“Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were *all baptized unto Moses* in the cloud and in the sea. . . .”

This refers to the deliverance and passage of Israel through the Red Sea at the exodus, yet it is stressed in Scripture that they passed over *on dry land*:

“And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea *upon dry ground* . . .” (Exod. 14:22).

“. . . the horse of Pharaoh went in with his chariots and with his horsemen into the sea . . . but the children of Israel *went on dry land in the midst of the sea*” (Exod. 15:19).

“He turned the sea into *dry land*: they (Israel) went through the flood on foot . . .” (Ps. 66:6).

“By faith they passed through the Red Sea *as by dry land*” (Heb. 11:29).

The baptism unto Moses was a dry baptism, and this is the *first recorded baptism in point of time in the Bible*, the meaning of which has largely been disregarded or not understood by the professing church. We find a similar experience for Israel at the end of the wilderness wanderings when they were about to enter the promised land under Joshua. Once more God miraculously cut off the waters, this time that of Jordan:

“The waters . . . were cut off . . . and the priests that bare the Ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm *on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground*, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan” (Joshua 3:14–17).

Thus Israel had a dry baptism at the beginning and end of the wilderness journey. This surely makes clear that immersion in water is not the only way of setting forth the inward meaning of baptism. What is this inward reality? For water baptism and washing in water is but a type of spiritual truth. This inward reality is *identification*. When Israel was baptized unto Moses



without water, *they became identified with him and all he stood for in law and ceremonial*. This approaches nearest to the truth of the one baptism of Ephesians four, for this baptism unites every believer who constitutes this Body with Christ.

There is another important point to consider. We have seen that the Apostle Paul was the channel appointed by Christ to reveal the calling of the Body of Christ. In which case we ask, what importance is water baptism given in his apostolic commission? 1 Corinthians 1:17 supplies the answer:

“Christ sent me NOT to baptize, BUT to preach the gospel”.

Nothing could be clearer than that water baptism did *not* form part of his Christ-directed ministry and though he baptized occasionally during the Acts, he did not claim it to be important. Once he could not remember whether he had baptized some or not (1 Cor. 1:16).

If anyone cites Colossians 2:12, then let them regard the context which repudiates literal circumcision for a spiritual one, a circumcision made without hands, and goes on to set aside all literal types and shadows whether relating to food or drink, holy days, new moons or even the sabbath day:

“Which are a *shadow* of things to come; but the body (the reality) is of Christ” (Col. 2:17).

To bring a type (water baptism) into a context that deals with the “working (operation) of God” (verse 12), and sweeps aside all types because we have the glorious *reality* of spiritual baptism giving identification with the Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, is to go backwards not forwards. Who wants shadows when they have the reality? Who wants shadows when they are “filled full” (complete) in Christ? (Col. 2:10). What can a shadow add to this completeness? To insert water baptism here is to bring in an intruder *which would nullify the argument of verses sixteen and seventeen*.

Part of the misunderstanding that has arisen over the place of water baptism in church doctrine is due to the shifting away from the Scriptural truth of identification with Christ, to that of witness to the world of unbelievers. We cannot find a passage in the New Testament dealing with water baptism that clearly teaches that this rite was given to be a witness to the world.

What unbelievers are watching are our words, our actions, *our lives*. *These* are the most effective witness, not ritual, which the unsaved care little or nothing about.

Coming back to the one baptism of Ephesians four, we unhesitatingly believe this cannot mean two baptisms, otherwise words have no meaning, and as it is *one*, *it must be the spiritual reality given by God the Holy Spirit which is absolutely essential*, not the picture or shadow that previously set it forth. The One Baptism balances the One Spirit (see p. 75) and this is the vital and necessary baptism we are asked to guard.

We do not judge other believers who, not realizing this seek to justify water baptism, but we feel from the foregoing Scriptures they cannot do it legitimately from Ephesians or Colossians. They must go elsewhere to the baptisms of John and Peter which we have already considered, dealing with another dispensation. And as we do not judge them, we sincerely hope they do not judge us in this matter. All we ask is that they seriously consider the divine import of the one baptism of Ephesians four.

*The seventh item in the Unity of the Spirit is:  
One God and Father of all.*

“One God and Father of all, Who is over all, and through all, and in all” (Eph. 4:6 R.V.).

We have to be careful with the word “all” in Scripture. Too many false doctrines have been erected on the presumption that “all” is equivalent to “universal”, whereas it is always limited to the context. One could easily use verse six to teach the popular doctrine of the universal Fatherhood of God, but this is not only foreign to this verse, but to the whole of the Bible:

“But as many received Him (Christ), to them gave He *the right to become children of God*” (John 1:12 R.V.).

Only those who have received Christ by faith as Saviour have the privilege of becoming members of God’s family and addressing Him as Father. It is the Lord Jesus Who makes the Fatherhood of God possible and known to us (John 14:9,11) when we are believers in Him. The “all” of Ephesians four is obviously limited to the members of the Body.

Here then we have the first stage of a walk that is worthy of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, namely seven perfect parts of a perfect unity made by the Spirit of God which we are charged to keep and guard, where Christ is pre-eminent, the Father is all in all and the Spirit gives the substance and reality of spiritual riches that are beyond the full comprehension of the human mind.

While we do not find the *word* "Trinity" in the Scriptures, the *fact* is there in many passages, and none clearer than this one—One Spirit, One Lord, One God and Father. Sometimes the concordance can be misused and become a menace. We have frequently come across arguments based on the non-occurrence of a word in the Bible, as demonstrated by the concordance, the person putting forth such arguments, either deliberately ignoring, or being blind to the *fact* being there even if the word is not and this is a case in point with the Trinity. If we refuse to use the word "Trinity" because of its non-occurrence in Scripture, we have to invent something else to take its place to represent the threefold expression of the Godhead in Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and what is it going to be?

Paul now leaves the Body as a whole, and comes to each individual member:

"But unto each one of us was the grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (4:7 R.V.).

In the body physical, the various members are not alike either in size or importance, but all are necessary for its proper and healthful functioning. Likewise with this church; every redeemed member has been placed in it according to God's will and all have a part to play in its outworking. Whether they are small, medium or large vessels is not their responsibility. What they should seek to know is exactly what work the Lord has called them to do and then to remember that all-needed grace is available for the task and therefore they can fulfil it and are responsible to Him to carry it out loyally. There must be no mistakes here. In our physical bodies it would be disastrous if one member ceased to do its own work and attempted the function of another. Fortunately, in health, this is impossible, but alas, it is possible in the Christian realm. Some attempt to do Christian work for which they are not fitted, and not

realizing their limitations, they only cause trouble and difficulty. One thing is certain and that is, if the Lord calls a person for a certain kind of work, He equips that person for the task. If He needs a teacher, a speaker or a writer, He will choose someone who has an aptitude for these things—"apt to teach" (2 Tim. 2:24). However, there are plenty of other ways of serving the Lord and what we all need is not wishful thinking, or trying to be like someone else, but to honestly say, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" (Acts 9).

Before the Apostle deals any further with the question of gifts for service, *the time element* of His special gifts to the Body of Christ is stressed. This is related, not to the earthly life of the Saviour, but to His ascension:

"Now this, He ascended, what is it but that He also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things. And He gave . . ." (4:9-11 R.V.).

There could be no revelation of the Mystery without the Ascension of Christ. It would be idle to talk of being seated together in heavenly places unless He is there first! There should be no difficulty with the phrase "the lower parts of the earth". This could either mean (1) the sepulchre into which the Lord's body was placed, (2) Hades, the *state* of being in the grave, grave-dom, if one could invent such a word, or (3) the earth, being looked upon as the lower parts from the standpoint of heaven. (1) and (2) are permissible, but the third view seems more natural in thinking of the Lord leaving the heaven that was His in order to descend to the earth for our redemption. The ascension means exaltation to the place of highest supremacy, as 1:19-23 has already stressed. Note the phrase "all heavens". Sometimes in Scripture "heaven" is used in the singular, but we must not deduce from this that heaven is just *one* place. It is complex. "All heavens" must embrace at least three subdivisions, and shows us that we are not dealing with simple truth, but with something that is profound, and this always needs to be kept in mind when dealing with heaven and heavenly things.

The object of the Ascension is likewise profound: "in order that He might fill the all things" (literally). We have seen that "filling" and "fulness" in relation to Christ, are characteristic of the completion of the purpose of the ages, which purpose is



now being preshadowed in the Body (1:23). The Lord Jesus, at the goal of the ages, will fill the whole universe in a way we are unable to fully grasp at the present time. He will have the supreme place that He now occupies, *manifestly* recognized by every being in heaven and earth (Phil. 2:9–11), for it is the Divine will that He should have the first place in everything (Col. 1:18). The expressed purpose then of Ephesians 4:10 is stupendous and should not be passed over without careful reflection.

It is clear that the gifts of the ascended Christ are not *things* but *persons*:

“And He gave some to be apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers” (4:11 R.V.).

Also it should be obvious that these apostles cannot be the same as the Twelve that He appointed when on earth (Matt. 10:2–4) who are so closely linked with the people of Israel. The apostles and prophets of Ephesians four are the same as those referred to in the second chapter.

They had a foundation ministry which was unique while the New Testament was in process of being written, and in some respects took the place of the canonical Scriptures. Now we have a completed Bible, we do not need such apostles and prophets. All Scriptural service is now being covered by the succeeding three: evangelists, pastors and teachers.

The evangelist in early Christian times was a pioneer, often going into new territory, sometimes with great hazards, and so this type of witness had a toughness about it. Pastors are really shepherds, and shepherds pre-suppose sheep. Those who believe that the figure of “sheep” denotes the people of God of all times without distinction, will lean to the view that shepherds and teachers represent one class of ministry. But many years study of the Scriptures has made it clear to us that the Holy Spirit uses figures and symbols with exactness and does not mix His metaphors as men often do. For the most part “sheep” are a description of the people of Israel (Ps. 78:52; 79:13; 95:7; 100:3; Jer. 50:17). Matthew 25:32 is an exception, and there are “other sheep” whom the Lord will gather and finally unite with restored Israel to form “one flock” (John 10:16), and share the glories of the earthly kingdom when Christ returns and Israel is

restored. This is a wide ministry, as John's Gospel shows, and we see no reason to believe that the calling out of the joint-Body of Ephesians is the only thing God is doing in this present age; rather the reverse, when one looks around on the present Christian scene the world over and also contemplates it in its past history. There is need therefore for a "shepherd" ministry, and the Lord has been raising up such all down this age.

Teachers play an important part in the building up and development of those already saved. There is sometimes a false emphasis put upon evangelists and they are then considered to be much more important than teachers. This idea is usually held by those who think that all Christian witness is summed up by preaching the Gospel to sinners and "getting them saved". Whether such go on to grow up spiritually to maturity seems to be of little concern or importance. The result is that not only do we see around us many churches that are spiritually dead, but also others that are filled with spiritual infants. These become a liability rather than an asset, for they do not go on to become full grown believers who are really pulling their weight in Christian warfare and witness. It is significant that a bishop or overseer in the New Testament had to possess the qualification of being "*apt to teach*" (1 Tim. 3:2), and Paul enjoins Timothy to pass on the sacred deposit of Truth to "faithful men, who shall be able to *teach* others also" (2 Tim. 2:2). Some have the erroneous idea that people are not saved under a teaching ministry, but this is quite contrary to the true facts. The faithful teacher constantly points away to Christ as Saviour as well as Lord and Head, and many are truly saved who have never had a Gospel invitation put to them. We need the work of an evangelist, pastor and teacher proceeding side by side, and then we can expect results under the Lord's hand which will bring salvation and enlightenment as He wills.

The goal of all ministry, whether that of the evangelist, pastor or teacher is stated in Ephesians 4:12,13 Revised Version:

"For the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the Body of Christ: till we all attain *unto* the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, *unto* a full-grown man, *unto* the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ".

*The Unity of the Faith.*

The “perfecting” is not the word that means “to go on to maturity”. A different word is used which means adjustment, mending or equipment. The people of God, after Israel’s setting aside in unbelief at Acts twenty-eight, certainly needed adjusting to the new revelation of the Mystery and they needed equipping for the making known of this climax truth, or, as the verse states, “unto the work of ministering” (or serving) which would include every member of the New Man, the joint-Body of Christ, and not be confined to a special number, “those in the ministry”, as the word is used today. This service has in view the “building up (edification) of the Body of Christ”, a constructive work which is of the first importance. Edification is one of the chief characteristics of Paul’s ministry “Let all things be done unto edifying (1 Cor. 14:26). See also Romans 14:19; 15:2; 2 Corinthians 12:19. Three times we have edifying stressed in Ephesians four, in the verse under consideration, and in verses sixteen and twenty-nine.

It is so easy to be destructive, and this can often be done quite easily and quickly, but “edification” is very different. It takes effort, time and patience in coming before the Word of God and getting it firmly established in our minds, which are so often cluttered up with other things. The only *lasting* ministry is that which builds up.

The goal is reached by a threefold “unto”, just as the context gives us three measures:

“The measure of the gift of Christ” (4:7).

“The measure of the fulness of Christ” (4:13).

“The measure of every part” (4:16).

We have before seen that faith is sometimes used as the equivalent of a body of truth (see Acts 6:7; 14:22; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 4:7) and here we have a further revelation of what constitutes the “good deposit” of truth committed by Christ to the Apostle Paul to make known to us Gentiles and all who have ears to hear. Just as the sevenfold unity of the Spirit has the one Lord (Christ Jesus) in the centre, likewise the unity of the faith. “Till we all attain . . . and of the knowledge of the Son of God” (verse 13). Here “knowledge” would be better rendered “acknowledgment”, as it is several times by the

Authorized Version (1 Cor. 14:37; 16:18, etc.). We should remember that the English of the Authorized Version uses knowledge and acknowledge interchangeably. To really know the Truth, and the One Who is the truth, is not just filling the mind with facts about Him and the Bible. Anyone can do that. In the Word of God there can be no true knowledge without acknowledgment. Only as we acknowledge a truth can we be said to know it, and we need to bear this in mind continually. It is by practically acknowledging the Son of God, the One Lord, with all His claims upon us, that we grow spiritually and this is confirmed by Colossians 1:10 where a more accurate translation is: "growing by the acknowledgment of God". The goal of natural and spiritual life is adulthood, maturity in body and mind. Anything less than this is tragic, and while it is obvious in the physical world, it is not quite so obvious in the realm of Christian values, yet it is equally true here, where not just individual growth, but the growth of the whole Body is in view.

So few today are prepared to obey the Divine rules that ensure spiritual growth, and no wonder we see around us in Christendom spiritual infants who cannot receive the highest and best God has to reveal, and even antagonize and misunderstand those who seek to press on to maturity (Heb. 6:1). Let us make no mistake. The goal marked out for us is spiritual adulthood. Anything less than this falls short of the will of God.

"Stature" can mean age as well as height as John 9:21,23; Hebrews 11:11 show. It is another word that indicates full growth. Classical Greek used it of the prime of life. "Fulness" is one of the great words of Ephesians and Colossians as we have already shown. In the purpose of God, the Body is already the fulness of Christ (1:23). Here it goes on to attain this fulness by its spiritual life and growth in answer to the prayer of 3:19: "that ye might be filled unto all the fulness of God".

The Apostle now in absolute contrast gives the opposite which must be avoided at all costs:

"That we may be no longer children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error" (4:14 R.V.).

These are strong words of warning to believers. If such a one



will not grow spiritually, but remains in infancy, then he is an easy prey for Satan and his great system designated in Scripture as THE LIE. Having no stability in the truth, he eagerly runs after the latest religious fads. These “winds of doctrine” do not blow by chance. They are directed by the father of lies and so attractively presented by his dupes that the spiritual baby clutches at them readily and is completely deceived. There seems to be no middle or neutral position between truth for the growing believer and the Devil’s deception for the stunted. This is what makes spiritual growth so important and lack of it so dangerous for the Christian.

Have we not met those who are constantly changing their beliefs? They may profess to have been “led” into them, to have received “new light”, but these never square with the unchanging foundation of a rightly-divided Word (2 Tim. 2:15). We say “rightly divided” advisedly, for Satan does not hesitate to quote Scripture if it suits his purpose, just as he did to our Saviour in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1–11). Merely quoting Scripture proves nothing. It must be interpreted and that with the nearer and remoter context in view. Every modern sect and denomination goes to the Bible for its beliefs, yet they all differ. While all Scripture is inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16) and all of it is true in the setting that God has placed it, it is not all true for this dispensation of grace. Those who sought to foist circumcision and the bondage of law upon the early churches did not hesitate to quote the Word (Acts 15:1). Nevertheless they were propagating error for they were wrongly dividing the Word of truth.

God has given us a pattern or standard of Truth in this present Gentile age and it is found in the epistles of Paul the Apostle of the Gentiles, which make known the “form of sound words” (2 Tim. 1:13) committed to him by the ascended Lord Jesus and rests upon the foundation laid in the epistle to the Romans of justification by faith and identification with Christ. We turn away from these at our peril. If believers had realized this from the start in the early centuries and remained faithful to this teaching, the present divided state of modern Christendom could never have happened.

Satan is most to be feared when he comes, not as a roaring lion, but as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:13–15) and it is in the

religious world where he has the greatest opportunity to deceive. He transforms his ministers into “ministers of righteousness” and “apostles of Christ” (verses 13 and 15). No wonder the immature believer is ensnared by such methods.

Verse fifteen (R.V.) continues:

“but speaking truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him, which is the Head, even Christ”.

“Speaking the truth” does not adequately represent the word Paul uses here. The Revised Version margin has “dealing truly”, which seeks to show that this verb means more than talking about the truth. It is rather *living* and *acting the truth* that the Apostle has in mind. This is the antidote to the spiritual duplicity of the previous verse. There should be works as well as words, but both must be “in love”. It is possible to put the truth over in a hard way, to be very correct in doctrine, but to show a complete lack of love in presenting it. This nullifies its power and spoils its witness. This however will not happen if each member of the Body keeps in close union to the Head—“holding the Head” as Colossians 2:19 expresses it.

In Ephesians 4:16 Paul puts it in this way:

“From Whom all the Body fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in due measure of each several part, maketh the increase of the Body unto the building up of itself in love” (4:16 R.V.).

“Fitly framed together” is the same word as is used in 2:21 of the spiritual Temple. This close union with the Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, is absolutely necessary for spiritual life, light, nourishment and adequate functioning of each member of the Body. For any member not to realize this, but in practice to seek to function on his own, is to court failure and fruitlessness. The same important truth was given by the Lord to the Twelve under the figure of a Vine and the branches (John 15:1–6). Strictly speaking “which every joint supplieth” is rather misleading, for literally it is “every joint of the supply”. The “joints” supply nothing of themselves. This alone comes from the Head, but each member can be a channel through which the divine supply can flow to another member.

This stresses the importance of practical unity and shows that unnecessary isolation is out of the Lord’s will. We should seek

to grow together, each one like the individual organs of the body, all contributing something to the growth of the Body as a whole. There are no useless members in the physical body and there should be no useless or mal-functioning members in the Body spiritual! "Till we *all* attain", and apprehending "with *all* the saints" (3:18) stresses this. The three unities of Ephesians four are God's creation and not man-made, but we who embrace them by faith must see to it that we do nothing to cause a practical breakage, for this only plays into the hands of the Enemy who loves to try to divide and disrupt what God has united and so upset His people and hinder His work.

The Apostle now approaches the worthy walk of members of the Body of Christ from a negative standpoint. In 4:1 he tells us how to walk positively; in the seventeenth verse he shows us how *not* to walk:

"This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye no longer walk as the Gentiles also walk, in the vanity of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their heart" (4:17,18 R.V.).

In Romans 1:21 Paul had already shown the terrible darkness that the pagan world sank into because, in rejecting God as Creator, they became "vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened". This is what invariably happens when man turns his back on God. Left to himself he sinks into utter darkness and deception, yet at the time imagining himself to be wise and capable of arriving at the heights and depths of truth through his own intellectual capacity. Having rejected the true light, how great must be that darkness! And this is not a whit less true today than in century one. We see all around us a world that for the most part has rejected Christ and the Truth, and a Christendom that is largely impotent, having merely a form of godliness without its essential power (2 Tim. 3:5), an evil age that is hastening to its tragic end as foretold in the Scriptures. The Apostle tells us that the darkened Gentiles are "alienated from the life of God". This shows very clearly that, apart from Christ, man has nothing immortal; he is a stranger to God's endless life, and furthermore his ignorance leads to hardness of heart or mind and so affects his thinking which goes completely astray where God and His truth are concerned.

Ignorance can be of two kinds, blameworthy or excusable, and the remoter context of Romans makes it clear that this ignorance is the former, for “they refused to have God in their knowledge” (Rom. 1:28 R.V.) and the result, a callousness and utter indifference to the things of God. Such is the sure result of persistent rejection of God’s claims. Verse nineteen further describes their condition as being “past feeling”. The word literally means “to have lost the sense of pain”. When men deliberately choose darkness rather than light, God’s judgment allows them to go the way they prefer, with its awful consequences. We read three times that “God gave them up” in Romans 1:24,26,28, as a consequence of their deliberate giving up God.

This was the state that redemption had rescued some of the Ephesian believers from, and now Paul reminds them that their daily Christian walk must be free from such an outlook and practice. He wrote:

“But ye did not so learn Christ; if so be that ye heard Him and were taught in (or by) Him, even as truth is in Jesus” (4:20,21 R.V.).

We note that the Apostle did not say “you did not so learn the truth, or learn the gospel”, but “you did not so learn *Christ*”, for He alone is the embodiment of truth and every good thing that the human heart needs. Moreover, Paul does not bring himself or the other apostles forward as the teachers of the Ephesian saints, *but Christ Himself*—“if so be that ye heard *Him* and were taught in (or by) *Him*”. It was most improbable that anyone living at Ephesus at that time had ever actually heard Christ in His earthly ministry, yet the Apostle asserts that the Lord Himself had been their Teacher! This only goes to show that Paul was only the means that the Lord Jesus was using to instruct His people. How foolish then to separate the teaching of Christ from the teaching of Paul as some do, and to imagine that the record of the Gospels is more important than the epistles!

The Apostle goes on to use a phrase which is often misquoted as though it read: “the truth as it is in Jesus”. This suggests there can be truth apart from Christ, but Paul never suggests such a thing, for it would be completely untrue. “Even as truth is in Jesus” is what he wrote, and this but confirms John 14:6: “I



am the Way, *the Truth* and the Life". The use of the name Jesus by itself is unusual in Paul's epistles. Practically always, the New Testament apostles give Him a title of respect. For them He is not just "Jesus", an outstanding man, which is the way most professing Christians of today regard Him and name Him. To them, the apostles, He is Lord and God, and they do not forget it when they talk or write about Him. He Himself said "Ye call Me Master and Lord, and *ye say well; for so I am*" (John 13:13). Would that all who profess to own Him as Saviour and Lord would remember this! Jesus was His earthly name (Matt. 1:21) of His humbling and also as the perfect Man, and it is significant that in the context we are considering in Ephesians the emphasis is on the *new man*, the perfect new nature which God gives to each of His redeemed children:

"... that ye put away, as concerning your former manner of life, the old man, which waxeth corrupt after the lusts of deceit; and that ye be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and *put on the new man*, which after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth" (Eph. 4:22-24 R.V.).

The "old man" is the sinful old nature we all inherit from fallen Adam. Fundamentally God dealt with this at the Cross, for then our old man was crucified with Him (Rom. 6:6). Now each member of the Body is exhorted to count on this by faith and so make it experimental day by day. The old nature can never improve, or be reformed or changed. God gives it over to death and implants into His children the perfect thing he requires. This now can renew and control the mind with its thinking and planning through the Spirit's work. It is a new beginning, a transformation of the mind as Romans 12:2 declares; it is called "the new man" and manifests in practice the mind of Christ, and the actions that spring from it are the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22,23). This is the new man "put on" (Eph. 4:24), the mind of Christ in action, and it is this way of thinking and living that must now characterize each member of Christ's Body.

Paul now shows how this works specifically:

"Wherefore, putting away falsehood, speak ye truth each one with his neighbour" (4:25 R.V.).

The word "putting away" is the same as used in verse twenty-two. Falsehood is one of the main characteristics of the old

nature and comes directly from the father of lies (John 8:44). As we are members one of another, and the children of the God of truth in the close relationship that grace has placed us, falsehood and deceit must have no place. For if it does, it is bound to break in practice this divine relationship to each other. It is difficult, if not well nigh impossible, to have dealings with deceitful people.

The Apostle now passes from deceit to anger, and we ask the question; can a believer indulge in righteous anger? That there is such a thing, the Scriptures testify, for the wrath of God is a solemn fact that the book of Revelation stresses (6:16,17; 11:18; 14:8,10,19; 15:1,7; 16:1,19; 18:3; 19:15). God is righteous and there is no question but that His anger is just. But can we who are sinners indulge in it without sinning ourselves? In view of verse thirty-one, "let ALL bitterness, and wrath, and *anger* . . . be put away from you", it is surely better to avoid anger under any condition, and read verse twenty-six as a question "Are ye angry and do ye not sin?". In any case, anger should never be prolonged, for this is dangerous; "let not the sun go down upon your wrath". Paul insists on this, and many quarrels and differences between believers could have been avoided had this wise injunction been carried into effect.

Those who nurse their grievances do not realize that they are "giving place to the devil" (verse 27). They are giving him room to operate in their lives, which he will not be slow to use with deadly effect:

"Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have whereof to give to him that hath need" (verse 28 R.V.).

Stealing was not regarded as being a particularly bad sin in New Testament times, but however lightly the Ephesians had regarded this in their pre-conversion days, such sin could no longer be indulged in now they were believers. Rather were they to work and earn an honest living, not only to maintain their own homes and families, but to have a surplus to pass on to any who were in real need. Paul himself worked at his trade, so that he was not a burden to his converts (Acts 20:33,34; 1 Thess. 2:9), so he, as always, was practising what he preached to others.

“Let no corrupt speech proceed out of your mouth, but such as is good for edifying as the need may be, that it may give grace to them that hear” (4:29 R.V.).

In Colossians 4:6 the Apostle wrote that the speech of believers should be always “seasoned with salt”. Salt is a preservative against putrefaction, and Christian speech should always partake of this quality. This does not mean that the language of believers must be dry or dull. There is a proper place for wholesome humour, but anything that tends to corruption must be avoided at all costs. In these manifestations of the sinful old nature, Paul has stressed the bad effect that indulgence will have on the relationship between believers. Now he reminds us that such actions will affect our relationship with God:

“And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, in Whom ye were sealed unto the day of redemption” (verse 30 R.V.).

This is one of the verses that clearly teaches the personality of the Holy Spirit. Some who deny this, teach that the Holy Spirit is but a manifestation of God’s power. *But one cannot grieve a force.* One can only grieve *a person*, and indulgence in the works of the flesh grieves God and spoils the consciousness of our close relationship to Him.

The Holy Spirit has put His divine seal upon our redemption (1:13), showing that Calvary’s work is indeed finished and we belong now to the Lord for eternity. How careful then we should be not to bring grief upon the One Who has made all this possible at such tremendous cost! Indeed, as verse thirty-one states, *all* manifestations of the old nature must be renounced, and in their place must be the Christian graces of kindness, tenderheartedness, and full forgiveness, remembering constantly how great is the debt that the Lord has forgiven us. We do not now forgive in order to be forgiven (Matt. 6:12,14,15; 18:35). Rather we freely forgive *because we have been forgiven* (Eph. 4:32) and the word “forgive” means “to graciously forgive”, not the ordinary word for remission. Let us constantly keep this before our minds in our dealings with each other, and so glorify the Lord.

## CHAPTER FIVE OF THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

### *The worthy walk continued.*

The Divine injunctions regarding a “worthy walk”, a daily practical manifestation of the superlative Truth revealed in Ephesians 1–3, is continued by the Apostle Paul in chapter five:

“Be ye therefore imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love, even as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for an odour of a sweet smell” (5:1,2 R.V.).

As the Revised Version margin points out, many ancient authorities read “us” instead of “you” at the end of 4:32, as they do in 5:2. These include the Chester Beatty Papyri which did not become known until 1931. The pronunciation and spelling of *hemeis* (we) and *humeis* (you) was practically identical in the first century, so one can easily understand that a copyist could easily put one for the other. “Us”, which would include the Apostle, is most probably the correct reading.

It should hardly need to be stressed that only a believer in Christ can “imitate God”. A false gospel of works may urge the unbeliever to try to be like Jesus, but this is fatal as a means of salvation, and quite impossible to achieve. Only the truly saved who are quickened can spiritually walk in the Saviour’s footsteps (1 Pet. 2:21), and when we realize what this entails, it will be a lifetime’s endeavour which will surely keep us fully occupied. To “walk in love” might mean almost anything to the human mind, but we are not left in doubt here, as it is explained practically as the way *Christ loved and gave Himself up for us*. Here is a life of absolute unselfishness and self-renunciation, and this, said the Apostle, should characterize the daily Christian walk. Anything less than this is not “worthy” of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

This offering of Christ, the giving up of Himself for us, is described in the Levitical terms of the sweet savour offerings, for the two Greek words here (“offering” and “sacrifice”) are used in the Greek Old Testament for the meal or cereal offering



and the peace offering. These were offerings which had a fragrant smell and represented not so much sin and short coming, as a whole-hearted response in service to God which was fragrant and well pleasing to Him. We might stop to ask ourselves, “are our lives fragrant to the Lord? Does He get pleasure as He regards our thoughts and actions day by day”? This is what is behind the context in Ephesians, and we may all find it very challenging. The Philippian believers showed their practical love for the Lord and for Paul by sending him a gift which rejoiced his heart in his Roman prison. This, he said, was “an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God” (Phil. 4:18). Would to God that all our lives and actions were as fragrant and attractive as this.

There is a sacrificial element in all giving that is of lasting value. Giving that costs little is of little value. David said “neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of *that which doth cost me nothing*” (2 Sam. 24:24).

It is this kind of giving that is a real evidence of walking in love, and in doing so we become *imitators of God*, Who is so constantly giving of His fulness to us His children.

Completely contrary to this and to be shunned is a threefold uncleanness in action and word:

“But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as becometh saints; nor filthiness, nor foolish talking, or jesting, which are not befitting: but rather giving of thanks” (5:3,4 R.V.).

A light view of impurity was often taken in pagan circles. Those who had been saved and brought by grace into the Body of Christ must remember that they had been translated into an entirely different sphere, the kingdom of the Son of His love (Col. 1:13 R.V.) where such conduct was completely foreign. We would hardly link covetousness with fornication, but God’s ideas of sin are very different to ours. The foolish talking and jesting of verse four does not refer to healthy humour, but that type of speech that has a sinister double meaning. One great antidote is a thankful heart directed to the Lord (verse 4). Minds which are so engaged will not lend themselves to thoughts and actions which dishonour Him. God’s wrath is directed against such conduct in the sons of disobedience, and believers

who do not realize this and become “partakers with them”, will lose any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ (verses 5 and 6).

Paul now describes this, as John sometimes does, in terms of light and darkness. Believers are “rescued from the authority of darkness” (Col. 1:13) and brought into close contact with Him Who is the “Light of the world” (John 8:12). Once they were not merely *in* darkness but *were darkness*. Now they have *become light* in Him and they must walk “as children of light” (verse 8). Practical Christian walk is likened to fruit “(for the fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth)” (verse 9 R.V.). The Authorized Version reads “the fruit of the Spirit”, but the weight of textual evidence and that of the context is in favour of the Revised Version reading. “Goodness, righteousness and truth” are the concrete expressions of what “light” means, and this is in direct opposition to the darkness of paganism. The lesson is also written in nature, fruit is impossible apart from light. Only when we are walking in the light are we able to produce spiritual fruit and prove “what is well-pleasing unto the Lord” (verse 10 R.V.), and to please Him should be the chief goal of the believer. This will mean having no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness and again Paul looks back to the sordid depths of pagan ways. God’s light shows these up for what they are (verse 13):

“Wherefore he saith, Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine upon thee” (verse 14 R.V.).

The impersonal “it is said” of the Revised Standard Version is perhaps better here. The Apostle is not quoting a definite Old Testament passage, but giving the sense of a number of them, such as Isaiah 60:1 and Malachi 4:2, and applying them to the individual believer rather than to Israel as a whole, as many of the Old Testament contexts do:

“Look therefore carefully how ye walk, not as unwise, but as wise; redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (verses 15,16 R.V.).

The Apostle urges a careful walk because of the many dangers around where a careless attitude could lead to stumbling, affecting not only oneself but others. Here, he tells us, we need Divine wisdom, and if we look back to his prayer in chapter

one, we shall remind ourselves that the first thing he requests for the Ephesian believers is “the spirit of wisdom” (1:17). Walking in a world of spiritual darkness that knows not the Saviour nor the Truth, how wise we need to be! Some Christian’s walk may not be actually sinful, but it can be very unwise, and what problems this can cause! “Walk in wisdom toward them that are without” Paul urges in Colossians 4:5.

Not only this, but we should “redeem the time” or more understandably “buy up the opportunity” for Christian witness, because the days are evil and this is the only adequate antidote. This means we have to be wide awake and on the alert all the while so as not to miss opportunities that present themselves. How sad it is when we only recognize an opportunity for witness by its back! The times cry out for those who are bold enough to show Whose they are and Whom they serve. If we do this then we shall certainly be among those whom verse seventeen describes as “understanding what the will of the Lord is”, this being the key to a fruitful Christian life.

The Apostle continues:

“And be not drunken with wine, wherein is riot, but be filled with the Spirit; speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord” (5:18,19 R.V.).

Over indulgence in wine which leads to drunkenness is to be shunned. Rather than being filled with what would intoxicate, let the filling be by the Spirit of God. The last phrase has often been misunderstood and interpreted as though this is Pentecost repeated with all its miraculous evidential gifts. The parallel passage in Colossians makes it quite clear with what the believer is filled. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16). The Lord Jesus had said concerning the Holy Spirit: “He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you” (John 16:14). There can be no doubt that when the believer is filled with all that pertains to the ascended Christ, this is accomplished through the work of the Filler, the Holy Spirit, and it should be a continuous experience, as the present tense is used. The original does not say “Become full of the Spirit” as some think. Rotherham renders

it literally “But be getting filled in Spirit”, and the Revised margin also has “in spirit” instead of “with the Spirit”, which does not describe a mighty upheaval in the senses, but an uplifting of Christ as Saviour, Lord and Head in the renewed mind of the believer through the operation of the Spirit of God, leading to the praise described in verse nineteen, “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs”. Psalms almost certainly point to the Old Testament Psalter, but the difficulty for a number of the Lord’s people is finding an acceptable and easy way of singing the prose of the Authorized or Revised Versions. The Anglican chant, used properly, comes the nearest to this. The metrical version, as used in Scotland, often gets too far away from the original to be used as a translation, and is but a paraphrase of the Hebrew. It is not so easy to identify “hymns and spiritual songs”. There is evidence from the early centuries that Christians praised God in singing, but we have no exact knowledge of the forms this took. We have a record of Paul himself singing hymns and that in the most unlikely circumstances, after he had been cruelly beaten and thrown into the Philippian gaol (Acts 16:23–25).

A praising heart will be the more easy when we constantly remember how much we owe to the Lord for His vast redeeming love and providential goodness:

“Giving thanks always for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father” (5:20 R.V.).

“Always for all things” extends to all time and all experience for the believer which is covered by the will of the Lord (see also Col. 3:17). Sometimes we may not know how to pray, but we can always praise and it never wearies the Lord! Not only this, but it will have a preserving effect on us, for we cannot truly praise and backslide at the same time.

“Subjecting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ” (5:21 R.V.).

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” the Old Testament asserts (Prov. 1:7), and this reverential attitude is brought over to this dispensation in the verse before us. The Revised Standard Version rendering is “be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ”. This leads us to give Him His rightful place as Lord and Controller of all we have and are, and to



give, too, the rightful place to other believers. We shall do this as we seek to serve them in whatever way we can, always bearing in mind the example of the greatest Servant of all, our Saviour, Who took a towel and girded Himself so that He, though Lord of all, could perform the lowliest of services for each of His disciples (John 13:4,5).

Verse twenty-one closes the section and now the Apostle turns to daily life in the home. Here is where truth in practice starts and this is what so many believers forget. It is sometimes easier to shine for Christ in the world than in the home, but it is *here* that the fragrance of Christ should first be experienced.

*The Christian home and the outworking of the Truth.  
Husbands and wives.*

We should remember that in century one there were no special buildings for Christian worship. God's children met in the home, hence the importance of the practical out-working of the truth here. It is for this reason that leaders (bishops or overseers) had to have special domestic qualifications (1 Tim. 3:1-5), for it is quite obvious that an unruly home, or one that was un-Christian in any way, would have been a most unsuitable meeting place for believers.

The Apostle first deals with Christian husbands and wives, urging the wives to take their relationship to their husbands that Christ has ordained. The word "subjection" does not carry with it any abject idea of slavery. In 5:21 Paul had shown that it was the Lord's will that *all* should be "submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ" (R.V.). The basic idea is to take the place assigned by God. There is a divinely ordained position of men and women to each other in creation; but this does not mean that there is inferiority, either naturally or spiritually, of women to men. In 1 Corinthians 11:3 Paul had written:

"The head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God".

Thus we have a divine relationship ascending from woman through man, and through Christ to God. If the head of the woman is the man, and the Head of the Church is Christ, then

there is an analogy between a wife's relationship to her husband and the Church's relation to Christ. Once this is seen, the conception that men are better than women, or that women are expected to render them slavish obedience, vanishes. The husband has a tremendous responsibility, for he prefigures Christ as the Body's Head and Saviour, and is enjoined to love his wife "even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself up for it" (verse 25 R.V.). This goes much deeper than attraction or affection, and involves his unceasing and self-sacrificing concern for her well-being, thus safeguarding her dignity and welfare. And when wives constantly receive this sort of consideration, are they going to experience any difficulty in being in subjection to such a man? Surely this deference will be the natural outcome of such a high relationship.

But the Apostle now leaves the husband-wife relationship behind, for he goes on to state that, not only did the Lord give Himself up for His Body, but He did this in order that "He might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word" (verse 26 R.V.). We have a double figure here for cleansing—water and the Word of God. One is immediately reminded of Ezekiel 36:25–27 when, at the future re-gathering of Israel, God says:

"Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you".

Obviously here the water is not literal. The cleansing is not that of the body, but that of the *mind*. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you" (verse 26). Later on, in the New Testament, we find the Lord saying, "Now ye are clean *through the word* which I have spoken unto you" (John 15:3). Ritualists must be hard put to it to try and make Ephesians 5:26 refer to water baptism. Had Paul meant to teach this, the phrase "by the Word" would have been omitted. In any case, as we have already seen, the ONE baptism of 4:5 precludes that of the type and shadow—literal water—and must refer to the abiding spiritual reality, the work of the Holy Spirit Himself. The only other occurrence of the word rendered "washing" is Titus 3:5, where we have the "washing of regeneration", once again clearly not alluding to literal water, and this guides us in interpreting Ephesians 5:26.

This divine cleansing is in order that:

“He might present the church to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (5:27 R.V.).

This great presentation day is often forgotten by believers. The future glory for the Body must not be looked at exclusively as the realization of the hope of each member. Let us not forget what that day will mean for the Lord as well—the receiving to Himself of His complete and perfected Body. This is what the Father had in mind when He chose this company in Christ before the foundation of the world “that it should be” *holy* and *without blame* (*blemish*) before Him in love (1:4) and it is only through the redemptive work of the Son, providing this holiness, that this great goal can be realized.

Paul now returns to the marriage relationship, “Even so ought husbands also to love their own wives as their own bodies” (verse 28 R.V.). From the standpoint of the Word, a believer’s wife is an extension of himself and “no man ever hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it” (verse 29 R.V.), and this is an illustration of the relationship between Christ and the church, His Body (verse 30). How strange that with the argument so clearly expressed, some will persist in teaching from this passage that this church is the Bride! The Apostle goes back to Eden to stress the *oneness* of Adam and Eve, where Adam greets Eve, not so much as his bride, but “bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (Gen. 2:23), “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and the twain shall become one flesh” (verse 31 R.V.). The teaching of these verses is perfectly plain. Husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies, as Christ loved the church, His Body. Here is perfect balance in argument which is upset if one introduces the *bridal* church, and Paul is careful to do no such thing. Symbols and figures are used with precision and accuracy by the Holy Spirit, and He certainly does not “mix His metaphors”, as many make Him do, by confusing these two callings of the Lord’s redeemed family.

Paul’s thought now travels back to the great revealed Secret (Mystery) of chapter three. That there is underlying truth in the marriage relationship is perfectly true. “But (note the disjunc-

tive. Paul is not now referring to husband and wife) I speak in regard of Christ and of the church” (verse 32). This is the great Secret which he was privileged to receive from the Lord by revelation and commissioned to make known from his prison (Ephesians three and Colossians one). “Nevertheless (he concludes) do ye also severally love each one his own wife *even as himself*” (verse 33), and the thought is still that the man is to love his wife, not because she is his bride, but because she is, as it were, *part of himself*, as the church, the Body, is to the Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. “And let the wife see that she fear (reverence or respect) her husband.”



## CHAPTER SIX OF THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

### *Children and parents.*

Once the divine position is grasped by the Christian husband and wife, they have a true and lasting guide to joy and fruitfulness in Christian witness both in the home and outside. We can scarcely over-estimate the importance and state of the Christian home. Satan knows this well, and the appalling amount of marital disharmony today only confirms how thoroughly he does his evil work, resulting in wretched homes and untold misery.

The Apostle now passes to the duties of children and parents and he still has the Christian home in view. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right" and "well-pleasing to the Lord" (Col. 3:20). Disobedience, the refusal to be controlled or to exercise self-control, is typical of past degeneracy (Rom. 1:30) and the terrible darkness of the perilous times of the last days of this age (2 Tim. 3:2). One great characteristic of these times, which we now see all around us, is *lawlessness* or rebellion. The Lord marked this out as a sign of the end of the age. "Lawlessness (iniquity) shall abound", He said (Matt. 24:12), and this characteristic is not confined to any one country, but is world-wide at the present moment. All this is but a prelude to the revelation of the final Satanic world dictator, the man of lawlessness (2 Thess. 2:3,4) who will sum up in himself this terrible characteristic. Christian parents who allow disobedience to enter their homes are only contributing to this terrible state of affairs, and if a child never learns the meaning of obedience, how is he ever going to learn to obey the Lord?

Paul now quotes the fifth commandment, the importance of which is emphasized because it not only is the *first* commandment with a promise attached, but the only one in the Decalogue to have a promise at all. The Apostle quoted the *whole* of Exodus 20:12 which includes the promise which obtained at that particular time, "that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee". Not that this promise is necessarily brought over into this dispensation, for we are not

Israelites, nor in the land of Canaan which the Lord gave to Abraham and his descendants; but its importance in God's sight is stressed by this added promise when the law was given to Israel. Today the relationship of children and parents has lost much of its influence and solidarity. Parents are often too busy or too lazy to enforce wise and rightful discipline, with the consequence that a generation is rising that will not tolerate restraint or exhibit self-control.

Ephesians 6:1 states that such obedience and honouring of parents is *right*, and Colossians 3:20 that it is "well-pleasing to the Lord". The Word of God, however, is not one-sided. Parents have their Christian duty and responsibility to their children. They are warned not to provoke their children to wrath (verse 4) and Colossians 3:21 adds "lest they be discouraged". Many a child has failed to respond to the Truth by unreasonableness, unwise and unsympathetic handling on the part of the parents. Such parents do not deserve their children's obedience. Christian parents will need all the wisdom, patience and tact that it is possible to have, so that in these dark and perilous days their family may be brought up in the discipline (chastening) and instruction (admonition) of the Lord. The absolute need for such discipline is made clear in Hebrews 12:5-11. This, though sometimes unpleasant, is a mark of *love* not displeasure (Heb. 12:6). The wise parent will not hesitate to administer such chastening (not to be confused with the word "chastisement"), realizing full well that if this is not done the child is being prepared to be ensnared by the delinquency of these and the darkening future days.

#### *Servants and masters.*

Lastly, Paul deals with slaves and masters; and slaves were exhorted to obey their masters, even though they were not believers. Such a situation would be difficult indeed, but such slaves or servants of any kind, were given special Divine encouragement. They were asked to do their work as though the Lord had requested them to do it, which would put quite a different light on the situation (verse 5). They, like the Apostle himself, were bond-slaves of Christ, hence they were not to be clock-watchers and put on a show of working hard just

when the earthly master was watching. This would be “eye-service” and would bring the truth into disrepute. They were to serve with Christ in view as the final arbiter and rewarder of their work (verse 8). Equally masters were to do the same things to their servants without threatening or bullying, remembering that they themselves were but servants, and their Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom they would finally have to give account. Here is a righteous basis on both sides.

If only such wise relationships were possible today in the commercial world! Very few problems, if any, would arise, and the turmoil and strikes that we see all around us would be non-existent. But we know that unregenerate man will not learn these lessons in this age. This awaits the coming age of Christ’s reign with its righteousness and peace.

*The Final section.*

*The spiritual conflict and the panoply of God.*

Paul now comes to the final section of the epistle, which gives a revelation of the unseen and unfelt spiritual warfare that is constantly going on behind the scenes between God and the spiritual forces for good, and Satan and the powers of darkness that antagonize the Divine plan every inch of the way. But for the complete protection that the Lord has provided, the believer would have good cause to be afraid. The panoply of God, however, is all-sufficient for such a dangerous situation:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:10,11 R.V.).

Every member of the Body of Christ is reminded here where his true strength lies for this tremendous conflict. It is not in self, or on the human plane in any way. Mere human power would be less than useless against such spiritual enemies. Nothing less than the mighty resurrection power of Christ mentioned in chapter 1:19–23 is sufficient, plus the protective armour that He provides, which covers the believer from head to foot.

The Apostle had used a similar figure in 1 Thessalonians 5:8 “. . . putting on the *breastplate* of faith and love; and for a *helmet*, the hope of salvation”. There is the possibility that Paul

goes into greater detail here, because he had an object lesson constantly with him in the person of the Roman soldier to whom he was chained and who guarded him day and night. He reminds us that our warfare is not with our fellow-human beings:

“For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (6:12 R.V.).

Principalities and powers are the highest rank of heavenly beings, the very aristocracy of heaven. Angels are apparently heaven’s servants. They are “serving spirits” (Heb. 1:14). Some of these principalities acknowledge the lordship of Christ, and come under His Headship (Col. 2:10). Others have rebelled, possibly at the fall of Satan, and the triumph of Calvary not only dealt with human sin and death, but procured victory over these spiritual foes:

“Having put off from Himself the principalities and the powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Col. 2:15 R.V.).

The word translated “world-rulers” is important. Occasionally the Word of God draws aside the curtain, as it were, and lets us see things that are going on in the spiritual world around us, which are unperceived by our senses. In the tenth chapter of Daniel, for instance, we are introduced to two angel princes who impede the one who was being sent to Daniel to assist him and he was hindered for three weeks (Dan. 10:13,20). Later on, Michael, the archangel, is introduced, who has the responsibility of the interests of the people of Israel (12:1). From this and other places, including Ephesians six, we can see something of the great battle that is being fought between God and Satan and the powers of darkness. It would appear that Satan has his emissaries over every nation, affecting their policies and actions, and so has the Lord. Three times the Lord Jesus referred to Satan as the “ruler (prince) of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) and Paul calls him “the god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4). There is no doubt that the present world system is being run by him, for “the whole world lieth in the evil one” (1 John 5:19 R.V.). As the instructed Christian looks at world affairs all this throws light on what he sees going on around him.



Now it is with this flood of evil spiritual rulers that Ephesians six tells us that our wrestling engages, not with our fellow-man. Satan appears to have special malignity against the Body of Christ, for he sees in the heavenly destiny of this church a rival to his high ambitions in the heavenlies. The more we appreciate the whole of this situation, the more we can see the danger we are in of ourselves, and how utterly hopeless it would be for us to try and meet it in our own puny strength. However, we need not fear if we avail ourselves of the armour which God has provided for our complete protection; and with this and Calvary's work in mind, our final victory, through Him Who loved us is assured (Rom. 8:37-39).

Here is the final phase of experience for the believer who has grown up into Christ in all things and become spiritually mature (Eph. 4:13-15). In the Old Testament days, taking up arms and fighting was limited to adults, "from twenty years old and upwards, all that were able to go forth to war" (Num. 1:20). Babies are a liability in war and times of danger. They are helpless to render any assistance, and spiritual babes in Christ who have never grown in grace or knowledge of the truth are useless indeed to accomplish anything for the Lord in this war between light and darkness.

As we study this spiritual armour in detail, we note it consists of five pieces for defence and one for offence. We might have expected seven, but we must remember we are in a very imperfect age, and not until God's perfect kingdom is realized will the spiritual meaning of "seven" be realized. The Apostle goes on to describe each piece of the armour and its uses. It is significant that the first is *truth* and without this all the rest is ineffective. This constant seeking for truth, the understanding of the rightly-divided Word of God, must be the continued quest of the believer, if he wants to count in this great struggle. Satan is the liar and the father of lies, some of which have permeated Christendom today and the wise Christian will constantly check all he hears and reads by the great Divine standard of the Word. There is no other way that he can be proof against the deception of the evil one, and Christian witness and activity is fruitless divorced from the truth of God. Of what can we be witnesses, if it is not God's truth?

Righteousness is to be the believer's breastplate. In Isaiah 59:17 God Himself is represented as putting on "righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon His head", so Paul probably had these symbols in mind when he was writing this part of the Ephesian letter. Righteousness *in action*, as well as imputed righteousness, is meant here. These items of the spiritual armour are really the *fruit* of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22,23), and unless these are manifested in our lives, we are in a dangerous position indeed, for we are right open to the enemy's attack with his "fiery darts".

The feet, which speak of our walk, are shod with the "preparation of the gospel of peace" (6:15), not only that good news of peace with God which comes from being justified by faith in Christ (Rom. 5:1), but that God-given peace between each member of the Body (Eph. 2:15) which should constantly be manifested. In addition to these (not above all these (A.V.) as though faith was more important than the foregoing graces) the shield of faith, like the large body-shield that the Romans used, must be constantly used as a protection against all the fiery darts of the enemy. There can be no shield if any element of unbelief enters our minds, and it is Satan's constant aim to try to get us to doubt God's Word, just as he did in Eden when he whispered to Eve "hath God said"? (Gen. 3:1). Israel lost the promised land through unbelief (Heb. 3:19) and the only effective antidote to this dangerous thing is complete trust in all God has said and revealed, for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). "And take the helmet of salvation" continued the Apostle, using the same figure as he did to the Thessalonian church (1 Thess. 5:8). The helmet covers the head which stands for its thinking and planning.

Lastly, we come to the only offensive weapon that the believer is allowed, which is "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" (Eph. 6:17). Hebrews 4:12 Revised Version reminds us that the "Word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword" and this weapon is the only thing Satan fears. We remember how effectively the Lord Jesus used it against the onslaught of Satan in the wilderness temptation. His one reply to each of Satan's attacks was "It is written" (Matt. 4:1-11). He could have demolished the evil one's

craftiness by His divine power, but how glad we are that He did not do so, but instead gave us all a practical exhibition of the “Sword of the Spirit” which caused Satan to retire defeated.

Now it is useless having a weapon if we do not practice with it, so that we are expert in its use. Imagine anyone needing to use a revolver in a state of emergency who had never handled one! To use any weapon effectively, constant practice is essential, and we must have “the Word of Christ dwelling in us richly in all wisdom” (Col. 3:16), this wisdom guiding our use of the divine Sword, which can accomplish all God’s purpose and rout the hosts of darkness, which continually seek to thwart His plans.

We need to remember that the modernist who refuses to acknowledge the full inspiration of the holy Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation, leaving a book that is inspired only in parts, has only a broken sword which Satan does not fear and is useless in this spiritual warfare. Outstanding witnesses for Christ in this age have been men of the Word, and later on, when writing his last thoughts to Timothy, Paul declares that the God-breathed Scriptures are the complete equipment of the believer (2 Tim. 3:16,17), sufficient for all the needs of the Christian pathway.

Having described the panoply of God under which His children are perfectly safe, though going through a time of danger with the unseen spiritual warfare ever raging around them, Paul now stresses prayer and supplication. These are not parts of the armour, and it is not scriptural to speak of “prayer warfare”. As we have seen before, we have not been commanded to attack, but to stand and withstand all the enemy’s onslaughts and not yield an inch (6:13). However, prayer and intercession are of the utmost importance if we are to accomplish anything worthwhile for Christ and they are a ministry in themselves. There must be constant intercession, guided by the Word of Truth and a personal knowledge of the Lord’s will and *this must be continual*. “Men ought *always* to pray and not to faint” (Luke 18:1), and the non-ceasing intercession of the Apostle is an example to us all. The prayer-less Christian is an ineffectual and defeated one. Let us also *watch*, for the Lord not only said “pray”, but “*watch* and pray” (Mark 14:38). We must

be alert to see the Lord's hand working in our sphere of witness and service.

Last of all, Paul asks prayer for himself for "utterance" and "boldness, as I ought to speak". Paul knew the paralysing effect of fear (1 Cor. 2:3) and the temptation to keep silent when he ought to speak. The message was the "mystery of the gospel" (Eph. 6:19,20), which is not just how God can save a sinner, though that is wonderful. What a lot believers and expositors miss who put this one meaning on the word "gospel" wherever it occurs in the New Testament. The Lord has good news for His redeemed children as well as for sinners. The tremendous revelation given to the Apostle and made known in Ephesians three and Colossians one goes far beyond salvation, although it rests upon it. So wonderful was it that Paul's one aim was to "enlighten all" (3:8,9) as to its content and riches, and in the Colossian letter we are told that God wishes this to be made manifest to His saints (Col. 1:26,27). It was this "good news" hitherto kept secret (a mystery) that Paul asked for prayer that he might boldly proclaim and make known, and it was for this truth he was "an ambassador in chains" (verse 20). Instead of looking at himself as the prisoner of Nero, he preferred to see the situation from the Divine standpoint, and regard himself as God's representative at the imperial court of Rome.

He now assured the recipients of this epistle that Tychicus would visit them and give all the up to date news concerning his circumstances. This is almost identical with Colossians 4:7 and shows that Tychicus was evidently the bearer of the Colossian epistle as well as this one. He was a native of the province of Asia according to Acts 20:4, and here he is Paul's special envoy to the churches of this region. The Apostle closes the epistle with peace, love, faith and grace; wondrous spiritual gifts upon which it is indeed profitable to reflect and to experience. His last words are "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in uncorruptness" (verse 24 R.V.). He finishes as he began with grace, and leaves as his last thought, that of resurrection, for "uncorruptness" is practically synonymous with "immortality", and is put on at resurrection (1 Cor. 15:53,54). It is in resurrection when the exceeding riches of this epistle will be enjoyed by those who are graciously favoured to be members of the Body of Christ. The height, depth, length and breadth of



revelation in this epistle and its spiritual riches are not eclipsed by any other part of Scripture, and nothing less than all this is what God wants His children to embrace by faith, rejoice in, and live out in practice continually, according to His rules laid down in chapters four to six. This is a challenge indeed, which believers can only ignore to their eternal loss. Are we willing to face up to it honestly day by day?

We conclude by exhibiting once more the seven triads of practice in chapter four to six which balance the seven triads of doctrine in chapters one to three.

- (1) **THREEFOLD EXHORTATION (4:1–6)**
  - (a) Walk worthy of calling
  - (b) Forbear in love
  - (c) Keep the unity of the spirit.
- (2) **THREEFOLD MEASURE (4:7–19)**
  - (a) The measure of the gift of Christ
  - (b) The measure . . . of the fulness of Christ
  - (c) The measure of every part.
- (3) **THREEFOLD APPLICATION (4:20–32)**
  - (a) Put off old man
  - (b) Put on new man
  - (c) Put away the lie.
- (4) **THREEFOLD WALK (5:1–6:9)**
  - (a) Walk in love
  - (b) Walk in light
  - (c) Walk circumspectly.
- (5) **THREEFOLD STAND (6:10–13)**
  - (a) Stand against the Devil
  - (b) Withstand in evil day
  - (c) Standing, “having worked out”.
- (6) **THREEFOLD EQUIPMENT (6:14–18)**
  - (a) Girdle and breastplate
  - (b) Shoes and shield
  - (c) Helmet and sword.
- (7) **THREEFOLD PRAYER (6:19,20)**
  - (a) Open mouth
  - (b) Speak boldly
  - (c) As I ought.

## CHAPTER ONE OF THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

In the first century, Colossae was an ancient but declining commercial centre, situated in Phrygia on the south bank of the River Lycus, a tributary of the Maeander, about one hundred miles eastward from Ephesus near the cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis. The Christian message was evidently introduced there during Paul's Ephesian ministry (Acts 19:5) possibly through the faithful witness of Epaphras (cp. Col. 1:7; 4:12). Within five years the Apostle was a prisoner at Rome, waiting to have his case heard by the Emperor, to whom he had appealed. He was free to receive visitors, and among them Epaphras, who gave Paul up to date news of the churches in that area. The question as to whether any of his prison letters were written from an imprisonment at Caesarea or Ephesus rather than Rome is dealt with in the introduction to the epistle to the Philippians (see pp. 177-182).

Although there was much for which to thank God, one disquieting feature was the introduction at Colossae of teaching which, although outwardly appearing very spiritual, actually dethroned the Lord Jesus Christ from His unique place of having the pre-eminence in all things. It was a sort of pre-gnosticism combining Jewish and Greek elements which later developed more fully in the second century and it was to combat this error that the epistle to the Colossians was written. From its contents it is obviously a companion to the epistle to the Ephesians, and although some of the same ground is covered, yet it has its own distinct message with its central section of warning.

With the Colossian letter we must also link that to Philemon written at the same time and both were delivered by Tychicus and Onesimus, the run-away slave (4:7-9; Philem. 12). As to which was written first with regard to Ephesians and Colossians, we do not elaborate, as it does not affect the doctrine of the epistles (but see pp. 8, 9). Some expositors think that Colossians was the prior letter, but that they were written within a short time of each other there seems no doubt.

As regards the heresy which had developed at Colossae, we

only have the internal evidence of the epistle to reconstruct it. It evidently combined Judaism with a stress on legal ordinances such as circumcision, food prohibitions, and the times of feasts of the sabbath and the new moon. Combined with this was a Gentile philosophy which dealt with the spirit world. A large place was made for angels, who had figured so largely in Israel's history and through whom the law was given. Some were of a higher order than others—principalities and powers, who were supposed to control the spheres and the lines of communications between God and man. So important were these supposed to be that all prayer, worship and revelation could only be received through them and by their permission. They had special knowledge to impart and were therefore to be feared and respected. This could only be done by keeping the law and in addition to this, observing a rigorous asceticism.

This error was obviously more dangerous than the Galatian legalism which Paul had combated before. It struck at the roots of the doctrine concerning the pre-eminence of the Person and work of Christ, consequently the Apostle lost no time in seeking to expose its satanic origin and cunning deception. It is therefore in the Colossian epistle the majesty, glory and fulness of the Lord Jesus are developed more fully than in any of the other writings of Paul. The "tradition of men" is measured against the One in Whom dwells *all* the fulness of the Godhead bodily, Who is pre-eminent in both the old and new creations. He is the one Mediator between God and men, combining Godhead and manhood, and is the victor over the very principalities and powers who were ensnaring the Colossian saints.

Not only this, but as Lord and Head of the church which is His Body, He fills to the full every member. What need then was there for the empty shadows the Colossians were striving after? They were only satanic means of cancelling the liberty and fulness in Christ and bringing them into abject bondage. The Christians at Colossae had to learn that anything that detracts from the supremacy of Christ and the completeness of the believer in Him is deceiving error. In fact it can be said that all error does one of two things. It either tries to *add* something of its own to the unique position of the Saviour, or it *detracts* from Him. There can be no "extras" to the Lord Jesus Christ. HE IS ALL and in all (Col. 3:11). Once this profound

lesson is grasped, one is saved from all sorts of deceit and deception which come from the wiles of the devil.

Everyone who names the name of Christ should seriously ask himself: is Christ *everything* both as God and Man to me? Or must I *add* something else to Him to feel really comfortable and secure in my life and witness? And remember that these “additions” can look very spiritual and attractive on the surface and not in the least fleshly or wrong. The *Lordship* of Christ needs greatly stressing today among His people. Too many of them know Him as Saviour and no more, and have advanced little beyond the stage of spiritual babyhood. This is often the result, specially in young believers, of *doing* a lot and *keeping the Book shut*, thus mistaking activity for spirituality. Whereas the great need of all is to soak ourselves, as it were, in the truth of these New Testament epistles, especially the prison letters of Paul—the apostle to the Gentiles, whose writings so wonderfully cover this age of grace with their distinctive and supreme revelation of “our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13 R.V.) and the heavenly Body and Temple He is now building (Eph. 1:19–23; 2:19–22).

We come then to the exposition of this magnificent epistle and start with its divine structure which has been exhibited by C. H. Welch.

*The Structure of Colossians as a whole.*

- A 1:1,2 Epistolary and salutation
- B 1:3–8 Faithful; ministry of Epaphras
- C
  - a 1:9–12 Prayer and spiritual walk
  - b 1:13–23 Christ before all things
- D 1:23–27 Mystery (Secret) manifested by God
- E 1:28–2:1 Preaching to present perfect (mature)
- F 2:2,3 Hid—treasures of wisdom and knowledge
- G 2:4–23 BEWARE. Fivefold warning.
- F 3:1–4 Hid—your life with Christ
- C
  - b 3:5–15 Christ is ALL and in all
  - a 3:16–4:1 The Word and spiritual walk
- D 4:2–11 Mystery (secret) manifested by Paul
- E 4:12–16 Prayer that they stand perfect (mature)
- B 4:17 Fulfil ministry—Archippus
- A 4:18 Epistolary and salutation.



The balance between the various sections is self-evident, barring the central warning section G which is peculiar to this epistle, and deals with the Colossian heresy and its remedy. The opening verses associate Timothy with Paul, as in other letters (2 Corinthians, Philippians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Philemon). Paul reserves the title "apostle" for himself. Originally it was used of those who were directly commissioned by the risen Christ, and then later in a wider sense. As with the Ephesian letter, those addressed are not just saints, but *faithful* saints, and we have no right to omit this. Can all believers be truthfully described as faithful or loyal?

"We give thanks to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, having heard of your *faith* in Christ Jesus, and of the *love* which ye have towards all the saints, because of the *hope* which is laid up for you in the heavens, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel" (Col. 1:3-5 R.V.).

It is noteworthy that Paul's usual habit is to commence with *thanksgiving* for the good news he hears of the various groups of Christians to whom he is writing. He looked for the *good* in believers first of all, not their faults. Later on, in true love, he has to correct what he finds wrong, but this love and Christian tact *praises* before it criticizes. Most of us can learn a lesson here in our contacts with others. The trio of graces that figure so prominently in 1 Corinthians, faith, hope and love, find their place also in Colossians and elsewhere, and they seem to sum up the spiritual qualities which should be evident in the lives of all God's redeemed children. The Colossian faith did not exist by itself; it rested upon and was placed *in Christ Jesus*, the only secure Foundation for faith. Thousands can talk of possessing faith, but the main thing is upon what or whom is this faith placed? With many the faith is misplaced, for under test and the stress of life their foundation collapses and then utter disillusionment follows. Christ Himself is the only secure Foundation, the One Who is almighty, the same "yesterday, today and for ever", the immovable Rock of ages.

The faith of the Colossian believers looked forward to the hope, sure and certain, laid up for them in the heavens. *Ouranos* is used here, whereas *epouranios* is the corresponding word in the Ephesian letter. But there is no contradiction. *Ouranos* is all embracing, starting with the region where birds fly (Matt. 13:32)

right up to the abode of God Himself (Matt. 5:16), whereas the adjective *epouranios* is used of the highest heavens to which Christ ascended and is supreme above all (Eph. 1:19–23). This more restricted term must obviously be contained in the larger one, so there is no problem.

Peter also speaks of an inheritance reserved in heaven, and as he is one of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, he must be linked with the twelve foundations of the heavenly Jerusalem which is now reserved in heaven, but awaiting the time in God's great purpose, when in the new creation of heaven and earth at the goal of the ages it leaves the heavenly sphere and descends to the new earth (Rev. 3:12; 21:2,10). This was the "better country" that the tested and suffering worthies of Hebrews eleven looked for and Peter writes to a similar company enduring great trials (1 Pet. 1:4–9) who had respect unto the recompense of reward like Moses of old. Although heavenly in character and now reserved in heaven, this glorious city is not destined by God to *stay there*. Hence those believers will finally enjoy its wonders when it descends and is linked with the *new earth*, and they constitute the Bride of the Lamb (Rev. 21:2,9).

In contrast to this, the Body of Christ, which symbolically is part of the Bridegroom finally merges into the Temple as a dwelling place or home for God (Eph. 2:19–22) and is not only seated in Christ Jesus in the heavenlies *now*, but will realize its hope in the same heavenly places "far above all". They have been made meet or sufficient by the Father for this supreme inheritance of the "holiest of all in the light" (Col. 1:12), the very holy of holies in heaven. Nothing less than this will fulfil the purpose of God for this exalted company which has its origin from first to last in abounding grace, beyond our dreams or our comprehension. Does our faith rise to this?

Paul was glad to note that not only had the word of the gospel been received by faith at Colossae, but since then it had borne fruit and grown:

". . . the word of the truth of the gospel, which is come unto you; even as it is also in all the world bearing fruit and increasing as it doth in you also, since the day ye heard and knew the grace of God in truth" (1:6 R.V.).

This was real evidence of the working of God in their midst,

for the gospel was never meant to be static but a tremendous impetus urging the believer on to a deeper knowledge and love of the Lord, resulting in a more practical response in lip and life. The personal link between these believers and the Apostle was Epaphras, whom Paul describes as a “beloved fellow-slave” and a “faithful minister of Christ” on the Apostle’s behalf. Epaphras had therefore visited Paul in prison and given him up to date news of the church at Colossae. Epaphras is a contracted form of Epaphroditus, but we cannot identify him with the Epaphroditus of the Philippian letter with certainty. Nor do we know the circumstances which enabled Paul to describe him as a “fellow-prisoner” in Philemon twenty-three. He had possibly shared one of the Apostle’s many imprisonments (2 Cor. 11:23). What is certain is this man’s sterling character as a leader and servant of the church, and his highly effective and continuous intercession for them (Col. 4:12), the hall-mark of a true and faithful overseer.

The imparted news from Epaphras leads to the prayer of Paul for their spiritual welfare and then on to one of the great Christ-exalting passages of the New Testament.:

“For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray and make request for you, that ye may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to the might of His glory, unto all patience and long-suffering with joy” (verses 9–11 R.V.).

This section is balanced by chapter 3:16–4:1 where the words “wisdom”, “spiritual”, “work”, “giving thanks”, “pleasing” and “inheritance” are all repeated and light and understanding can be gained by carefully comparing these contexts. The first thing the Apostle mentions in his prayer is the “knowledge (*epignosis*) of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding”. We have seen in other studies that *epignosis* goes deeper than *gnosis*, as knowledge that *causes response* by the recipient, hence it is something more than mere intellectual grasp of facts. The Bible can be learned and stored in the brain like any other subject, but this does not and cannot give *spiritual* understanding or spiritual enlightenment which is absolutely essential if the truth lying behind the words is to be

received and appreciated. The “natural man” cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God, “neither can he know them, because they are *spiritually discerned*” (1 Cor. 2:13,14), and so he needs *enlightenment*, opened eyes, which only the Holy Spirit can give (Eph. 1:17,18). It is absolutely essential to realize this. To go through a theological course does not and cannot of itself give this enlightenment or *spiritual* understanding. Natural understanding, as with ordinary earthly subjects, is useless here.

It is possible, in the context we are considering, that Paul makes a subtle contrast with the false knowledge of his opponents at Colossae, professedly more advanced than ordinary knowledge. He shows that mere intellectualism or any occult experience is no substitute for the thorough knowledge of the will of God in accordance with Divine wisdom and perception. So, before dealing with the false teaching which was Satan’s substitute for the Truth in chapter two, the Apostle stresses the *real* knowledge and acknowledgment which leads to lasting practical results. The reader should compare here the first prayer of Ephesians 1:15–23 which likewise starts with *wisdom*. This is the first requirement if we are ever to have a real grip of God’s truth with its riches of grace and glory. These supreme riches of God are the subject of Paul’s prison letters. Is the Lord going to entrust them to foolish people?—and let us be honest, we are *all by nature foolish to some extent*. “If any man lack wisdom let him ask of God, Who giveth unto all men liberally . . .” (Jas. 1:5) is the Divine promise that alone can remedy this.

In experience then, this is where we must all start, with the *gift of Divine wisdom*, which the human intellect of itself cannot provide. From this will follow Divine understanding, the *spiritual discernment*, which again is a gift of God, and both of them leading to *practical* results, a walk that is *worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing* that is, giving Him *complete satisfaction*. This should be the *first aim* of our lives, and reminds us of Enoch, who *pleased* God with his walk and was later *translated* by God and “was not found” (Gen. 5:24; Heb. 11:5). We, too, as members of the Body of Christ are “translated” ones (Col. 1:13). The worthy walk is expressed in three ways in Paul’s prison letters—“worthy of the calling” (Eph. 4:1), “worthy of the gospel” (Phil. 1:27) and “worthy of the Lord” (Col. 1:10).



The Apostle likens such a walk to “bearing fruit” and from this practical working out of the Truth comes a growing knowledge (*epignosis*) of God. Or it could mean that this vital spiritual growth springs from the *acknowledgment* of God and His claims. Both of these statements are of immense importance to each member of the Body of Christ. We only grow spiritually as we *respond* to the truth of God, and *obedience* to the knowledge of God that one has already received is the necessary condition for reception of further knowledge. In other words, cramming the brain with Bible facts, merely an *intellectual* approach, accomplishes nothing. Nor will our heavenly Father give greater heavenly knowledge to us when we are not acting on what we already possess.

In his prayer, Paul now requests that the believers at Colossae be “empowered with all power in accordance with the might of His glory”. This takes our minds to Ephesians 1:19–23 where the Apostle describes this as the “power of His resurrection” which conquered death and exalted Him to the supreme position at the right hand of the Father. This overwhelming force is put at the disposal of the redeemed. It is to “usward who believe” and its practical apprehension would be all-sufficient to enable these believers to face up to all opposition and every trial that would test their faith. It is well to note that “strengthened” translates the present participle *dunamoumenoi* which indicates a *continuous* experience, not one that is seldom or never repeated.

From this we are led to a threefold fruit, *patience*, *long-suffering* and *joyfulness*. “Patience” is better rendered “endurance”, the steady persistence exhibited by a runner in a race, who continues right to the goal without giving up. “Long-suffering” will stand up to provocation without retaliation or bitterness. It has been pointed out that the Stoic often exhibited patience and longsuffering, but he seldom did it with *joyfulness*. One can show a measure of both and yet be a picture of misery. The Christian grace of abiding “joy”, not the empty bubble that the world calls “fun”, will transform the previous fruits and make the whole attractive for Christ.

All this should be accompanied by a grateful spirit:

“Giving thanks unto the Father, Who made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light”  
(verse 12 R.V.).

One of the basest of human faults is ingratitude, and to be ungrateful in view of the supreme work of the Father described in this context is to sink low indeed. He has “made us sufficient” or fitted us for a tremendous goal, nothing less than an inheritance in the heavenly holiest of all in the light. *Hagion* we can read as “holy things” as well as “holy people”, and bearing in mind Hebrews 9:8 where the same word is rendered “holiest (of all)”, referring to the most holy place, the dwelling place of God’s glory in the Tabernacle, we can better appreciate how this inheritance is “in the light”, the (*shekinah*) glory of God.

Here is something that eclipses any blessing that Israel possessed, great though these were. No Israelite would ever dream of *dwelling in* this most sacred place. Indeed, he lived his whole life *without entering it once*. Only the high priest, Aaron, had this unique privilege and then *only once a year* on the Day of Atonement, by virtue of his being a type of Christ Who has entered “within the veil” in resurrection and ascension as the Forerunner (Heb. 6:19,20). But the Body of Christ is so favoured and graced that it will not only enter heaven’s most sacred place, *but will dwell there permanently*, for *there* and not on earth, is their inheritance and each one is a living stone in this heavenly Temple and habitation for God (Eph. 2:19–22). Nothing short of this is the tremendous goal for which the Father has fitted us. How grateful in practice should we then be!

Before the Apostle passes on to further truth, he bids us take a look back into the past:

“Who (the Father) delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love”  
(verse 13 R.V.).

The word “deliver” means to “rescue from danger” and how great this danger was can be realized by remembering that in our unsaved state we were under “the authority of darkness” or, as Ephesians 2:1–3 expresses it, we walked according to the “prince of the power of the air”, namely Satan himself, who animates all the unsaved. Ephesians 6:12 refers to the “world rulers of this darkness” under his control, the evil principalities and powers who were defeated by the Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary (Col. 2:15) but who still seek to overthrow us and against whom our “wrestling” is directed. The whole might of

these dark Satanic forces was directed against the Son of God at Gethsemane to prevent Him reaching the Cross and accomplishing there complete victory over them all. "This is your hour, and the power of darkness" He said (Luke 22:53). Let us never forget that Calvary means final victory over every foe for all the redeemed.

Every member of the Body of Christ is a translated one from the domination and kingdom of Satan and the powers of darkness into the supreme glories of the heavenly phase of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is well to realize that in the "dispensation of the Mystery" (Eph. 3:9 R.V.) we have not left the thought of a kingdom behind. Many who value dispensational truth apparently do not realize this, for they say we must distinguish between the "Kingdom and the Church", as though the word "Kingdom" is always limited to Israel and does not occur after Acts twenty-eight. What they mean is right, but it is wrongly or inaccurately expressed. Paul uses the word "kingdom" five times *after* Acts twenty-eight (Eph. 5:5; Col. 1:13; 4:11; 2 Tim. 4:1,18), and to be faithful to what God has written we must not divorce the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, related to the Mystery, from the thought of a kingdom. As the context we are considering tells us, each member of the body has been translated and brought into the *kingdom of Christ*. Those with whom the Apostle was working when he wrote to the Colossians, he describes as "my fellow-workers unto *the kingdom of God*", and one of his last thoughts in his last epistle is that the Lord will "preserve me unto His *heavenly kingdom*" (2 Tim. 4:18).

What we must realize is that there is more than one phase of God's kingdom purposes. There are His *earthly* kingdom purposes of which the redeemed people of Israel are the centre. This phase was postponed at Acts twenty-eight when this people were laid aside in spiritual darkness after their rejection of Christ and the further offer of mercy and forgiveness in Acts 3:19-26. But there is a *heavenly* side to God's kingdom purposes and here the Body of Christ is the centre and "heavenly places, far above all" the sphere of operation. We must therefore "rightly divide" and distinguish between these differing aspects of the purpose of the ages and not be lax in the way we

use the word “kingdom”. It is not sufficient to say we must not confuse the “Kingdom” and the “Church”. We should be more specific and say the *earthly* kingdom of God (when the so-called Lord’s prayer is fulfilled, Matt. 6:10), and the church, the heavenly people of the heavenly kingdom (which embraces the highest heavens as the sphere of blessing).

Realizing this, let us rejoice in the teaching of Colossians 1:13, that at the present time we are members of this supreme calling in the *Kingdom of the Son of His love*. Its basis is of course *redemption*:

“In Whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins”  
(Col. 1:14).

The words “through His blood” are omitted by the best Greek texts, though, keeping Ephesians 1:7 in mind, they are obviously implied. The Word of God knows nothing about redemption that is not based upon the sacrificial death of Christ. This is absolutely central to all the great plan of God and verses twenty and twenty-two of Colossians one give us this basic truth (and compare Romans 3:24). We now enter a section that experiences depths and heights, dealing with the old and new creations, one material and the other spiritual, and this with the object of combating the Colossian heresy. Paul shows that the Lord Jesus is *pre-eminent in both*, which would be a shattering blow to the seducing doctrines promulgated by the opposers at Colossae.

Several points of doctrine brought forward in this section are echoed again in 3:9–15:

*Colossians 1:13–20 and 3:9–15.*

- A 1:15,16 The Creator, The Image
- B 1:20 Reconciliation of heaven and earth
- C 1:17,18 Christ pre-eminent. All in Him
- D 1:20 Peace and forgiveness of sins
- E 1:22 Holy, blameless, unreprouable
- A 3:10 Created after Image
- B 3:11 Reconciliation of Jew and Gentile
- C 3:11 Christ is all and in all
- D 3:13,15 Peace. Forgive quarrel
- E 3:9,12 Put off, put on, holy and beloved.



Charles H. Welch draws our attention to the parallels between John one, Colossians one and Hebrews one:

<i>John 1</i>	<i>Colossians 1</i>	<i>Hebrews 1</i>
The Word	The Image	The express Image
God never seen	The invisible God	The substance
All things made by Him	All things created by Him	Ages, heaven and earth made by Him
Preferred before John	Pre-eminent in all	Superior to angels
His fulness	All the fulness	Heir of all things
	All things by Him consist	All things upheld by Him
The Word was God		Thy Throne, O God
The only-begotten Son	Firstborn	Firstborn

The tremendous statements of these three contexts and others as well must be taken into consideration if we are to get any true appreciation of the passage we are considering. The Apostle here goes right to the heart of the matter that was troubling the Colossians by asserting the *primacy* of Christ in all things. The truth of this was sufficient to show up the false teaching at Colossae for what it was, the “angel of light” doctrine that emanated from the arch-deceiver, Satan himself. The mediatorial position and work of the Lord Jesus Christ in creation is first brought before us:

“Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in Him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through Him and unto Him; and He is before all things, and in Him all things consist” (Col. 1:15–17 R.V.).

God is spirit (John 4:24 R.V. margin), and as such He is invisible and unapproachable. He needs a concrete representation of Himself if ever He is to be known in any measure by limited created beings and this has been fulfilled in Christ as the Image of God, or, as Hebrews one puts it, “the Express Image of His substance”, the exact representation of all God is. This was the pre-existent Christ, the Logos, through Whom everything came into being and in Whose Image Adam was created (Gen. 1:26). We must be very careful with the word “firstborn” (*prototokos*) and not make the gross error of arguing from the English word that Christ was the first being who was “born” or

created. This the Arians do, but they conveniently ignore the argument of the context. Christ was the Firstborn *because by Him all things were created* (Col. 1:16). In other words, it is as *God the Creator* He is described as the “Firstborn” and only as such could it be said with truth that “*He is before ALL things*” (verse 17). This could never be said of a created being. We quote from *The Deity of Christ* by Professor F. F. Bruce and Dr. W. J. Martin:

“The word ‘firstborn’ had long since ceased to be used exclusively in its literal sense, just as ‘prime’ (from Latin *primus*—first) with us. The Prime Minister is not the first minister we have had, he is the most pre-eminent. A man in the ‘prime’ of life has long since left the first part of his life behind. Similarly, ‘firstborn’ came to denote *not priority in time, but pre-eminence in rank*”. (Italics ours.)\*

In other words, *prototokos* expresses *primacy and great dignity of rank* and rather than limiting Christ or degrading Him into the position of a created being, it does just the opposite. Furthermore the word used by Paul, *all*, means exactly what it says. Had the Lord been a created being, the Apostle would have had to use the Greek word meaning “other things” or the word meaning “remainder” or “rest” and the phrase would then have read that He was the first of all other beings to be created or born. Not only this, but Paul would have described Him as *first-created*, a term never applied to Christ. But let us note verse seventeen. “And He *is* before all things”; not He *was* before all things. This is surely parallel to the great statement of of the Lord in John 8:58 “Before Abraham was, I AM” (*ego eimi*).

We must also take careful note of the fact that not only did the whole creation come into being through His agency, *its goal is to Him also*. It is not only *through* Him, but “*unto* Him”. This again stresses His primacy in all things. Such a statement could never have been made with truth in connection with any *created* being, however great. Not only was He the Creator, but His omnipotence holds the creation together—“by Him all things consist”. This goes far beyond the impersonal force of cohesion.

There is no doubt then, that as far as the material creation is

\* This most important subject is also dealt with in the author's *The Lord Jesus Christ – God or only man?* published by The Berean Publishing Trust.

concerned, the Lord Jesus Christ was its originator and is its upholder, and only One could fill this role, namely God Himself. Anything less than this would have nullified Paul's aim and argument, namely to combat the Colossian heresy in respect to degrading the Person and Work of Christ. It would have played into the hands of the opposers.

When the Apostle describes creation, he relates it to all things in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, but he concentrates on the invisible heavenly beings, "thrones, dominions", "authorities", "principalities and powers", for he had the erroneous teaching at Colossae in view, which exalted angels and worshipped them (Col. 2:18) putting them in the place of Christ Himself. These heavenly beings rather than being equal with God, *must have been created by Christ* and as such owed their being to His work and were subject to Him. These five classes of angel-princes seem to represent the highest orders of the angelic realm, the aristocracy of heaven. Some were hostile powers and were conquered by the Saviour's work on the cross (Col. 2:15). This, too, exalted Christ far above them.

There is no doubt, then, relative to the creation of this gigantic universe which includes the heavens, Christ is pre-eminent as Creator and Lord. No created being, however great, could fill this role. The whole witness of the Word of God, the Old and New Testaments, points to *God* as Creator. The epistle to the Hebrews states that "He laid the foundations of the earth, the heavens are the work of His hands" (Heb. 1:10), and "He that built all things is God" (Heb. 3:4). God has not deputized any creature to do this work, nor could such a being accomplish anything so gigantic. But this is only half the story. Paul is now going to consider *the new creation*, and here, as in the material realm, the Lord Jesus Christ is First and Supreme.

"And He is the Head of the Body, the church: Who is the Beginning, the Firstborn from the dead; *that in all things He might have the pre-eminence*" (first place) (Col. 1:18 R.V.).

It is clear that the title "the Firstborn from the dead" balances "the Firstborn of all creation" (1:15). It was in resurrection, His victory over death, that He became the First of a new order. He was the "Firstfruits" (1 Cor. 15:23) in resurrection and the Beginning (*arche*) of a new creation. This word occurs in the Divine titles used in Revelation 21:6, "I am Alpha and Omega,

the *beginning (arche)* and the end”, and Revelation 22:13, “I am Alpha and Omega, the *beginning (arche)* and the end, the first and the last”. These majestic titles take us back to the middle chapters of Isaiah’s prophecy where God asserts:

“I am the *first*, and I am the *last*; and *beside Me there is no God*. . . . Is there a God beside Me? Yea, there is no God” (Isa. 44:6–8).

“Hearken unto Me, O Jacob and Israel, My called; I am He; I am the first, I also am the last” (Isa. 48:12).

There can be no doubt from these verses that the title “the first and the last” belongs to Jehovah, God alone. *They are unconditionally given to the Lord Jesus in the book of Revelation.* It is *in this sense* that He is the *beginning*, the First in all creation, either material or spiritual, and this is the meaning the word bears in the much misunderstood title in Revelation 3:14, where the word *beginning* is this very word *arche*, “first”. And in the context we are studying He is revealed as the “Beginning” or “the First”, with one object:

“that in ALL things He might have *the first place* (pre-eminence)” (verse 18).

Note it is not merely the first place in *some things*, but the *first place in everything*, and there is only one Person Who can rightly have such an exalted and unique position and that is God Himself and He has been revealed to us in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Image of the invisible God, the Head of the church, the Body. In the light of all this, the heresy at Colossae was shown up in its true colours. The pre-gnostic ideas of many spiritual angelic mediators between God and men, claiming man’s adoration, are swept aside and shown to be part of the Satanic lie. The opposers at Colossae who were seeking to put over these ideas were faced with a challenge of the first magnitude. They either had to abandon them completely or persist in their deception and apostasy, and all today who belittle or down-grade Christ are in a similar position. In these perilous times we should maintain the utmost watchfulness over all that comes our way concerning Him, either spoken or written. No one who names the name of the Lord Jesus and wishes to be regarded as sincere and faithful can take any less or different position. Men today either stone Him or worship Him as God manifest in the flesh. There is no middle position.



The Apostle Paul continues the theme of the uniqueness of Christ:

“For it was the good pleasure of the Father that in Him should all the fulness dwell; and through Him to reconcile all things unto Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things upon the earth, or things in the heavens” (1:19,20 R.V.).

Not only is Christ first as Creator and as Head of the Body, but in Him *all* the fulness of the Godhead dwells in a bodily form (1:19; 2:9). Members of the Body as earthen vessels can be filled with God’s fulness (Eph. 3:19 R.V.—and note the “unto” rather than “with” of the A.V.), but neither they nor any other being, angelic or otherwise, can contain ALL the fulness of God. *Pleroma*, fulness, is one of the great words of the Prison Epistles, but it also occurs elsewhere. In the Gospels it is used of the patch put in to “fill up” the rent in an old garment (Matt. 9:16; Mark 2:21) and of the left-over fragments which “filled” several baskets after the miraculous feeding of the multitudes (Mark 6:43). In Romans it is used both of the Jew and the Gentile (11:12,25). For the Jew, restoration after their “diminishing” in judgment for their unbelief, and for the Gentile, the completion of the Gentile period covering Israel’s *lo-ammi* condition.

In Ephesians, the church is the *fulness* of Christ (Eph. 1:23) and each member is “filled full (complete) in Him” (Col. 2:10 R.V.) and in the verses we are studying, the Lord Jesus Himself contains *all* God’s fulness. *Pleroma* is obviously a word of great doctrinal import, sometimes with the thought of a rent or gap in the background, or it concerns the completion or totality of what the context treats. Here in Colossians, Paul is asserting that in Christ the completion of Deity dwells. He is not merely a being endued with great power, but is rather the dwelling place of the very essence of God.

From this follows His great reconciling work based on the offering of Himself on Calvary’s cross which touches heaven and earth, *ta panta*, all things that are contained in the mighty, redemptive purpose and will of God. We have no real ground for universalism here, for we must remember that the same cross that is the Divine basis for the reconciliation of “the all things” (literally) is also the means whereby principalities and powers

who were the enemies of God have been defeated and brought into subjection. The wide sweep of reconciliation here has in mind the creation which became subject to vanity because of man's sin (Rom. 8:20) and looks forward to the final new creation of a heaven and earth wherein dwells righteousness and from which all rebels and sinners, whether angelic or man, are excluded.

In Colossians 1:20 this reconciliation was a decisive act (note the *arist* tense of the verb, not future) pointing us to the *basis* wrought once for all on the cross by the Lord Jesus, and upon this alone this mighty reconciliation rests and comes down to individual believers who once were "alienated and enemies in their minds" to God. The verb for "reconcile" is *apokatalasso*, found also in Ephesians 2:16 and nowhere else in the New Testament. The shorter word *katallasso* occurs in Romans 5:10 (twice), 2 Corinthians 5:18,19,20 and the cognate noun *katallage* is found in Romans 5:11; 11:15; 2 Corinthians 5:18,19. *Apokatalasso* appears to be an intensified form of the verb "to reconcile" and is kept by the Holy Spirit to the prison letters of Paul where reconciliation is seen in its highest and widest sense. All this has been accomplished by *one Person* and *one act*, that is the Lord Jesus Christ and the sacrificial offering of Himself on the cross, paying the penalty of sin, which is death. No angelic mediator could have accomplished this and all the while we must bear in mind the *object* here of Paul's writing, to show up the falsity of the heresy that was undermining the faith of believers at Colossae.

The reconciliation of Ephesians two deals with the creation of a "new man" from the Jew who was nigh and the Gentile who was alienated and at a distance, and the removal of all barriers between them in this newly created company. Here in Colossians after the mighty sweep of all creation, Paul shows how this full reconciliation touches each individual believer in the Body of Christ:

"Yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and without blemish and un-reproveable before Him" (verse 22 R.V.).

The ultimate aim of this great work of the Lord is to present each member, and the Body as a whole in holiness and

perfection. In the original will of the Father, this company was "chosen in Christ" to be "holy and without blemish before Him in love" (Eph. 1:4 R.V.). In the future presentation day this will is carried out and completed in all its fulness through the redemptive work of the Son. *Amomos*, "without spot", is used of Christ Himself in 1 Peter 1:19 and this means that this church has nothing less than the very holiness of the Lord and in such a condition is "unreproveable", literally, "not accused". There are no grounds for any accusation (Rom. 8:33,34). What a goal for sinners such as we are! Can we ever thank the Lord enough for all this? Surely words alone will not do. Our very lives must reflect here and now something of this Christ-likeness.

The Apostle Paul was concerned that this glorious prospect which he brought before the Colossian believers should not lead to complacency or slackness. If it is God's will that they should be presented as holy as He is, then He wills their continuing in faithfulness during this life:

"If so be that ye continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel which ye heard, which was preached in all creation under heaven; whereof I Paul was made a minister" (1:23 R.V.).

The Apostle assumes they will continue in the course in which they have begun, no matter what temptations or difficulties come their way. He knew the danger of being hindered in the "race" and the possibility of falling out, with the Lord's disqualification at His award day as regards reward for service. Did not Paul say of himself "I do not run aimlessly . . . lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified" (1 Cor. 9:26,27 R.S.V.). This indeed would be a shameful thing after all that God has accomplished for the members of His Body. Hence the importance of their not being enticed away from the truth by the insidious teaching that was being circulated in their midst. The Colossian believers should not think that they were a small isolated group, for the fulness of this great gospel had been declared far and wide to the limits of the then known world.

In the Lord's strength they could stand and become "more than conquerors" through Him that loved, died, rose again and ascended for them.

Paul now deals with the effect of the ministry given him by Christ as it related to himself and its relationship to the church which is the Body of Christ:

“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His Body’s sake which is the church; whereof I was made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which was given me to you-ward” (Col. 1:24,25 R.V.).

In the letter to the Ephesians the Apostle expresses the desire that these believers should not faint at his tribulations *for them* (Eph. 3:13). Rather than indulging in self-pity, he rejoices at the sufferings he was enduring which were a necessary part of his faithful witness for the Lord and His people. At his conversion, Christ had expressly stated “For I will show him *how great things* he must suffer for My Name’s sake” (Acts 9:16) and in this perhaps Paul was unique. In the ordinary way the Lord does not inform us beforehand as to the trials and difficulties we must undergo in the future. “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matt. 6:34) and we can be thankful that this is so. How many of us could stand up to such knowledge, such as, if we knew that some terrible suffering and loss awaited us in a year’s time? But with the Apostle Paul suffering would not be surprising after the Lord’s statement recorded in the Acts. He did not shrink from such suffering, but rather was anxious to fill up just that measure that the Lord had willed for him. When writing to the Colossians he had not yet reached this stage, but was ready to go on in his experience of trial and difficulty until the measure had been reached and “filled”.

A similar figure is used when speaking of “filling up” sins (1 Thess. 2:16) or of filling up “the measure of the fathers” (Matt. 23:32). While it is possible that some of our suffering may result from our own foolishness or lack of faithfulness, it is a joy to realize that all sufferings connected with true service and witness are the “sufferings *of Christ*”. The link between the Lord and His redeemed people is so close that what affects them affects Him. Paul learned this at the outset, on the road to Damascus. “Why are you persecuting *Me*?”, the Lord said to him, referring to his persecution of believers (Acts 9:4).

The sufferings then that the Apostle was enduring when writing to the Colossian church, had a twofold aspect: (1) as it



affected the Lord and (2) its connection with the instructing and building up of the Body of Christ. What it does *not* mean is that Paul or any other believer could have a share in the redemptive sufferings and work of salvation endured by the Saviour on the cross. This would have contradicted the whole witness of the Apostle in connection with the proclamation of the gospel of God's grace apart from merit or works, and indeed goes against the whole tenor of Scripture on this subject. If anyone cites Matthew 24:13, then the context and time setting must be carefully studied. The verse cannot be properly understood if this is not done and in any case Scripture cannot contradict Scripture.

Paul realized his special calling and its significance. He knew that he had been divinely called to discharge a special stewardship of truth that was entirely new, for up to this point God had hid it *in Himself* (Eph. 3:9) from all previous times and generations of people (Col. 1:26). It was a calling associated with riches of grace and glory beyond imagination and all this was principally for those who from a spiritual standpoint had been outcasts, Godless, Christless and hopeless (Eph. 2:11–13). This stewardship or “dispensation” had been a “mystery” or secret because of the fact that God had hidden it, not even in the Scriptures where searching might have discovered it, but *in Himself*. And if God hides in this way, who can find, until He chooses to reveal? Yet how many profess to find this secret in the Old Testament or in Scriptures written earlier than the Prison Epistles of Paul! This surely must be unbelief and deception, yet it often poses as spirituality! The Apostle had faithfully ministered all through the period covered by the Acts of the Apostles, but he never once described this ministry as *God's secret* which he was making known for the first time. Rather he insisted that all of it accorded with and went no further than Moses and the Prophets, i.e., the Old Testament (Acts 26:22,23). Therefore this early ministry of his could not have described as a “mystery”, something Divinely hidden, but was one of *revelation* since the Pentateuch and the Prophets had declared it.

It would be a good thing in our Bible study to contrast the secret of Ephesians three and Colossians one with truth which has never been hidden, such as the condition of man as a sinner

and the only remedy for it, God's salvation. Or the fact that from Abraham onwards God had Gentile blessings in mind all the while, even though for a long time He concentrated on Israel, preparing them as a channel of truth to reach the whole world. Those who imagine this great "secret" is made known in the gospel of grace, or in Gentile blessing with Israel, have surely not gripped just what the "Mystery" really is, for both these things were *never hidden*. One almost gets tired of reading this sort of explanation of the Mystery in expositions of Ephesians and Colossians, the writers apparently being unable to see that they are making the Word of God contradict itself.

The Apostle now enlarges on this special ministry which Christ had given him relating to the church which is His Body:

"... His Body's sake, which is the church, whereof I was made a minister, according to the dispensation (stewardship) of God which was given me to you-ward, to fulfil the word of God, even the mystery (secret) which hath been hid from all ages and generations, but now hath it been manifested to His saints, to whom God was pleased to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery (secret) among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (1:24-27 R.V.).

This revelation and stewardship was given to Paul alone. There is no hint by any other New Testament writer that they had received such a commission from the ascended Christ, nor do they claim to reveal any such Divine secrets. They were appointed to serve elsewhere in the great purpose of God and they speak with authority in that particular sphere of service to which they were sent, chiefly in connection with the people of Israel who are the key to world blessing and the kingdom of God *on earth*. But Paul's commission deals with outcast Gentiles whose divine destiny after salvation is *heavenly*, whose commonwealth exists *in the heavens* (Phil. 3:20), and who are now seen *positionally* in those very heavens "seated together in Christ" (Eph. 2:6). This was certainly a fulness of revelation that had never been made known before. The Old Testament knows nothing of it, nor does the New Testament until we reach the prison letters of the Apostle Paul where he first unfolds the wonders of this divine secret and its purpose.

He assures us that, at this point, God *willed* or *chose* (R.S.V.) to make it known. Israel, the covenant people of God, had

miserably failed and been set aside in blindness, hardness of heart and unbelief (Acts 28:28). Instead of choosing another channel and proceeding with His purpose of world blessing and the establishment of His kingdom of righteousness and peace on earth, God now reveals a *heavenly* side to His kingdom purpose. This concerns the calling out of a *heavenly* people, principally Gentile, with a heavenly hope, with whom the aristocracy of heaven, principalities and powers, are connected and are now learning the manifold wisdom of God. This company He plans to be a permanent home (habitation) for Himself (Eph. 2:20–22). What a destiny and what a revelation!

As far as the redeemed are concerned, it is surely unmatched in the rest of Scripture! No wonder the Apostle counted it the highest honour to be the human channel through which it was revealed! No wonder he desired above all things to make it known at whatever cost to himself!

Ephesians 3:3,6–9 and Colossians 1:27 are complementary in revealing this great secret. The Ephesian context tells us that the Body consists of chosen Jews and Gentiles who in this out-calling lose their status *as such*. In this church there is no Israelite or Gentile (Col. 3:10,11). They are divinely called to be a *new creation* (not an evolution or improvement from what had gone before), a *new man* (Eph. 2:15), and are members on a perfect equality for the first time, “joint-heirs”, “joint-partakers” and forming a “joint-Body” (Eph. 3:6). As we have seen, it had never been a secret that Gentiles would be blessed with and through Israel. This was God’s express purpose in calling out Israel, as He clearly made known to Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3). But in this relationship Israel did not lose her identity or her priority. Even during the Acts period, the Gentile was reminded that he was but a wild olive grafted into the true (Israel) to partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree, that is, Israel’s covenant blessings, but in doing this he was reminded “thou bearest not the root, *but the root thee*” (Rom. 11:18). Only by the means salvation was attained were they equal, that is by grace alone (Rom. 3:21–23), for God has only *one* way of salvation whether it touches Jew or Gentile, namely—faith in Christ Jesus apart from any human works or merit.

The context in Colossians with which we are dealing gives another aspect. In Colossians 1:27 the preposition *en* occurs

twice “this mystery *among* (*en*) the Gentiles, which is Christ *en* (in or among) you, the hope of glory”. It does not seem likely that Paul uses this preposition in two different senses in these phrases which are so closely linked in position and meaning. The normal sense of *en* is “in”, but we cannot translate the former occurrence as “Christ *in* the Gentiles”. With the plural, *en* can mean “among” and translators are forced to render it as such. Why not keep this for its second occurrence which would then be “Christ *amongst* you” (Gentiles, as the A.V. margin). If we render it as “Christ *in* you”, we make the indwelling of Christ the secret hid from all past time and generations of people. But the marginal reading is more accurate to the doctrine concerning the Mystery. The fact of Christ’s indwelling of the believer is wonderful indeed and its experience is a matchless privilege. But this had been made known long before Ephesians and Colossians had been written and had never been called a secret. In Isaiah 57:15 we read:

“For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, Whose name is Holy; I *dwelt* in the high and lofty place, *with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit . . .*”.

“Jesus answered and said unto him, if a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and *We will come unto him, and make Our abode (dwelling place) with him*” (John 14:23).

“And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are One: *I in them*, and Thou in Me . . .” (John 17:22,23).

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, *but Christ liveth in me . . .*” (Gal. 2:20).

From these Scriptures it will be evident that God’s indwelling of His redeemed children, wonderful though it is, is no secret which had been kept hidden “from ages and from generations” (Col. 1:26). It had been known as far back as Old Testament times and Paul in his first epistle (Galatians, written during the Acts) had declared this to be his precious experience and he was writing to churches *who had a large proportion of Gentile believers*. But he does not say here that this constituted the Mystery (the Secret) which he had been given as a special stewardship to pass on to the Gentiles. In fact he does not once speak of the churches of the Acts period as being linked with the Mystery revealed and described in Ephesians and in this epistle.



Later on in the letter to the Ephesians he shows that the Gentiles were by nature “without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (2:12). But in this new creation their great distance from Christ Jesus was cancelled. Now, instead of being “far off”, Christ was *among them* in the closest relationship as Head, independently of Israel or the covenants made with Israel. A new vista was opened to them connected with “riches of glory” that belong to heavenly places where Christ is now enthroned and positionally they are seen by God as “seated together *in* Christ Jesus” in these heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). No such calling had ever been made known before, least of all to Gentiles so far off from God and utterly hopeless in themselves! What riches of glory are here! This new calling is closely connected to the *wealth* of the Godhead. “Riches” occurs eight times in Paul’s Prison Epistles and each reference is tremendous in its implications and needs revelation and careful and prolonged meditation to savour its fulness and wonder. We give the occurrences:

“... the forgiveness of sins, according to the *riches* of His grace” (Eph. 1:7).

“What the *riches* of the glory of His inheritance in the saints (or in the ‘holiest of all’)” (Eph. 1:18).

“That ... He might show the *exceeding riches* of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:7).

“That I should preach *among the Gentiles* the unsearchable *riches* of Christ” (Eph. 3:8).

“That He would grant you, according to the *riches* of His glory” (Eph. 3:16).

“My God shall supply all your need according to His *riches* in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19).

“... what is the *riches* of the glory of this mystery” (Col. 1:27).

“unto all *riches* of the full assurance of understanding, that they may know the mystery of God, even Christ” (Col. 2:2 R.V.).

These verses make known some of the almost incredible wonders of this new dispensation or stewardship which is God’s revelation “for us Gentiles”. Here indeed is truth, that up to this point had been kept secret. Where previously can we find such wealth, such spiritual treasure given in grace to far-off

outsiders? All this was summed up in Christ Jesus and He is now “among us” Gentiles in all His fulness. This indeed warrants Paul’s statement “the riches of the glory of this secret, Christ among you (Gentiles) the hope of glory”.

We wish however to point out that the indwelling Christ is certainly true for members of the church which is His Body for in the second prayer of Ephesians the Apostle prays:

“... that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; *that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith . . .*” (3:16,17),

but Paul does not include this as part of *the secret* Christ had commissioned him to make known to the Gentiles. It is profitable to note that the important word “Gentile” in the Prison Epistles also occurs eight times, like the word “riches” (Eph. 2:11; 3:1; 3:6,8; 4:17; Col. 1:27; 2 Tim. 1:11; 4:17). Another key word is *doxa*, glory, which occurs twenty-four times in Paul’s epistles written after the Acts. However baffled we may be to explain this great word, we may rest assured that it stands for something absolutely real, even though too wonderful for explanation in human terms, for it enters into the very nature of God and the exaltation of the Lord Jesus “far above all” that can be conceived, and He is the “hope of (this) glory”, which is so vitally connected with the heavenly inheritance of the Body, destined to become the “dwelling place of God” when completed (Eph. 2:20–22).

Paul now tells the Colossian believers that it is this ascended Christ, in Whom dwells all this spiritual wealth, that he is proclaiming to them:

“... Christ in you (among you), the hope of glory: Whom we proclaim, admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ; whereunto I labour also, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily” (Col. 1:27–29 R.V.).

We should notice that there are two “presentations” in Colossians one and they are not just repetitions of each other. In verse twenty-two every member of the Body is assured of being presented “holy, and without blemish and unreprouable in His sight” for this is what the Father originally willed (Eph. 1:3,4)

and the Son has died to procure (5:25–27). In verse twenty-eight however the presentation is different although the English version appears to teach the same, that is to “present every man perfect in Christ”. Here the word “perfect” is the very important word *teleios* which means “mature” as opposed to infancy and inexperience. That all believers should develop spiritually and grow up, leaving babyhood behind Ephesians 4:13,14 makes perfectly clear. There is a danger of this not happening the context we are considering in Colossians reveals. Paul laboured intensely *kopiaō* (implying labouring to the point of weariness) that this would not be the experience of the Colossian saints. He knew well that immature believers easily become the dupes of Satan. His “cunning craftiness” easily deceives such, and this may have been at the root of the trouble at Colossae. The error that was creeping in and which this epistle directly combats, most probably was gaining ground in the minds of some who were not growing in grace and the knowledge and acknowledgment of Christ. Such are always a danger in a Christian community and the Apostle therefore strives, according to the working of Christ’s resurrection power, to bring such back to Truth and vital spiritual growth which can only take place when the Lord Jesus is accorded His rightful place as the pre-eminent One in the Divine purpose of the ages.

## CHAPTER TWO OF THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

In the first verse of chapter two Paul refers again to his striving for them and also for those at neighbouring Laodicea and the fact that they had not “seen his face in the flesh” shows that they had been brought to a saving knowledge of Christ through the ministry of others, in this case most probably the witness of Epaphras. The Apostle’s concern for them was that they might be strengthened (“comforted”) and “knit together in love”. Divine love he assures us later on in the epistle is “the tie of maturity” (3:14) that binds together the people of God. This love is pre-eminent among the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22) and the unity of spirit which is cemented by this love has been made by Him. Satan always seeks to *divide*. God always *unites* His children. Real unity is strength and division leads to weakness. Let no one be deceived. There can be no “worthy walk” without keeping “this unity of the Spirit” which has been made between the members of the Body. Any breaking of this can only lead to trouble and a grieved Spirit of God (Eph. 4:30). Not only this but it gives place to the Devil and he will not be slow to take advantage of the situation. Hence the injunction to guard this unity as the first part of the worthy walk (Eph. 4:1–16).

“... being *knit together* in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, that they may know the mystery (secret) of God, even Christ” (Col. 2:2 R.V.).

Then follows one of Paul’s supreme phrases, an antidote surely to the false knowledge that was leading some astray at Colossae and possibly elsewhere. The *gnosis*, knowledge, that the false teachers were trying to foist on the Colossians might have been externally impressive with its prohibitions and false holiness, but it could never lead to the “full assurance of understanding” of God and the One Who sums Him up concretely, namely the Lord Jesus Christ. The “secret of God” *is Christ*—He is not just a part of it. This should remind us that not all God’s secrets are *fully* revealed. The Saviour declared:

“... *no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth*



any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him" (Matt. 11:27).

It is impossible for any finite being to completely comprehend God whether revealed as Christ or as the Father. Now we only know "in part" (1 Cor. 13:12). Those who deny the deity of Christ and glibly talk of Him being a created being should remember this. Our knowledge of this profound mystery can only grow and deepen as we *acknowledge in practice* the One of Whom it can be said with truth that "in Him dwelleth *all* the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9). The words of C. H. Welch are to the point here:

"The touchstone of all doctrine, whether it be expressed as 'philosophy', whether it has the sanction of 'tradition' or comes with all the force of the accepted 'rudiments of the world', is CHRIST (Col. 2:8). Christ is revealed as our very life itself (Col. 3:4), and eventually as our 'ALL and in all' (Col. 3:11). It is the simplest yet the most profound lesson of the ages. 'The mystery of God' is the all embracing secret within which all other mysteries (secrets) find their sphere, and which are all solved in the Person of Christ. 'That I may know *Him*' is the climax of all prayer. 'I know *Whom* I have believed' is the basis of all assurance. 'To know the love of *Christ*' is to possess a knowledge far beyond our greatest faculties. The excellency of the knowledge of *Christ* makes all lesser attainments so much offal, and the very unity of the faith unto which we all press is, above all, 'the knowledge of the *Son of God*' (Eph. 4:13). Paul's gospel was *Christ* (1 Cor. 1:23; 2 Cor. 4:5; Gal. 1:16). Paul's doctrine was *Christ* (Eph. 4:20). *His* life here in the flesh (Gal. 2:20), the goal of this life (Phil. 1:21), and the life of resurrection glory (Col. 3:4) was *Christ*. No language of ours can express anything approaching the fulness that the heart realizes to be resident in these words of Colossians 2:2. Nothing less than a life-long exposition of these epistles could hope to touch the fringe of so mighty a theme" (*The Berean Expositor*. Vol. 23. pp. 44,45).

If these wise words impress afresh with the mightiness of the theme of Christ Jesus they are not in vain. Truly in Him alone are "*all* the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden" (Col. 2:3 R.V.) and this is the great antidote to all error of doctrine, such as the false teachers were seeking to foist upon the Colossian believers. As Paul had previously insisted to the Corinthian church, Christ alone is the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24,30). This glorification of the Lord Jesus was for the express purpose of preventing those at Colossae from being deceived:

“This I say, that no one may delude you with persuasiveness of speech. For though I am absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ” (verses 4,5 R.V.).

Although the Apostle was severed by distance in his Roman prison, yet in the tidings that were brought to him by Epaphras he was with them in thought and prayer, keenly alert to their needs and noting their response. In the next two verses Paul sums up their Christian experience in their vital relationship to Christ Jesus, the One Who is Lord and God:

“As therefore ye received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and builded up in Him, and stablished in your faith, even as ye were taught, abounding in thanksgiving” (Col. 2:6, 7 R.V.).

They had received Him as Saviour and Lord and thus were “rooted” in Him. They were now expected to *acknowledge* Him in practice as Lord and Master. The Apostle uses two illustrations here to express the truth. “Rooted” is the perfect participle in the Greek which points to an act that took place in the past, but whose effects persist in the present. This “rooting” in Christ and close unity with Him is true for all time and therefore speaks of continuous security. Such healthy rootage leads to healthy growth and fruit. “Built up” is the present participle which indicates a steady spiritual growth. “Established” likewise expresses a continuous experience of strengthening and confirming resulting from this Christ-centred living. The “faith” is the body of revealed truth that had been given by the risen and ascended Christ through the Apostle Paul (Gal. 1:11,12; Eph. 3:1–9; 2 Tim. 1:13,14; 2:2) and as a final note, abounding thanksgiving and gratitude is stressed, for this directs thought away from self to the Lord Who is the only source and substance of these glorious truths and to Whom all praise and glory should be given.

We now enter the distinctive section of this epistle which deals with the Colossian heresy and its antidote (Col. 2:8–3:4). Consequently the Apostle commences with a word of warning:

“Take heed lest there shall be any one that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ: for in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and in Him ye are made full, Who is the Head of all principality and power” (2:8–10 R.V.).

We have already touched upon the false teaching that was creeping into the Colossian church. While it is difficult to get a clear picture of it in detail, it was apparently a blending of Jewish legalism and pagan philosophy with its stress on the complete antithesis between spirit and matter which was considered to be evil. Consequently a holy God was divorced from His creation and no direct contact was possible between them. Any contact could only be achieved through intermediaries who were looked on as spiritual lords or rulers of the seven planetary spheres in which Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn moved. Each was believed to be governed by one of these lords (an *archon*) and no direct approach to God was possible except through these angelic mediators. If this was accepted as truth, then one could understand the concern to please or placate these spirit beings.

The whole of this deceptive lie was an attack upon the Biblical doctrine of creation and redemption wrought through the sole agency of the Lord Jesus. He alone was the antidote to such falsity. The new teaching stressed a higher wisdom, but *all* the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found solely in Him. He alone was Creator; He alone summed up the Godhead bodily. He alone was the *one Mediator* between God and men and was also the conqueror of principalities and powers that were the believers' enemies. Therefore to leave Him was to slip back into darkness and bondage from which they had been redeemed, no matter how plausibly the new ideas were put across with their stress on a sanctity and humility which, seen in their true colours, were completely false.

The whole history of man since Eden has been interwoven with deception. Satan is above all, the arch-deceiver. As such he deceived Eve and has been deceiving mankind ever since. There is no protection from this apart from the revelation of truth, the Word of God, and the living Word Whom it reveals, Who is the Truth (John 14:6). In Him alone there is safety. So long as we hold fast to God's Word of truth and rightly divide it, refusing to go one step beyond what is revealed we are safe. To do otherwise is to follow darkness rather than light, to sow the seeds of error and finally to reap the harvest of shame, bondage and Divine disapproval. This is Satan's one aim, to lead believers away from the freedom in Christ and to bring them back under his control

and slavery. “Let no man deceive you” said the Apostle, and the call is just as vital and necessary today as ever it was. Satan may alter his tactics but the end is always the same although it is covered up by attractive presentation, “plausible speech” and the striking and capable personality of the so-called “ministers of righteousness” that Satan often uses.

We should note from this context in Colossians that his attack is threefold, described as “false reasoning”, “enticing” and “spoiling” and in carrying this out he uses three means (1) a vain and deceitful philosophy, (2) human tradition and (3) rudiments or elements of the world.

We can easily be deceived by false reasoning. While faith is never *unreasonable*, there are many Divine things that are *above* our reasoning or ability to comprehend. We are therefore shut up in these things to the Word of God and this should be enough for all who are convinced of its truth. If we do not accept this, then we become a prey to the Deceiver and his lies which are put over with “enticing words” and made to appear so attractive and right. The Apostle deliberately avoided “plausible speech” in his dealings with the Corinthian church, so that their faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God (1 Cor. 2:1–5) and so be safe from Satan’s wiles.

To “spoil” is *sulagogeo*, “to take captive or to kidnap”. We repeat, this is ever Satan’s aim—to undo the freedom which has been wrought for us by Christ’s redemption and to bring again into slavery. Philosophy and vain deceit can be treated as *hendiadys*, that is, not two separate things, but one, a philosophy that is both empty (vain) and deceitful.

What is philosophy? It is the search by unaided human minds to discover knowledge and wisdom and to generally get to the bottom of things. There is nothing wrong in the quest for knowledge providing the searcher keeps within the limits of human capability of understanding and experience. But directly he ventures further than this, that is into the realm of God and infinity, he is right out of his depth and is like a cork being tossed about by the ocean. His ideas then become mere speculation, however cleverly presented, and thus are empty (vain) and devoid of truth and are completely deceptive.

We should not limit Paul’s term “philosophy” to the Greeks



and Romans. Josephus makes clear that the word was applied to the various sects of Israel:

“The Jews had for a great while those sects of philosophy peculiar to themselves; the sect of the Essenes, and the sect of the Sadducees and the third set of opinions was that called the Pharisees” (*Antiquities* 18:1,2).

It apparently was a mixture of Jewish and Greek philosophy that was creeping in at Colossae as a substitute for the Divine realities in Christ. It emphasized the primacy of human reason and knowledge as against God’s revelation of Himself in the Person of the Lord Jesus in Whom He had spoken finally. Christ-centred revelation is the opposite of any humanistic philosophy which begins with man and makes man’s reason and intellect the measure of truth. Such a philosophy is utterly unconscious of its finite limitations, nor does it realize the human mind has been affected and blinded by sin.

The wise believer on the other hand comes to the Word of truth in humility to hear what God has to say to him. He is conscious of the limitations of his intellect and is willing to be taught by the Holy Spirit and not make his own reason the final arbiter of truth. It is still true to say with the Apostle Paul “the world by wisdom knew not God” (1 Cor. 1:21). The false philosophy at Colossae had two supports, the tradition of men and the rudiments of the world. Tradition is used in both a good and bad sense in the Scriptures. The word refers to knowledge that is passed on to others and while the New Testament was being written, this was done *orally* from the apostles. Consequently Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3:6 warns the one who walks disorderly and “not after *the tradition which he received of us*”. Thus it is used here in a good sense. This was the truth in its purity. But, alas, truth often gets human additions which finally swamp it. Christ accused the Jewish leaders of transgressing the commandment of God, and making it of none effect by their tradition (Matt. 15:2–6) and this has been a characteristic of Christendom ever since. How many tenets are held by professing Christians because *they have personally tested them from the Word of God*? For the most part they are believed because a certain church teaches them, or they are looked upon as the accepted thing and not questioned. This is disastrous to the appreciation of God’s truth, and brings the

person into bondage who blindly accepts such tradition. Both Peter and Paul knew the binding power of tradition (see Gal. 1:14 and 1 Pet. 1:18). We need to make quite certain we are not being held by its shackles. Many a belief, hoary with age, has become attached to the pure Word of God and been accepted as truth. This then was what Satan was using at Colossae to ensnare the believers there.

The third means of the enemy's attack was the "rudiments of the world". *Stoicheion* means a "first step" or the elements or beginnings of learning, the ABC of any subject as it were. In Hebrews 5:12-14 it is translated "first principles" and so linked with childhood and immaturity as contrasted with "full age" (perfect A.V.). The word also means *elemental substances*, the basic elements from which everything in the natural world is made. Peter assures us that the time is coming when these shall melt with fervent heat (2 Pet. 3:10,12) and a new heavens and earth will be created by God. Its third meaning is *heavenly bodies*, the signs of the zodiac and then the *elemental spirits* which were supposed to control the planets. Hence the reading of the Revised Standard Version in Colossians 2:8:

"See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the *elemental spirits of the universe*, and not according to Christ".

These "elemental spirits" are the evil spiritual rulers supposedly in control of the seven planetary spheres to which we have already referred. Modern astrology, which has now become so popular, is a first step towards this sort of conception. It is difficult to decide which of the two meanings represented by the Authorized Version and Revised Standard Version obtain in Colossians two. Probably there is truth in both as regards the error in the Colossian church. Both could be means that the enemy of truth was using to lead the believers at Colossae away from Christ and the rich fulness they had in Him. The vain and deceitful philosophy undoubtedly was presented very attractively, but it was *not after Christ* (2:8). Here is the touchstone of all truth, the standard by which all things must be measured by the believer. Let us not be deceived. We need not waste our time with any Christian scheme that does not stand this test. What does it make of the Lord Jesus Christ? Is He First and Last, the Centre and the Circumference of it all? If He is not,

then if we are faithful, we can only do one thing, namely turn away from it.

The Apostle Paul now applies the corrective to all this error:

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and in Him ye are made full, Who is the Head of all principality and power” (2:9,10 R.V.).

Those who had *really embraced* by faith the supreme revelation of these two verses would surely not turn to the poverty-stricken substitute of spirit powers who had in any case been conquered by Christ on the cross (verse 15). In Christ Jesus alone the fulness of deity resided and that fulness had been imparted to believers. They had been “filled full” in Him, no matter what size vessel they were, small, medium or large. The link between the fulness of God and the filling of the believer, so apparent in the Greek has been veiled by the Authorized Version translation “complete” unless we think of it as “filled to the brim”. This is surely *one of the most stupendous truths for a believer to grasp*.

Once this has been realized, it immediately becomes apparent that each member of the Body *has everything* in Christ that is precious, worthwhile and eternal. There are no desirable extras. Anything that appears to be so, is a snare and a delusion. The Apostle is going to follow with the argument that this “filling” makes types and ritual completely unnecessary. At the best they can only be as unsubstantial *as shadows*. This Divine fulness which is spiritual is *the supreme reality* and none the less so because it cannot be touched or assessed by the senses. Who wants to try and grasp shadows when they have this incomparable fulness? Thousands alas do and in fact still cling to the shadows, which only shows how little conception they have of this overwhelming spiritual wealth in Christ.

The Apostle now gives the Divine ground work that makes this filling of God possible for the members of the Body:

“In Whom (Christ) ye were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with Him, through faith in the working of God, Who raised Him from the dead” (2:11,12 R.V.).

The circumcision of Christ was not the rite performed when He was eight days old but rather His crucifixion, the putting off of the body of the flesh as 1:22 has already expressed. The baptism is not the result of anything a man does. It is not the work of any Christian minister or leader. It is positively the *working of God* as verse twelve stresses. Just as the circumcision relating to the believer is not literal but spiritual (not made by human hands), so is this Divine linking and identification of the believer with Christ which is treated in Romans six and Ephesians two. No human being could accomplish this for himself or for anyone else. God does not wait till a saved person is immersed in water before He accomplishes this great work. It is *His operation* through and through and this becomes true the moment salvation is experienced. In just the same way the raising of the believer *with* Christ must be God's work alone. No dipping in water or raising out of it by a man can accomplish this. The dying, burial, quickening, raising and seating of the believer in Christ in the heavenlies is, we repeat, solely the *operation of God*. To bring any ritual operated by man here is to spoil the wonders of the context and ruin the Apostle's argument. He tells us that types and shadows have vanished because we now have the fulness of spiritual reality, being completely identified and made one with Christ in His death, burial, resurrection and ascension. It is pitiful to bring in *water baptism* here. This sticks out like a sore thumb. Even if one believed in baptismal regeneration (as do the Roman Catholic and high Churchmen) it is still out of place. If we are enjoying the glorious spiritual reality to the full, we need not be concerned with the types that once set it forth and even then not perfectly. We can surely let the "picture book" go and praise God for the stupendous fact that *in Christ*, we are now *filled to the brim* with His fulness and this is all of His doing. The Apostle Paul now proclaims the fact that each member of the Body of Christ is now free from the dominion of the law which was "contrary to us" and "against us":

"... Having blotted out the bond written in ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us: and He hath taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross" (Col. 2:14 R.V.).

The word *cheirographon*, handwriting, was a statement of debt signed by the debtor, setting forth his "indebtedness".



The law of God with its ordinances stands as a Divine statement of our indebtedness as sinners. This has been cancelled and removed by the death of Christ, because not only did He perfectly fulfil that law, but He stood in the sinner's place and accepted in His Own Person the penalty due to the law-breaker. Thus the law as an instrument of condemnation has been dealt with by God and cancelled. It has been satisfied completely by the offering of the Son of God and now has no power to accuse or condemn and it is in this sense that it has been removed as far as the believer is concerned.

But this is not all that results from the victory of the cross. Not only has the bond of the law been cancelled, but it also spells victory over the spirit forces of evil:

“... Having put off from Himself the principalities and the powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Col. 2:15 R.V.).

This was like a conqueror who strips his foes and leads them as captives behind his chariot in his victory procession. Finally, Calvary means utter defeat for Satan and his hosts, and as this is so, how foolish and dangerous it was for the Colossians to seek to worship angels and subjugate themselves to them! In doing this they were throwing away the glorious freedom wrought by Christ from abject slavery from which they had been delivered! It was the great lesson of Galatians all over again:

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5:1).

While this freedom must not be exercised in a selfish way (Paul was always ready to limit his freedom to avoid upsetting someone who was weaker in the faith), yet to put the shackles on again where fundamentals are concerned is to put oneself under the power of Satan which redemption has cancelled. Therefore, continues the Apostle:

“Let no man therefore judge you in meat (food), or in drink, or in respect of a feast day or a new moon or a Sabbath day: which are a shadow of the things to come; but the body is Christ's” (verse 16 R.V.).

Bondage to legalistic requirements was past, whether it related to annual, monthly or weekly observances. Verse sixteen

may go wider than Mosaic ceremonial, which did not touch drink regulations in connection with foods ceremoniously clean or unclean. It could have included special regulations stressed by the false teachers at Colossae with their spurious holiness. However, it did include observance of the seventh day, the sabbath, and we quote from Dean Alford here who certainly had no dispensational bias:

“We may observe, that if the ordinance of the Sabbath had been, *in any form*, of lasting obligation on the Christian church, it would have been quite impossible for the Apostle to have spoken thus. The fact of an obligatory rest of one day, whether the seventh or the first, would have been directly in the teeth of his assertion here; the holding of such would have been still to retain the shadow, while we possess the substance. And no answer can be given to this by the transparent special pleading, that he is speaking only of that which was *Jewish* in such observances; the whole argument being general, and the axiom of verse 17 universally applicable” (*Greek Testament* Vol. 3, p. 225).

The same thing could be said of Paul’s argument in Romans 14:5,6. Our Sunday is *not* the Sabbath of the Old Testament; it is always designated “the first day of the week” in the New Testament and there is no Divine command in the New Testament to observe it as the Old Testament Sabbath. This does not mean that we do not appreciate having this day as one of rest and the opportunity to worship together and witness. Nor should we use our freedom to upset weaker brethren; we seek only to be regulated by what is clearly revealed in God’s Word as commands for the church.

The fact remains that sabbath days are joined by Paul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, with “food and drinks” and classed as *shadows*. But, we are assured, the *body* (*the substance, the reality*) is of *Christ*. All types were prophetic; they looked forward to their fulfilment in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus. Once He had fulfilled them they had achieved their purpose. At the best they were only *shadows*, pointers to Him, but shadows have no purpose or place when the reality they set forth has come. We should remember that a shadow has no permanence apart from the body that projects it. *When the body stands directly beneath the light the shadow disappears.* And this is exactly where we are in the purpose of God. We

now stand in the full blaze of revelation given in the prison epistles of Paul and, if we have any real appreciation of these supreme spiritual riches, we shall be quite ready to drop the shadows. They will vanish in the light of His ascended glory and our exalted position *in Him*, "seated together in Christ Jesus in the heavenly places" (Eph. 2:5,6). By nature we are creatures of sense and feeling. If there is something we can see or hold on to or touch or taste, that is what appears to be real to us. But we must learn that this is not so in actuality: it is only the shadow as far as spiritual truth is concerned. *The realities are the exceeding spiritual riches we have in Christ*. These are eternal and unchanging and it is these that we should be holding fast by faith and rejoicing in; there is nothing earthly or visible that can compare with them in value.

So to all who might judge us on these things, our answer is the same, namely Colossians 2:16. Having the Lord Jesus in all His fulness, *we have everything*. We are "filled to the full (complete) in Him" (verse 10) and for us the shadows are for ever finished and passed away. The Apostle continues:

"Let no man rob you of your prize by a voluntary humility and worshipping of the angels, dwelling in the things which he hath seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast the Head . . ." (verses 18,19 R.V.).

*Katabrabeuo*, rob, occurs only here in the New Testament. Its meaning in classical Greek varies from "to deprive of a prize" to the more general "to give an adverse judgment": its usual meaning conveys the idea of depriving someone of something which he would have otherwise possessed. In view of the Apostle's fondness for illustrations drawn from the race-course "depriving someone of the prize" is undoubtedly his meaning here. It is good to realize that the enemy does not waste his time trying to make a believer lose his *life in Christ* or his *salvation*. This is impossible, for that life is safely "hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3) and is, therefore, out of the enemy's reach. We remember that Satan was permitted to touch everything belonging to Job except *his life*. Satan does, however, seek to trip up the believer so that possibly a *divine reward* may be forfeited. It is "prizes" and "crowns" that can be lost (Rev. 3:11), and those at Colossae who were being ensnared by the false teaching that was circulating there were

in danger of this very thing, a serious loss indeed that would be accompanied by shame, as 2 Timothy 2:15 makes clear.

It is extremely difficult to render the Greek of the phrase “intruding into those things which he hath not seen” (A.V.) for the textual evidence of many manuscripts omits the negative and, as *embateuon* occurs nowhere else in the New Testament we do not have usage to guide us. Only those with an advanced knowledge of New Testament Greek would be able to assess the technical difficulties which are discussed by such authorities as J. B. Lightfoot, F. F. Bruce, E. Percy, G. Taylor, J. R. Harris and others. The weight of evidence comes down on the Revised Version rendering which fits the context very well. Those who were being led astray were receiving and dwelling on “visions” which resulted in pride (puffing up by the sinful flesh). Although outwardly appearing to be humble (verse 23), this was a hollow caricature of the real thing, for it sprang from man’s speculations rather than God’s revelation and came from those who had lost touch with Christ (“not holding the Head”) and were at the mercy of the darkened “mind of the flesh”.

These pseudo-visions were evidently related to angels who posed as being the necessary mediators between God and men and so supplanted the One Mediator, Christ Jesus. This led to their worship, the very thing Satan craved, for he was behind these false spiritual powers. Satan desires nothing less than the position of God Himself and the adoration of all creation. How pleased he must have been about the developments at Colossae! And when we grasp what was happening there, we can better appreciate Paul’s deep concern for the believers who formed the church in that place.

To cease to “hold fast to the Head” could only lead to disaster. Using another figure, the Lord Himself said, “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. . . . If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned” (John 15:4-6).

Severance from Christ means spiritual death and fruitlessness. So the Apostle goes on to state:



“If ye died with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, do ye subject yourselves to ordinances, handle not, nor taste, nor touch (all which things are to perish with the using), after the precepts and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and severity to the body; but are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh” (verses 20–23 R.V.).

Paul has already insisted on the believer's identification with Christ in His death, burial, quickening, raising and ascension. He goes on to further apply this to them in a practical way. If this was true, why did they act as though they were still the slaves of Satan and of men? Why subject themselves to such negative restrictions such as “don't handle this”, “don't eat or touch that” etc., etc.? This was only a mockery of real sanctification. On the surface it might *appear* to be humble and wise and spiritual. In reality it was futile and utterly of no value in preventing the indulgence of the old sinful nature. Such taboos were also perishable and passed away in the very acts themselves. They were purely of human invention and were completely deceptive.

There are Christians today who need reminding that real sanctification is *positive* and *active*, not merely negative. It is not sufficient for a believer to say, “I do *not* do this or that”. It is what we *actually are and do* that really matters. This is what an unbelieving world is watching, not merely our negatives.

## CHAPTER THREE OF THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Having magnified the Lord Jesus Christ and put Him in the first place in material creation as Creator and spiritual creation as Lord and Head of the Church which is His Body, and having insisted that the redeeming work of God has united the believer with Him in His death, burial, quickening, raising and ascension, the Apostle Paul now seeks to bring the Colossian believers to the *practical* issue of all this. They were not to be side-tracked and robbed of their reward by being drawn away to worship false spiritual powers who in fact had been defeated by the victory of Calvary. They must continually view themselves as linked with the triumphant Lord Jesus in glory and not view things just from the earthly standpoint:

“If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth. For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, Who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with Him be manifested in glory” (Col. 3:1–4 R.V.).

It is evident that the attitude of the mind is of great importance here. As with the body, the mind of the believer can be allied with and controlled by the “flesh”, the sinful old nature inherited from fallen Adam, or it can be under the domination of the “spirit”, the new Divine nature bestowed at regeneration by the Holy Spirit. Under His control the mind then can aspire to heavenly things. The unregenerate world with its ways and its thinking should be past and gone as far as the believer is concerned; heavenly places “far above all”, where not only the ascended Lord is, but the believer’s inheritance too, can now be the sphere of his *bent* of mind. This inheritance is not earthly, like Israel’s, for this “citizenship *exists in heaven*” (Phil. 3:20) as a present fact, we are assured, and also as a future hope. What is at the “back” of a believer’s mind is all-important, even though he has to employ his conscious mind in his daily employment.

The result of this should be reflected in the believer’s life, in his words and actions, as well as his thinking and this should go

on until the consummation of his faith is reached, the realization of the “blessed hope”, being manifested in the glory where the Saviour is enthroned “far above all”. *Now* the believer is seen to be seated together in the “heavenly places IN Christ” (Eph. 2:6). *Then* he will be WITH Christ in the same exalted sphere. Christ Jesus expresses all our *hope* and He also expresses all our *life* and when this is realized and acted on, the sins of the flesh have no place (Col. 3:5-9). The “old man” and his deeds are “put off”, relying on the fact that they were crucified with the Lord when He died on the cross. The “new man” is constantly “put on”.

“Mortify” (*nekroo*) means here “to treat as dead”, that is to *count on* the slaying of the old man with Christ crucified *as being an actual fact*. *Then* Romans six assures us that it is nullified or “put out of working order” (“destroyed” is too strong in the A.V. of Rom. 6:6). This being so, why try to fight and kill what God has already slain, as though we had the power to conquer the sinful old nature?

The climax of the list of sins is covetousness, which we might think was not nearly so bad as sexual impurity. But the Apostle insists that those who indulge in it are idolaters (Col. 3:5; Eph. 5:5). The Greek word *pleonexia* means the desire to possess more than one ought to have, particularly that which belongs to someone else. This puts some object of desire in the central place which the Lord Jesus should occupy, and so it becomes idolatry. This is indeed dangerous and all the more so because it can assume so many respectable forms.

As against all this, the “new man”, the life and power of Christ within, is renewed by the Holy Spirit “day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16) and thus Christ-likeness is being reproduced continually in the believer’s life. It is “renewed unto knowledge after the image of Him that created him” (Col. 3:10 R.V.). This takes us back to the creation of Adam, made in the likeness of the One Who is the Image of the invisible God. The believer’s life is not just an improvement or reformation of the old. It is something completely new, a *creation* by God and it is this that should dominate him right through to the end of his earthly pilgrimage.

But it is not only sinful habits that should not intrude into

this new creation. All barriers that divided one from another are abolished, too, whether *racial* (Jew and Gentile), *cultural* (primitive Scythians and other barbarians who did not share in the Graeco-Roman culture), or *social* (such as that between slaves and free men). In the unsaved world these barriers still counted, but *in Christ* they ceased to exist. In the spiritual sphere and in His relationship to the church which is His Body, Christ is ALL. These last three words really sum up the Truth. There are no extras to the Lord Jesus Christ. Only when the believer, *in his experience* reaches the stage that this is real and vital in relation to himself, does he reach his full spiritual stature. There are so many “other lords” which seek to have dominion over us and there is only One Who has the indisputable right to be there as Lord.

When we in truth crown Him “Lord of all”, then we are at last, from a practical standpoint, in the right relationship to Him, one in which we can realize to the full what He plans for us in our lives and service, and how rich then our Christian lives and witness can be!

The result of all this is bound to be shown in the day to day Christian walk of the believer, in his estimate of himself, his treatment *of* others and his treatment *by* others. The ground has already been stressed in Ephesians four and five. There must be humbleness of mind leading to meekness and longsuffering. This certainly does not imply *weakness*, but refusal to retaliate in the face of provocation. These graces must be “put on” by the believer continually (Col. 3:12–14). There must be gracious forgiveness if one has been wronged and all is summed up in the greatest Christian virtue, “love, which is the bond of perfectness” (or maturity), which forgets about self, its needs, and thinks constantly of the Lord and how much we owe Him and, after this, the needs of others. This is the only tie between believers that is really effective. When such love is constantly in the forefront, misunderstanding and splits disappear. It is the tie that expresses *maturity* (perfectness) and should always be in evidence among those who have left spiritual infancy behind and are growing up in all things into Christ (Eph. 4:15). The *peace of Christ* automatically follows when this is experienced and “rules in the heart” as also does a thankful spirit. We have seen before what a safeguard this is against spiritual declension



and forgetfulness of the many mercies we continually enjoy day by day. The pagan world had slid into darkness, not only because “they glorified Him not as God”, but also because they were not “*thankful*” (Rom. 1:21). We do well to keep the spirit of gratitude ever before us.

With gratitude, praise naturally follows:

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto God” (Col. 3:16 R.V.).

It is hardly necessary to say that the “Word of Christ” which should dwell in us richly, can hardly mean all that He spoke on earth in His ministry to the people of Israel, for it would have been most unlikely for these Gospels to have circulated at this time as far as Colossae. The Word of Christ embodies all the revelation of the “good deposit” of truth the risen Christ had made known to Paul and which he had so faithfully proclaimed and taught in the churches. It is amazing how great is this treasury of Truth which can only be appreciated by a close and careful study of his epistles. When this is personally appropriated by faith and divine understanding, we have a rich storehouse to draw on in every experience, need or emergency.

Does the “you” mean individually, or collectively as an assembly? The answer is both. The more each individual member is indwelt by the Truth the more the assembly as a whole is indwelt and the greater the possibility that God’s Truth will reign therein and He will be supreme. The praise that naturally follows, as Ephesians 5:19 declares, is expressed in a threefold way: “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs”. Little has been left on record to clearly indicate what these were, but the psalms almost certainly were drawn from the Old Testament Psalter; the hymns possibly from New Testament passages of Scripture; and spiritual songs composed by members of the church who were gifted spiritually and musically to express truth in this way. Professor F. F. Bruce quotes from Tertullian (*Apology* 39) where the latter states “. . . each is invited to sing to God in the presence of others from what he knows of the Holy Scriptures or from his own heart”, and from Pliny the younger who, giving an account to the Emperor Trajan, states that the Christians of Bithynia met on a fixed day before dawn and

“recited an antiphonal hymn to Christ as God” (Epistles X.96). There is no doubt that Christian praise is important for the believer and it should be the best that we can render to the Lord, for He is surely worthy of nothing less than the best. At the same time we should bear in mind that praise should not only be with our lips, but continually with our lives, “by giving up ourselves to His service”.

Verse seventeen finally sums up the preceding verses, embracing every aspect of life and practically expressing the sovereignty of Christ not only in the so-called “sacred”, but also in the secular.

“And whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Col. 3:17 R.V.).

To do this means to live and act as those who are indwelt by the Lord Jesus and entirely under His control as Head, and such obedience will not be merely a dry duty, but a joyous expression of thankfulness to Him. The injunctions that follow cover in a shorter form the same ground as Ephesians 5:22–6:9 and they touch all aspects of the home and business life. The phrase “in the Lord” shows that, for the believer human relationships must be considered from the basic relationship to Christ. The practical attitude of the husband to the wife and the wife to the husband should reflect the original design of the Creator, both realizing that the part they play is an illustration of Christ Himself and the church which is His Body. There is then no question of one being inferior or superior to the other, but rather there will be harmony, lasting happiness and fruitfulness in Christian witness together when this is put into practice.

There is a complementary responsibility of parents and children. The latter are to be obedient and if parents do not wisely and lovingly discipline children to this end, how are the children ever to learn what obedience to God means? So many children today are totally ignorant of the meaning of this word and therefore one does not wonder at the terrible increase in lawlessness that we see all over the world.

On the other hand, parents are exhorted not to irritate or discourage their children. God’s Word is not one-sided, and

sometimes difficult children are the product of unwise treatment by parents. There is a longer section given to the relationship of masters and slaves, possibly because slavery was part of the social structure of the time. The companion epistle to Philemon clearly shows the practical duties of these two classes in the Christian fellowship. The Christian slave or the Christian employer had to remember that they were both servants of a heavenly Master and were fully answerable to Him Who will deal with both with impartial fairness. "Whatsoever good thing done" is recognized by Him for commendation and reward, whereas "wrong" is equally dealt with by the "righteous Judge", for with Him there is "no respect of persons". The Old Testament likewise required similar impartiality: "thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty" (Lev. 19:15) in lawsuits. The extremely important doctrine of reward or loss for the service of the believer is here touched upon and is dealt with more fully in other Pauline epistles such as 1 Corinthians, Philippians and 2 Timothy.

## CHAPTER FOUR OF THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

The Apostle Paul now issues his final instructions. He stresses the importance of intercession, a ministry in itself of great importance as we saw when we studied the parallel section in Ephesians (6:18). There is no doubt that prayer along the lines of the Lord's will accomplishes much, and the believer who neglects it does so to his great spiritual loss:

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, watching therein with thanksgiving; withal praying for us also, that God may open unto us a door for the Word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds; that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak” (Col. 4:2-4 R.V.).

The plural pronouns “us” doubtless include Paul's friends who were free, like Timothy and Epaphras. The idea of a “door being opened” is characteristically Pauline (1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12), a new opportunity being given by the Lord for witness. In Ephesians six it is to make known the good news concerning the Mystery, the great secret revealed in the earlier chapters. Here it is the secret concerning Christ and His exaltation which has been so stressed in this epistle as the antidote to the error which was circulating at Colossae. Both these secrets are stressed in Ephesians three and both are necessary to get a balanced view of the prison ministry of the Apostle Paul for us Gentiles. First we must have our eyes opened and our minds enlarged to grasp the greatness of the Lord's exaltation “far above all” in the heavenly places (Eph. 1). Only then can we begin to appreciate what it means to belong to a newly created company of believers taken from Jew and Gentile and linked with Him there (Eph. 2:6). With such a great stewardship of Truth it is no wonder that the Apostle asks for prayer so that he may make it manifest, for according to Colossians 1:27 God wills to reveal the greatness of this secret to His people and in the first place used Paul as a channel so to do (Eph. 3:3,8,9).

The Apostle goes on to exhort believers to walk carefully in view of those “without”, that is, those who are non-Christians, for the unbelieving world cares little about Christian doctrine or ritual, but carefully notes the words and actions of those who



profess to name the name of Christ. We are to be epistles “known and read of all men” (2 Cor. 3:2), specially to those who do not read the Bible and, as living epistles, we must “redeem the time” (Col. 4:5), in our witness to those who know not the Saviour. *Kairos* is not the ordinary word for “time”, but means a special opportunity which may soon pass. “Buy it up”, says the Apostle, “while it lasts”, and those who are keen for Christ and the stewardship of the “good deposit” which Paul was ministering, will be eager and vigilant to seize every such opportunity for witness that presents itself. The speech of all such must be gracious and a preservative against evil and error, like salt in food (Col. 4:6). In other words, the believer who wishes to be faithful and fruitful must not only be opportune as regards time, but also speak appropriately to the person concerned, and here heavenly wisdom will be needed as to the best way to handle each one that comes our way, for everyone is individual in his needs.

Paul now refers to his associates and messengers and brings forward Tychicus who was the bearer of the letter to the Ephesians as well, and also possibly one to Laodicea (Eph. 6:21). He is mentioned twice in the Pastoral Epistles (2 Tim. 4:12; Titus 3:12) and is designated by the Apostle as a faithful friend and helper who would declare his circumstances to them. Onesimus, the runaway slave, who in the providence of God had come into contact with Paul at Rome and become a believer, is the subject of the letter to Philemon. Though once an unbelieving slave, he is now “one of you” and, from a spiritual standpoint, on an equal footing with the other members of the Colossian church. Tychicus and Onesimus would be able to give them an up to date account of the Apostle and the circumstances surrounding him as the “prisoner of the Lord” at Rome.

The Apostle now sends greetings from six believers who were with him at the time of writing, three of them Jews and three of them Gentiles. Aristarchus was associated with Paul in the riot of Ephesus (Acts 19:29) and later went to Jerusalem as one of the two delegates sent from Thessalonica. He also, together with Luke, accompanied the Apostle when he set sail from Caesarea to Rome (Acts 27:2). Paul describes him as his “fellow-prisoner” which probably means he shared the Apostle’s imprisonment voluntarily.

Mark joins in the greetings (verse 10). He is described as the cousin of Barnabas (R.V.) which explains the link between him and Barnabas in the Acts (15:37), causing the dispute between Paul and Barnabas when he failed and left them, not being able apparently to stand the rigours of the way. Now, at the time of writing the Colossian letter, he had redeemed his reputation. It would appear that the Colossians had received some communication regarding Mark (verse 10) and they are bidden to receive him if he should visit them.

Of Jesus Justus we know nothing apart from this reference. Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua and Justus was a common Latin name. "These only are my fellow-workers unto the Kingdom of God" declared the Apostle. We have shown earlier on that the thought of a Kingdom is stressed in the Prison Epistles after Acts twenty-eight as well as before, and therefore it is quite erroneous to try to limit the thought of a Kingdom to the people of Israel. It is the *sphere* of the Kingdom that differs before the Acts and afterwards, inasmuch as earth is distinct from heaven.

There is no part of God's redemptive purpose (touching both heaven and earth) that does not come under God's sovereignty. Almost the last thought of Paul in his final letter is to declare that the Lord would preserve or save him "unto His *heavenly Kingdom*" (2 Tim. 4:18). These Jewish Christians had been a comfort and support to the imprisoned Apostle.

He goes on to name three other believers, Gentile by birth. Epaphras, as we have already seen, was the human link between Paul and the Colossian church, and chapter one stresses his faithfulness and zeal for the Christians at Colossae. His effective life of intercession for them is summed up in verse twelve (R.V.):

"Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, saluteth you, always striving for you in his prayers, that ye may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God".

This was vital intercession, complementary to the Apostle's, as chapter one makes clear. Both were "*striving* for them in prayer", which clearly shows that real prayer or intercession is not something that is just pleasant and easy. It is an *exacting work* that costs, but how rewarding it can be! All those who

profess to rejoice in the fact that they are “complete, or filled full in Christ” (2:10) should know something of this in experience and service for others.

Luke and Demas complete the list of those sending greetings. Here we are told that Luke was “the beloved physician”. The Lord gave Paul a faithful friend who stayed and assisted him right through to the end of his course (2 Tim. 4:11), looking after his physical needs as well as his spiritual and temporal ones. Luke is probably a shortened form of Lucius, a very common Gentile name throughout the Roman Empire. We do not see any point in trying to establish, as some have tried to do, that Luke was a Jew. A Jew was not likely to have a Gentile name!

Lastly we come to Demas and note that Paul makes no comment regarding him. Later on he is evidently pained to record that Demas had left him “having loved this present world” (2 Tim. 4:10). Could he see the traces of this already appearing in Demas when the Colossian epistle was being written? If so, it would explain his silence concerning him. What a powerful effect love can have, either for good or evil! It is obvious we should take great care concerning the things and the persons we profess to love as these can alter the whole course of our lives one way or the other.

In closing the epistle the Apostle Paul directs that it should be passed on to the church at Laodicea after the Colossians had read it at a church meeting. Not only this, but the Colossians should publicly read an epistle of his from Laodicea. There has been a great deal of discussion about this letter, but we cannot be certain as to its contents. Some suggest that it has been lost. If this is true then it did not form part of inspired Scripture, for who can question the ability of the Lord to preserve parts of His own Word and superintend their gathering together in one volume? We do know that Paul wrote letters which do not form part of Holy Writ (e.g. to the church at Corinth, additional to the ones we already have).

On the other hand, some scholars suggest that the Laodicean letter is our epistle to the Ephesians, which, as we have seen, was not addressed to one church, but was for wider circulation. If Colossians was written before Ephesians, as some think,

this would be a difficulty. However, it may be the other way round and J. B. Lightfoot and A. Harnack and others uphold the Ephesian letter theory mentioned above. The fact is we do not know for certain and, therefore, it is not wise to dogmatize. At a later date there was an apochryphal letter entitled "The Epistle of Paul to the Laodiceans", but this comes in the category of apochryphal literature which was prominent in the early centuries, just as the Book of Jasher and other so-called "lost books" stimulated other writers to issue compositions bearing these titles.

Paul ends with a personal message to one member of the church:

"And say to Archippus, take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it" (verse 17).

Archippus is mentioned in Philemon two where the Apostle described him as his "fellow-soldier", and it would seem that he was a member of Philemon's household and possibly his son. What the ministry involved we do not know, but it was evidently important enough for Paul to send him this stimulating message and it would have been all the more effective because it would have been read before the whole church. Archippus may have been slipping back spiritually and needed this reminder of his responsibility to discharge his God-given ministry (literally "fill up", a typical Colossian thought).

Paul now takes the pen from the amanuensis and concludes in his own handwriting, which was a guarantee of the genuineness of the letter:

"The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you" (R.V.).

We should note the last personal touch which was full of feeling, "Do not forget my bonds". While he rejoiced in being, not the prisoner of Nero, but of Christ Jesus for us Gentiles, yet there was a great personal cost he had to pay and it would do us all good to remember at what price, even from a human standpoint, the precious Word of God has come down to us, first of all through the faithful Apostle of the Gentiles, and then through loyal successors, many of whom gladly gave their lives for the Lord Jesus.

So ends this Christ-exalting epistle which, together with



Ephesians, touches heights and depths of doctrine and revelation unequalled in the rest of Scripture. In them are revealed the supreme exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ and the purpose of God concerning the church, His Body in its redemption, out-calling and union with Him in the heavenlies, “far above all”; and its divine destiny to be a dwelling place for God in heaven’s holy of holies.

They also reveal the “worthy walk” which goes hand in hand with such a wondrous calling by grace and this should be our constant concern day by day.

## THE EPISTLE TO PHILEMON

The Apostle Paul must have written many private letters which have not been preserved or form part of Holy Scripture. However, the letter he wrote to Philemon is an exception and we should be grateful that we can read today this delightful example of Paul's private correspondence, for while this letter includes the church in Philemon's home, it was obviously personal to Philemon himself touching the matter of his runaway slave Onesimus. The epistle is closely linked with the Colossian epistle. Both were carried by the same bearer, Onesimus (Tychicus joining him in taking the epistle to the Colossians; see Col. 4:9). The persons sending the salutations are the same, except one, Jesus called Justus (Col. 4:11). In both letters Archippus is addressed (Philem. 2; Col. 4:17). Paul and Timothy stand in the headings of both and in each Paul appears as a prisoner (Philem. 9; Col. 4:18). It follows from this that the epistles were written about the same time and in the same place, viz. at Rome, the epistle to the Ephesians being written about this time also (A.D. 61 or 62).

Ancient testimony as to the authenticity of the epistle to Philemon comes from Origen, Tertullian, Eusebius and Jerome. Paley in *Horae Paulinae* has shown striking proofs of its authenticity in undesigned coincidences between it and the epistle to the Colossians.

To understand the letter it is necessary to know something of its background. Onesimus, of Colossae ("one of you" Col. 4:9) a slave of Philemon, had fled from his master to Rome, after having probably defrauded him (Philem. 18). Here, under the wonderful providence of the Lord, he came in contact with Paul in his prison which resulted in his personal salvation, and now, under Paul's advice, he is returning to Philemon who is urged by the Apostle "to receive him favourably", as now no longer being a mere runaway slave, but a brother in Christ.

There has been conjecture by the modern writer, John Knox,

in his *Philemon Among the Letters of Paul* that makes Archippus the slave owner and Philemon an overseer of the churches in the Lycus Valley. While his view is persuasively presented, it raises more problems than it solves and the above explanation is much more likely to be according to the facts. This being so, we shall not give Knox's ideas further consideration.

Alford quotes Luther's eloquent comments on the epistle which are as follows:

"This epistle shows a right, noble, and lovely example of Christian love. Here we see how St. Paul layeth himself out for the poor Onesimus, and with all his means pleadeth his cause with his master, and so setteth himself as if he were Onesimus and had himself done wrong to Philemon. Yet all this doeth he, not with force, as if he had the right thereto, but he stripped himself of his right, and thus enforced Philemon to forego his right also. Even as Christ did for us with God the Father, thus also doth St. Paul for Onesimus with Philemon; for Christ also stripped Himself of His right, and by love and humility enabled the Father to lay aside His wrath and power, and to take us to His grace for the sake of Christ, Who lovingly pleadeth our cause, and with all His heart layeth Himself out for us. For we are all Onesimi, to my thinking".

### *Slavery.*

The issue with which Philemon deals, reflects the prevailing conditions of the Roman Empire. Slavery was a long-established institution and was accepted by all as a normal feature of life. The treatment of slaves was on the whole exceedingly callous. They were looked on as things, not as persons, and their master had absolute right over them. Bishop Lightfoot comments thus:

". . . these vast masses of human beings had no protection from Roman law. The slave had no relationships, no conjugal rights. Cohabitation was allowed him at his owner's pleasure, but not marriage. His companion was sometimes assigned to him by lot. The slave was absolutely at his master's disposal; for the smallest offence he might be scourged, mutilated, crucified, thrown to the wild beasts" (*The Epistle to Philemon*).

One can therefore understand why Onesimus fled as far away as Rome, out of fear as to what his master might do to him if he had been caught. When one considers the savagery connected with the treatment of slaves, it seems surprising that

there is no condemnation of slavery as such in the New Testament. Some have tried to excuse slavery by referring to the Old Testament, but there is no comparison. In those days it was not slavery but hired service. The righteousness of God's law saw to it that the servant had his rights and that he was protected from harm. He was never to be ill-treated (Lev. 25:43) and no one could be *forced* into such service. Such treatment was punishable by death (Exod. 21:16). In cases of poverty such employment was really a means of subsistence (Lev. 25:39) and could never last longer than six years (Deut. 15:12). Provision was made for those servants who had formed a personal attachment to their masters and did not wish to leave them (Deut. 15:16,17), showing that possibly such conditions of service had often been a blessing in disguise.

Thus the relationship of masters and servants in the Old Testament bore no comparison with the slavery of the Roman world. It is not enough to say that to attack slavery in New Testament times would have been too revolutionary and would have called forth the opposition of the authorities. Idolatry was also part of the social life of the Roman Empire, yet the apostles attacked it unsparingly.

If the New Testament did not condemn the essential element of slavery, what did it teach which changed the thinking of the Christian on the subject and brought a radical transformation of the attitude to be adopted to it? The statement of Colossians 4:1 must have sounded revolutionary:

“Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know you also have a Master in heaven” (Col. 4:1 N.I.V.).

and the obligation for slaves was expressed in this way:

“Slaves, obey your masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favour, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord . . . as working for the Lord, not for men” (Col. 3:22 N.I.V.).

When this was carried out on both sides, the whole situation was transformed. The slave was to receive an adequate and fair reward and when this was applied, it lifted his status to that of a free man who was under contract. This meant that instead of receiving nothing, or a mere pittance for his work, he would



receive food, clothing and everything necessary to maintain a family life. This situation was then far removed from the wretched servitude of the serfs in the average pagan Roman household. It gave a slave self-respect, and if a believer, a consciousness of his responsibility to the Lord with the realization that even his condition was one where he could glorify the Saviour.

In Philemon a goal is reached. While the master-servant relationship is not denied, a new relationship transmutes the former, where master and servant are brethren in Christ. In this position the legal title of slave ceases to be of real importance. Thus while the New Testament did not openly condemn slavery, it made it impossible to continue as the gospel progressed all over the then civilized world.

Before we expound the epistle, we give its structure:

- |   |   |        |                        |
|---|---|--------|------------------------|
| A | Salutation  | 1-3    |                        |
| B | Making mention of thee always in my prayers                                 |        | } Paul and<br>Philemon |
| C | We have great joy in thy love   | 7      |                        |
| D | Bowels of the saints refreshed  | 7      |                        |
| E | I might enjoin (but I do not)<br>-rather beseech thee                       | 8,9    |                        |
| F | Onesimus, profitable to thee and me   | 10,11  |                        |
| G | Receive him, that is my bowels (myself)                                     | 12     |                        |
| H | He ministered in thy stead  | 13     |                        |
|   | Thy benefit   | 14,15  |                        |
| F | Onesimus, beloved to thee and me  | 16     |                        |
| G | Receive him as myself   | 16,17  |                        |
| E | I do not say (but I might)<br>If he hath wronged . . . put it to my account | 18,19  |                        |
| D | Refresh my bowels   | 20     | } Paul and<br>Philemon |
| C | Let me have joy of thee   | 20     |                        |
| B | I trust through your prayers  | 22     |                        |
| A | Closing Salutation  | 23-25. |                        |

The balance of each item needs little explanation and once again we see the perfection of the Word of God inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Paul commences the letter by describing himself as "the prisoner of Jesus Christ". This reminds one of Ephesians 3:1 but in no other epistle does he start in this way. Usually there is a reference to his apostleship. An apostle is one who is clothed with the authority and given the power of the sender, Christ Himself, and in writing to some of the churches, it was necessary to

remind them of the position the risen Lord had given him. To the Philippians and the Thessalonians he omits the title, but then both churches were closely linked to him in bonds of loyalty to the truth and it was not necessary to assert this. Nor was it necessary in the case of Philemon, a brother beloved in the Lord. Paul entreats, he does not command, although he had the right to do so.

He links his son Timothy with himself in the faith, as he does in his epistles to 2 Corinthians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Philippians and Colossians. Timothy appears to have been with the Apostle during a great part of his three years' stay in Ephesus (Acts 19:22) and could hardly have missed meeting Philemon. In verse two Apphia and Archippus are mentioned. J. B. Lightfoot suggests that there was a blood relationship between them:

“The letter introduces us to an ordinary household in a small town in Phrygia. Four members of it are mentioned by name, the father, the mother, the son and the slave” (*Introduction to Philemon*).

He also points out that Archippus, Philemon's son, was possibly ministering to the church at Laodicea, which was only a short distance from Colossae, and in the epistle to the Colossians, a message to Archippus is included with the greetings sent via the Colossians to the saints at Laodicea (Col. 4:17). From this we can surmise that he needed a reminder of his responsibilities that the Lord had laid upon him in service. Hence the Apostle's urge for him to fulfil or complete it. He, however, must have been a believer who had grown in grace, otherwise Paul could not have described him as a “fellow-soldier” (verse 2). Soldiering is not for infants, and already he had tasted of the many difficulties that beset the pilgrim pathway. Perhaps he was getting discouraged and needed the Apostle's reminder not to slip back and spoil his witness.

Paul uses *sustratiotes*, “fellow-soldier”, only of one other believer, his valued friend Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25) who had risked his life for the gospel and therefore knew what “enduring hardness” really meant. The Apostle links the church in Philemon's home with them in verse two and as we have been reminded in other epistles, the local assembly of believers met in one another's homes, there being no church buildings till the third century A.D.

What an honour this was, and one can readily understand the need for Christian hospitality so that each believer might feel the warmth of welcome as they gathered around the Word of God. The home is where the practical outworking of truth must begin and here we all need grace, patience and longsuffering so that our own manifesting of Christ and Christian love may be much in evidence.

As the Apostle Paul thinks of Philemon, there springs to his mind immediately his love and faith, first of all shown to the Lord and then to His people. He thanks God for this:

“I thank my God always, making mention of thee in my prayers, hearing of thy love and of the faith which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all the saints; that the fellowship of thy faith may become effectual, in the knowledge of every good thing which is in you, unto Christ. For I had much joy and comfort in thy love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through thee, brother” (Philem. 4–7 R.V.).

The practical love in the New Testament results from faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the basis of all love and faith and it is only when these graces are acknowledged as coming from and resting upon Him, that they can flow out in practical value to others. In Philemon’s case Paul was glad to be able to say that this had happened, so that the believers with whom Philemon was in contact had been refreshed by him. In this way the “fellowship” (sharing) of his faith had become “effectual” together with “every good thing” which was in him, “unto Christ”, that is, with Christ as the goal. “Every good thing” can only mean the vast spiritual wealth which is resident alone in the Lord Jesus. In his measure Philemon was partaking of all this by faith, not just for his own enjoyment, but with the object of sharing it with others so that they might grow in grace and acknowledgment of the Truth. It was this that gave Paul the prisoner so much joy and consolation. There could have been little in his Roman prison to cheer him, but the grace of God manifested in the life of Philemon was a refreshment to him as well as to those members of the Body of Christ who evidently met in Philemon’s home.

The next section of the epistle commences with “wherefore” (*dio*) which links the chief subject of his letter with these intro-

ductory remarks. These are not to be thought of as just a polite introduction, but they bear a close relationship with what follows, for it is only because of the practical love which characterized the life and witness of Philemon, that Paul could write in the way he does concerning Onesimus.

As both of them move in an atmosphere of Christian love, the Apostle can send a request on behalf of the runaway slave, not in terms of an apostolic command, but rather as an entreaty which calls for a willing consent. Paul does not lay aside his apostolic authority. Indeed he asserts that he has the right to command his friend Philemon (verse 8), but he waives this “for love’s sake” and instead “beseeches”. The very fact that Paul here is willing to forgo his rightful claims as an apostle shows that these claims are not due to spiritual egotism. He does not stand on his dignity, for personal position meant nothing to him. But this made his status as an apostle of Christ all the stronger when he felt that he must insist on this in reply to those who would deny and oppose it in order to introduce false teaching (Gal. 1:1; 2 Cor. 11:5). In the context we are studying, Paul describes himself as the “aged” one, but there is a possibility that it could read “Paul, the ambassador” as the Revised Standard Version renders it. There is only a difference of one letter in the Greek (*presbutes* “aged”, and *presbeutes*, “ambassador”). Lightfoot points out that at this period *presbeutes* was often written without the second “e”, so it would be quite valid to take it as “ambassador” and this equally fits the context and reminds us of 2 Corinthians 5:20, where, as an ambassador, he *beseeches* men, rather than commands them. Paul continues:

“I beseech thee for my child, whom I have begotten in my bonds, Onesimus, who was aforetime unprofitable to thee, but now is profitable to thee and to me” (verse 10 R.V.).

So it could be that here Paul is stressing his position as an ambassador and prisoner of Christ Jesus. There is play on the name “Onesimus” which means “profitable” or “useful”. In the past he was useless: now as a believer in Christ he had become useful to both Philemon and Paul. Instead of giving the grudging service of many an unbeliever, now he had learned to serve “in singleness of heart, fearing God” (Col. 3:22,23) and this complete change of heart had benefited the Apostle



just as it would Philemon later on. Onesimus had come to a personal knowledge of salvation through the Apostle's witness even though he was in chains, and thus had been brought to spiritual birth and become his "son" in the faith. Not only this, but since his conversion he had evidently been able to serve and help Paul in his Roman prison, and so it was with a deep sense of personal loss that Paul was willing to let him go and return to Colossae:

"(Onesimus), whom I have sent back to thee in his own person, that is, my very heart: whom I would fain have kept with me, that in thy behalf he might minister unto me in the bonds of the gospel" (verses 12 and 13 R.V.).

We give the same passage in the up to date New International Version which puts it admirably:

"I am sending him, who is my very heart, back to you. I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favour you do will be spontaneous and not forced".

The Apostle makes clear what it cost him to send Onesimus back to Philemon. It was like sending back part of himself. He would gladly have retained him and in a sense would have been justified in doing so, for Philemon was in debt to the Apostle because of the great measure of blessing he had received through him.

Paul's thought now moves to another aspect of the situation which touches the providential ordering of circumstances. It was evident that the Lord had over-ruled all that had happened to Onesimus for his spiritual benefit and also the comfort of the Apostle. Truly all things had been made to work together for good (Rom. 8:28). At the same time Paul wanted Philemon to know the true facts of the situation so that his response would not be forced, but spontaneous:

"But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favour you do will be spontaneous and not forced. Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good, no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord" (verses 14-16 N.I.V.).

Paul sees the hand of God in all the circumstances surrounding

Onesimus. The Authorized Version completely misses this point by wrongly translating *echoristhe* as active (“he departed”) when it is passive. In spite of his wilfulness, the runaway slave had been in the hand of God Who is sovereign. The Apostle contrasts the short time of the absence of Onesimus with the eventual outcome, a reunion that would never be ended, even by death. Philemon had certainly lost a slave, but would now receive much more than a slave, namely a *brother in Christ*. The Apostle does not deny that Onesimus is still a slave. He does not say “not now a servant”, but “*not now as a servant*”, which is very different. He is not to be regarded merely as a slave. The whole relationship has been transformed and now they are fellow-believers owning the same Saviour and Lord. Even more than this, he is to be loved as such with the same Christ-like love as Paul had shown towards him.

The Apostle now puts his request to Philemon directly:

“So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me” (17 N.I.V.).

Paul blends the personal note in this request in an irresistible way. If Philemon really regarded him as a partner in the witness for the Gospel and the “good deposit” of truth, then let him welcome Onesimus back again just as he would receive Paul if he had been able to pay him a visit. There was no doubt of what Philemon owed to Paul from a spiritual standpoint, but in asking mercy for the slave, the Apostle was not ignoring the past. Philemon had been wronged by the action of Onesimus and restitution must be made.

However, Paul pledges himself as the guarantor for the repayment of the debt:

“But if he hath wronged thee at all, or oweth thee aught, put that to mine account; I Paul write it with mine own hand. I will repay it: that I say not unto thee how that thou owest to me even thine own self besides” (verses 18,19 R.V.).

It is evident that Philemon’s debt to Paul was much greater than Onesimus’ debt to Philemon. The latter had come to a knowledge of salvation and the consequent riches of grace and glory through Paul’s ministry, and this constituted a debt he could never repay, so that the debt that Paul had taken over was really more than cancelled.

The Apostle's final request is that Philemon will give him cause for rejoicing. He wants benefit from him *in the Lord*, so refreshing his heart and mind (verse 20). He assumes that Philemon will act in the gracious way as suggested, and not only this, but that he will do even more than Paul asked. Did this mean that Paul expected Philemon to set Onesimus free? It is the opinion of P. N. Harrison and J. Knox (*Onesimus and Philemon* and *Philemon among the letters of Paul*) that Philemon not only did this but he also sent Onesimus back to Paul and that later on Onesimus became a bishop of the church at Ephesus. We cannot know this for certain, but what a happy outcome would have resulted if this was so! But whether this happened or not, Onesimus would move into the liberty of fellowship in Christ.

Paul now proposes to visit Philemon if the Lord willed. As in Philippians 1:19 he expected to be released from prison through Philemon's prayers (verse 22). Once again is stressed the vast importance of the ministry of intercession and the great things it can accomplish, which should be a reminder to us all. What a privilege to be able to "move the Hand that moves the world"! Not only prayer but the Christian duty of hospitality was strongly enjoined on believers in the epistles (Rom. 12:13; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8; Heb. 13:2; 1 Pet. 4:9), for, as we have seen, the Christian home was the centre of Christian witness for the first two centuries.

The epistle closes with reference to the five believers mentioned in the last chapter of Colossians, Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke (see the exposition of the last chapter of Colossians) and then a final reference, as in all his epistles, to the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ:

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit"  
(verse 25 N.I.V.).

So ends this delightful and very personal letter of the Apostle of the Gentiles. We should be profoundly grateful that the Holy Spirit saw fit to inspire and include it in the sacred Scriptures which have been preserved all through the centuries for our instruction, eternal profit and guidance.

## CHAPTER ONE OF THE EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS

The ministry of the Apostle Paul at Philippi marks the entrance of the Gospel into Europe and is described in Acts 16:12-40. The city, which was a Roman colony, first received its name from Philip of Macedon who took it from the Thasians around 360 B.C. In 168 B.C. it became part of the Roman Empire. Luke describes it as “a city of Macedonia, the first of the district, a Roman colony” (Acts 16:12 R.V.). There was a dignity in this title, for this permitted the use of the Roman law in local affairs, and sometimes exemption from tribute and taxation. Even more than this the *Ius Italicum* gave them the privilege by which ownership, transfer of land, payment of taxes, local administration, and law, became the same as if they were on Italian soil.

Luke, in the Acts, makes it clear that a Jewish community existed there before the Apostle's visit, and it is interesting to note the high status of women in Macedonia. W. Tarn and G. T. Griffith in *Hellenistic Civilization*, pp. 98,99 state “if Macedonia produced perhaps the most competent group of men the world had yet seen, the women were in all respects the men's counterparts; they played a large part in affairs, received envoys and obtained concessions for them from their husbands, built temples, founded cities, engaged mercenaries, commanded armies, held fortresses, and acted on occasion as regents or even co-rulers”. Jewish women, we know, met for prayer at Philippi, of which Lydia, a proselyte of Judaism was one.

### *Date and Place of Composition.*

The traditional dating of the epistle is associated with Paul's imprisonment at Rome. This view was current in the second century, and was virtually unchallenged until the end of the eighteenth century. From this time onwards two other places have been advanced as the origin of this letter. They are Caesarea and Ephesus. Oeder of Leipzig in 1731 first propounded the Caesarean origin, though today it has been practically abandoned. We will, however, consider it. Later, Ephesus was



put forward as the place where the epistle was written by Adolf Deissman in 1897 and is sponsored by some modern scholars like Dr. G. S. Duncan. The reader may ask if this is of vital importance, and the answer is "yes", for a Caesarean or Ephesian origin for the Philippian epistle would remove it from the Prison Epistles written after Acts twenty-eight relating to the Mystery and put it into the Acts period, where Israel and Israel's hope are still dominant.

Those who uphold the Caesarean origin make much of the word *praetorion*, translated "palace" in the Authorized Version of Philippians 1:13, and point out that this word describes Herod's official residence at Caesarea. But the same word is used of Pilate's residence as Roman procurator at Jerusalem, and it is also used of the Emperor's palace on the Palatine hill in Rome (as A.V.), and it could equally refer to the residence of the proconsul of Asia in Ephesus, or any governor of a province. This argument therefore cancels out, and no secure foundation can be based on it.

There is another side to this, however. *Praetorion* can also be used of the *praetorian guard*, and "all other" need not mean "places" which is added in the Authorized Version. It can refer to a personal reference, "among the rest" of a group of people, and so the Revised Version renders it "throughout the whole praetorian guard, and to all the rest". To this J. B. Lightfoot and other scholars concur and link it with Rome. Professor F. W. Beare states "it scarcely needs to be said that the nine cohorts of the Praetorian Guard were usually concentrated at Rome, after Liberius built them a great barracks; and any detachments found in a provincial capital would be nothing more than a guard of honour for the proconsul" (*The Epistle to the Philippians*, p. 22).

We should note too that the "saints of Caesar's household" (4:22) would not refer to the family of the Emperor or members of the court circle, but rather to the servants and slaves of the Emperor's household which were in the nature of civil servants and with whom Paul had had some contact, and in the case of the praetorian guard this would certainly be true in the course of their supervisory duties, and "all the rest" (1:13 R.V.) describes the wider circle who came to hear of Paul's imprisonment.

We know for certain that Paul was imprisoned at Rome for

at least two years and in conditions that admitted of his receiving visitors and of preaching the Kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all freedom, without hindrance. It is not known that he was ever imprisoned at Ephesus. On this Luke is silent, and this weighs heavily against the Ephesian hypothesis. It is by no means certain that at Caesarea he enjoyed the same liberty of action as at Rome. At Caesarea he was detained in Herod's praetorium: in Rome he was allowed to live in his own rented dwelling. At Caesarea, moreover, he was in no danger of death. Felix would have released him at any time on the payment of a bribe. It was very unlikely that the issue of life and death described in the Philippian epistle referred to the enmity of the Jews, for Paul had faced this from the *commencement* of his ministry and in 2 Corinthians he had stated that he was "in deaths oft" (2 Cor. 11:23). Moreover the Lord had definitely promised that *he should go to Rome and reach there unharmed* (Acts 23:10,11), so the Apostle would have no fear of his countrymen in this respect at Caesarea.

Regarding the Ephesian or Caesarean theory of the place of writing Professor Beare writes: "It must also be shown that the conditions of the imprisonment were such as to allow the Apostle to receive friends, to direct the movements of his associates, and to receive and write letters. Let us remember that the writing of letters involves the admission of a scribe to the prison, and the provision of papyrus at the prisoner's expense. It was not every prisoner who would be free to turn his cell into an executive office for the propagation of a religion of doubtful legality! It must be emphasized again that it is only for Rome that we have documentary evidence for a prolonged imprisonment which allowed Paul such freedom for his apostolic activities" (op. cit. p. 23).

He further states that it was hard to believe that at Caesarea he would be so completely abandoned by the Jerusalem church, to which he had just brought generous gifts from Macedonia and Achaia, that he would require aid from the Philippian church 1,200 miles away.

One of the difficulties that we have in connection with Rome as the place where Philippians was written is the long distance of Rome from Philippi and the number of journeys mentioned

in the epistle which must be fitted in. This also militates against Caesarea, for such a journey would involve a trip of 1,200 miles overland, taking even longer than the journey to Rome, for communications through Asia Minor were not equal under the best conditions to those between Rome and Philippi, and for several months of the year the roads were impassable over the Taurus mountains. The journey by sea would take several weeks, judging by the fact that Paul, leaving Philippi immediately after Easter, feels that he cannot take time to stop over in Ephesus if he is to be in Jerusalem for Whitsuntide (Acts 20:16).

The number of journeys mentioned in Philippians are as follows: four trips are presupposed between Rome and Philippi:

- (1) A message is sent from Rome to Philippi, telling that Paul is in prison.
- (2) Epaphroditus comes from Philippi to Rome bringing gifts.
- (3) Word is sent from Rome to Philippi that Epaphroditus has fallen ill.
- (4) Message comes back from Philippi to Rome, telling of the Philippians' distress at the news.

The return of Epaphroditus with the epistle would make a fifth journey and it is to be followed by the sending of Timothy. Paul himself hopes to visit Philippi some time afterwards. The distance between Rome and Philippi was nearly 800 miles, following the Appian Way for 360 miles to Brindisium (Brindisi), and then by boat across the Adriatic to Dyrrhachium (Durazzo), a two-day trip, provided the weather was favourable. From Dyrrhachium the Egnatian Way would be followed for 370 miles to Philippi. Sir William Ramsey has calculated that the average distance of a day's travel overland, on foot, would not be above 15 miles (HDB, v, art. *Roads and Travel* (N.T.), p. 386). Reckoning like this, the one-way journey would take over seven weeks, and allowing for rests between trips and delays on the way, we should have to allow about five months for the return trip or ten months for the four journeys.

This period could be cut in half if the Philippians heard of Paul's appeal to Caesar soon after it was made, and sent their messenger to meet him with supplies on his arrival. We should still have to allow four or five months for exchanges of cor-

respondence before the despatch of the epistle. Since Paul was under house arrest at Rome *for two years*, there was clearly time for all these journeys, so Rome cannot be turned down because of its distance from Philippi.

Certainly, the journey from Ephesus to Philippi would be much shorter, taking 10–12 days in each direction, but there are many problems which this supposition produces which cannot be overcome. No less an authority than Professor C. H. Dodd has critically examined the Caesarean and Ephesian hypotheses and rejected them in favour of the Roman origin of Philippians (*N.T. Studies*). Professor F. W. Beare concludes his survey by writing, "Taking everything into account, the ancient hypothesis that Philippians was written from Rome must be allowed to hold the field. A precise date cannot be established. We must be content to place it between A.D. 60 and 64, probably towards the later date. The Philippians are Macedonians. These, having received the word, stood firm in the faith, and did not receive false apostles. The Apostle praises them, writing to them from Rome, from prison, by Epaphroditus (*The (Latin) Marcionite prologue to the epistle*, dating from the second century)". See *The Epistle to the Philippians* by F. W. Beare, p. 24.

Professor C. H. Dodd points out that Paul, as a Roman citizen, was not in danger of suffering the extreme penalty as the result of any sentence of a provincial court such as Ephesus, since he could always play his trump card, an appeal to Caesar. Rome alone was the place that imprisonment could end immediately in death. Professor A. T. Robertson, one of the foremost New Testament Greek scholars, writes "the argument (of the Ephesian origin propounded by Dr. G. S. Duncan) is more ingenious than convincing. It is not possible here to review the arguments *pro* and *con* that convince me that Paul was in Rome when he wrote this letter to Philippi" (*Word Pictures of the N.T.*, p. 433). Donald Guthrie sums up the situation thus: "If the Roman hypothesis were proved untenable, the Ephesian would probably be unchallenged as an alternative theory. But the grounds for disputing the Roman theory are far from conclusive, and in view of this uncertainty and the fact that the Acts' silence about an Ephesian imprisonment must be a certain embarrassment to the Ephesian theory, it



seems better to give the preference to Rome as the place of despatch" (*N.T. Introduction, The Pauline Epistles*, p. 153). No less an authority than J. B. Lightfoot firmly supported the Roman origin, and others could be named, so at least we are in good company from a scholastic standpoint in adhering to Rome as the place where the Apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians, and we should remember that this subject is largely one of scholarship and research.

But there are two more important points which must be considered, namely, the make-up of the New Testament; and the dispensational viewpoint. (1) If Philippians was written from Rome after Acts twenty-eight, then we get a perfect arrangement of the New Testament epistles in groups of sevens.\* *Seven of Paul's epistles during the Acts*: Galatians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Hebrews and Romans (we have given our reasons elsewhere for maintaining the Pauline authorship of Hebrews despite its unpopularity today). *Seven of Paul's epistles after the Acts*: Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, Philemon, 1 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Timothy. *Seven general epistles or epistles of the circumcision*: James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2 and 3 John, and Jude. This is so obviously of Divine origin that we should need very strong positive evidence indeed to take any other position. If we put Philippians into the Acts, this perfect balance is upset, and not only this, but the inter-relationship of the Prison Epistles themselves; Ephesians and Colossians making known the Mystery and Philippians and 2 Timothy the prize and crown attached to it. (2) Nothing is surer than that the miraculous gift of healing is prominent all through the Acts as one of the sign gifts of the earthly kingdom related to Israel. It is as prominent in Acts twenty-eight as at the beginning. How comes it then that Paul laments in Philippians (if he wrote this at Ephesus or Caesarea), that he cannot heal his beloved friend Epaphroditus who practically lost his life through serious illness yet later at Acts twenty-eight his gift of miraculous healing is quite unimpaired (Acts 28:8,9)? This certainly must be faced *from Scripture*, and we should like to know the answer.

It has been asserted that because the word "mystery" does not occur in Philippians, the epistle cannot be written after

\* See *Perfection or Perdition* by C. H. Welch and S. Allen (B.P.T.).

Acts twenty-eight. By the same argument 2 Timothy, Paul's last letter, would have nothing to do with the Mystery, for likewise the word does not occur there! The word "sanctification" does not occur in Philippians. Are we to conclude then, that this church was not sanctified? Let us face the fact that *an argument from silence is exceedingly weak unless accompanied by strong positive evidence*. If Paul had to mention every basic or important truth in every letter he wrote, he would have been compelled to have written long volumes concerned with doctrine rather than letters. Those with dispensational leanings who place Philippians in the Acts should weigh over very carefully what they are losing in precious truth belonging to the Body of Christ as against anything they think they are going to gain by so doing.

We have said nothing about the question of "bishops and deacons" (Phil. 1:1) as this is no problem as related to the Mystery when viewed Scripturally: but we hope we have made it clear that we have good ground for placing the epistle to the Philippians after Acts twenty-eight and written from Paul's house-imprisonment in Rome. We note that Philippians is a letter pre-eminently of *unselfish service*, in connection with the Gospel and the fulness of Truth made known after Israel's defection. This letter does not go over the ground again of Ephesians. There was no need to do this. Philippians deals with the responsibility that comes from receiving the riches of grace and glory that are revealed in Ephesians and Colossians, the *working out* of our salvation with a prize or Divine *reward* in view, and thus it balances 2 Timothy with its similar emphasis on a *crown* (2 Tim. 4:8 and cp. 2:12).

We are not surprised therefore to find service stressed in the first verse:

"Paul and Timothy, *servants* of Christ Jesus, to all the saints . . . at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons" (R.V.),

and it is the only epistle of Paul's to begin in this way. The word "servant" is literally "slave", and on the surface it seems extraordinary that the champion of liberty (Gal. 5:1) should so describe himself. But ever since his conversion, the Apostle's conception of redemption was that he had been *purchased* by the Lord and thus he was entirely the Lord's property, as his very first question showed (Acts 9:6). Only those who have this

experience and realize its implications to the full know what real freedom is. Before we go any further we will set out the structure of the epistle, and for this we are indebted to Mr. C. H. Welch:

- A 1:1,2 Salutation. Saints in Christ Jesus
- B 1:3-26 Fellowship in the Gospel from the first day
- C 1:27-2:5 Conversation (manner of life) here. Stand fast
- D 2:6-11 Sevenfold humiliation of Christ
- E 2:12-17 Exhortation. Work out
- F 2:17-30 Example of Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus
- E 3:1-5 Exhortation. Beware
- D 3:4-19 Sevenfold loss of Paul
- C 3:20-4:10 Conversation (citizenship) there. Stand fast
- B 4:10-20 Fellowship in beginning of the Gospel
- A 4:21-23 Salutation. Saints of Caesar's household.

The structure is an introversion and is self-explanatory. There are many parallels with the epistle to the Hebrews. In each case a race is envisaged, and maturity as the goal (Phil. 3:12-15; Heb. 6:1; 12:1,2), and we should not be surprised at this when we realize that Hebrews is the "prize" epistle of the Acts period, as Philippians is to the church of the Mystery revealed after the Acts.

Some find the mention of "bishops and deacons" in verse one a problem, but, rightly regarded, this is not so. We feel this may have come about through the idea that organized assemblies only existed during the Acts period; and afterwards, when the great secret of Ephesians and Colossians was revealed, such united witness finished; the churches somehow were dissolved and thus ceased to be. When one tries to examine the basis for such an idea, one searches in vain for any solid reason. Even later on, when so many deserted the Apostle (2 Tim. 1:15 R.V.), this did not stamp out the various churches, unless one assumes that all these people became atheists! There was still plenty of Christian witness left, even though it was largely devoid of the truth of the sacred "deposit" given to Paul by the ascended Christ. In the sub-apostolic period we know for certain that the churches at Corinth and Philippi were still in existence because Clement wrote to the former and Polycarp to the latter and we have their letters today (See *The Early Centuries and the Truth* by the authors).

Now it is God's will that things be done "decently and in order". The Apostle Paul was constantly concerned that this should characterize the various groups of believers. A pagan world was watching and only too ready to pounce on any irregularity among the Christian churches. We can thus understand that the provision of leaders was a necessity in all circumstances, and the lowly but valuable offices of bishops (overseers) and deacons (servants of the church) were a gift from the Lord to this end. We must cast out from our minds any modern conception of a bishop. In Paul's day these were just humble and faithful believers, whose homes were examples of what Christian homes should be, and therefore a fit place for believers to meet with one another in study, praise and worship (1 Tim. 3:1-13).

If this was true during the Acts, then the need certainly did not cease afterwards when the Mystery was revealed with its new calling and walk. The need and importance of such leadership would be even greater, and the fellowship in the house-church even more necessary than before so that the new Truth could be studied together and the Body grow as a whole (Eph. 4:13,15,16). The very fact that instruction concerning bishops and deacons was given after Acts twenty-eight, when Paul wrote his first epistle to Timothy proves this.

Some have tried to give an earlier date for 1 Timothy and place it in the Acts period, but this is impossible, and even if it were so, there is still the same problem with the epistle to Titus. A. M. Stibbs in *The New Bible Commentary* writes (p. 1,063) "It is generally agreed that it is impossible to fit these epistles (the Pastorals) within the limits of Paul's life as we know it from the Acts of the Apostles. For their explanation they demand the recognition, indeed they themselves provide the most decisive evidence, that Paul was released from the imprisonment of which we read at the end of Acts (Phil. 2:24; Philem. 22) . . .".

The duties of an overseer (bishop) are clearly set out in Acts 20:28:

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers (bishops), to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood".



These believers are also called “elders” in verse seventeen, showing that these two titles referred to the same office. The need for nourishing the people of God (who were enlightened to the new calling of Ephesians) certainly did not cease at Acts twenty-eight. Deacons (*diakonoï*) appeared to be responsible for certain welfare duties connected with the assembly. The house of Stephanas had appointed themselves for service (*diakonia*) to the saints (1 Cor. 16:15), and was linked with others who helped and laboured together (verse 17). There is no exalted ecclesiastical office in either of these titles. This was what they degenerated into as organized Christianity got further and further away from the original truth. It is worthy of note that there are *bishops* (plural) at the beginning, not *one* bishop ruling and superintending, which again was a declension from original truth by the time of Ignatius.

From the standpoint of the Philippian letter, we see the church still organized in absolute simplicity with the minimum of “offices” to assure the orderly running of the new witness. Because Paul addressed his last letter to Timothy, again some have assumed that, in view of this, organized groups of Christians had ceased to exist. Most certainly this was not so, but we can well understand that the Apostle’s last thoughts before his martyrdom would be for the young fellow, his dearly loved son in the faith, who was soon to take up the great responsibility of standing for all that made up “the good deposit” of truth which he (Paul) had received from the ascended Christ, and thus his last letter was a personal one for his correction and encouragement.

At the commencement of Philippians the Apostle gives his thanksgiving for the believers at Philippi. “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you” he said. Isolated in his Roman imprisonment, we can well imagine that Paul’s thoughts would continually travel to the various groups of God’s children his faithful ministry had been the means of founding. At least the Roman Praetorian guard could not chain his thoughts, nor the Word of God! (2 Tim. 2:8,9). Neither could they stop his Christian witness, as the rest of the chapter clearly testifies, for there was still abundant fruit, even though he was chained to a Roman soldier night and day. Every time he thought of the Philippian church he felt extremely grateful to God for

them, not only because in their practical love for him they had sent him a gift, but also because they had shared in the work and witness of the Gospel from the first day of the founding of their assembly by the Apostle. Thus they were constantly in his prayers with joy in his heart.

Although this is an epistle of suffering, testing, and sacrifice (1:29,30; 2:17; 3:7,8), yet paradoxically it is the epistle of joy and rejoicing (1:4,18; 2:16,17,18,28; 3:1; 4:4,10). This only goes to show that the believer need not be unduly affected by his environment. Trying though it may be, by the grace and strength of God he can rise above it and become “more than conqueror” (Rom. 8:37). Joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), and this is not something that fluctuates from day to day as it does not depend upon anything external, but is an abiding possession given by the Spirit of God and centres around all the spiritual wealth that exists in Christ. Later on in this epistle Paul is going to reveal how he could be independent of all circumstances (4:11–13). A careful consideration of the occurrences of the word “joy” will throw a flood of light upon this most attractive grace which advertises the Christian faith so well. Long-faced Christianity does not win new adherents! On the other hand, it is not the empty flippancy of the unbelieving world, which is so often mistaken for it.

The Philippian believers had shown the genuineness of their faith by their obedience to the truth and their constant labour to make the Gospel known, which was a good deal more than the empty profession of words only. Paul was assured that this was an *abiding* work:

“Being confident of this very thing, that He which *began* a good work in you, will *perfect* it until the day of Jesus Christ” (verse 6 R.V.).

Whatever God begins He finishes or perfects, and this is the final answer to those who say one can be saved today and lost tomorrow. Moreover we must remember that there are three tenses in salvation and redemption. We *have been* saved from the penalty of sin. We are *now being saved* from its power. In resurrection, when our hope is realized and we have the redemption of the body (Rom. 8:23–25), we shall be saved from *its very presence*, for we shall be presented “holy and blameless” (Eph. 5:27).

This very fact shows that God will complete the work of salvation which He began. If this is not so, then Christ has died in vain. The two verbs “begin” and “finish” come together again in Galatians 3:3; “Are ye so foolish? having *begun* (*enarchomai*) in the Spirit, are ye now *made perfect* (*epiteleo*) by the flesh?” Can the old sinful nature complete what the Holy Spirit, in the new nature given to the believer, has commenced? To ask the question is to answer it. In Philippians the completion will be realized in “the day of Jesus Christ”, or “the day of Christ” (Phil. 1:10; 2:16). In his last letter he just calls it “that day” (2 Tim. 1:18; 4:8). Previously, to the church at Corinth, he had declared that this future “day” will be the testing time for our service (1 Cor. 3:13), and he placed it over against “man’s day” of the present time (1 Cor. 4:3 margin). This period is one of the great prophetic “days” of Scripture which cannot be limited to twenty-four hours, and it is in harmony with the theme of Philippians, namely the practical working out of the truth (2:12), a goal to be reached, and the running of the race for a prize to be awarded at the end by the Lord (3:12–16).

In the section now before us (1:3–26) we have three references to fellowship and furtherance (verses 5, 12, 25) and in between a threefold confidence (*pepoitha*, verses 6, 14, 25). This can be set out as follows:

- A 1:3–5 Thanksgiving. Fellowship and defence of the Gospel
- B 6–8 Confidence
- A 9–11 Paul’s prayer. Furtherance of the Gospel
- B 12–18 Confidence
- A 19–21 The Philippians’ prayer
- B 22–26 Confidence.

After asserting his confidence in the fulness and completeness of all the Lord’s gracious work on behalf of the Philippian believers (and all of God’s children for that matter), Paul states that it is only “right for me to be thus minded on behalf of you all, because I have you in my heart . . .” (1:7 R.V.). *Phronein*, “minded” is of frequent occurrence in this epistle. It occurs in 2:2 (twice), 2:5; 3:15 (twice), 16 (Received Text), 3:19; 4:2, and 10 twice, “care” and “careful”. It is obviously one of the key-words. In fact the whole of the epistle revolves around the “mind of Christ” and its practical outworking in the believer. The word means much more than mental acknowledgment. Sympathetic concern is nearer the mark, the thought that

touches the heart and action in connection with others. This the Apostle had in abundant measure towards all his converts, making a close bond that distance could not affect or sever. "I have you in my heart", he says, and this is surely one of the warmest expressions he ever used. This bond also came about because he and the Philippians shared together in the "defence and confirmation of the gospel" and in the grace of God which imparted the necessary strength for this defence and confirmation (verse 7).

Just what does Paul mean by these latter words? He could mean faithfully proclaiming and defending the Gospel in his oral and written ministry. Or he could be referring to his prison experience, for the two terms *apologia* and *bebaiosis* are legal terms which could be connected with his trial before the imperial court. Moulton and Milligan, on the evidence of the papyri, state that "*bebaiosis* must always be read with the technical sense in mind". In this case he would mean that whether he is in prison or brought before his judges for the Gospel's sake, the Philippians all shared in the grace which was given to both, for they were suffering too (1:29). Not only this, but he had an intense longing for them, doubtless sharpened by his imprisonment and separation. This was a reflection of the "tender mercies" (bowels, verse 8 A.V.) of Christ; that compassionate regard which the Lord showed to men in His earthly ministry and which He still bears today. If Paul cannot see the saints at Philippi, then he will pray for them, and the prayer that follows is outstanding in that every word should be carefully weighed if the fulness of the prayer is to be appreciated. Paul was concerned that their love should develop into "knowledge" or "acknowledgment" and "judgment", with the result that they might be able to "approve the things that are excellent"; leading on to being "sincere" and "void of offence" and "being filled with the fruits of righteousness". It will be seen that each stage leads to another and fuller development; "that" in each case being *hina*, in order that, and the preposition *eis* expressing a goal ("that", "till" and "unto").

Love, to be practical and of real value, must issue in *act* or *performance*. Here its practical outworking leads to a daily *acknowledgment* and this in turn will lead to *discernment*. There can be no spiritual growth without a real practical response. Mental



grasp of truth by itself is barren and lifeless. Ephesians 1:17 tells us that by practical acknowledgment we receive illumination. Colossians 1:10 instructs us that by such acknowledgment we grow. Philippians 1:9 assures us by the same acknowledgment we have the important ability to discern and weigh over things *so that we can obtain the best*. The word “judgment” is not to be linked with a law court or with legal terms. It is *aisthesis*, perception or discrimination, by which one has the ability to weigh things up as regards *quality*, thus separating between good and bad, or the better and the best. A cognate word *aistheterion* is used in Hebrews 5:14, “having the *senses* exercised to discern both good and evil”, which has the same thought in view. Now this is very necessary in the affairs of everyday life. No one deliberately chooses what is poor in quality. He naturally desires the best that life offers, and this ability comes with mental development and experience. It is no less necessary in the Christian life if one wishes to lay hold of the best that God has to give. The Authorized Version margin has the alternative reading “that ye may try the things that differ” which, on the surface, does not seem to have much connection with “approving the things that are excellent”, till one realizes that the latter phrase can only be true when the previous one has been put into operation. Things usually differ in *quality*, and it is only by perception and careful weighing over that what is better can be appreciated and received. *Diapheronta* (excellent) has this meaning in Matthew 6:26 and 10:31 (“better than”, “of more value than”), and 1 Corinthians 15:41 (“one star *differeth from* another star in glory”).

Now this perception and ability to weigh things over in order to get what is “excellent” or the best, is just what is lacking in so many believers. There is no difference in truth so far as they are concerned. All is one and the same. They are the very opposite of Abraham whose eye of faith embraced the “better country” and heavenly city (Heb. 11:10,16). Abraham and his posterity had already been given an earthly country, a good land (Gen. 15:18) which afterwards was described as “flowing with milk and honey”. Yet he looked for something better! God had most evidently given him a glimpse of the heavenly Jerusalem, that, centuries later, the Apostle John was also to see and describe in all its glory and beauty (Rev. 21). Abraham was able to

“weigh up” and “discriminate” and “to prove the things that are excellent” and, by faith, to embrace God’s best for him. It is this ability and keenness that is so lacking today in Christian circles. Why should we “rightly divide the Word of truth”? they say. Why bother about three spheres of blessing in the Bible? Is it necessary to know this? We are saved and that is all that matters!

The example of Abraham and the worthies of Hebrews eleven condemns this attitude. Overcoming faith wants the best that God has revealed. This is not presumption; it is honouring and valuing what God has been pleased to make known for the obedience of faith. The other is just spiritual laziness and unbelief, which can only result in loss for the believer who indulges in it. We are often amazed at how little of the fulness of God’s revealed truth the average believer desires to receive.

Presently Paul is going to introduce the figure of a race, and here, therefore, the mind or thinking is all-important. Those who wish to be victorious in the race, must be “thus minded” with the Apostle (3:15). This quality then of spiritual perception is a mark of one who is pressing on in the race for the heavenly prize. All wrong attitudes of mind will only clog and slow up the runner and they must be rigorously discarded. This leads to the next clause in the prayer, “in order that ye might be sincere and without offence with a view to the Day of Christ” (literally, verse 10). The word sincere is *eilikrines*, which also occurs in 2 Peter 3:1. The noun *eilikrineia* occurs three times (1 Cor. 5:8; 2 Cor. 1:12; 2:17). The derivation of these words is doubtful, and neither of them are common in the papyri. There are two possible sources. (1) A derivation from *eilein*, to shake to and fro in a sieve, till all the foreign matter is extracted and only the pure substance left. This would describe the mind which has been purified and cleansed by the Word of God (John 15:3; Ps. 19:9). (2) Or they could be derived from two words, *heile*, sunlight, and *krinein*, to judge, and would describe something that could stand the test of sunlight and show no flaws. Both are searching ideas and would fit into the context. The successful runner in God’s race is one who has been purified, has laid aside every weight and sin that so easily besets us (Heb. 12:1,2), and is running this race with patience, looking unto Jesus, the Beginner and the Finisher. Or he can stand the test of God,

Who is light, and penetrates the innermost thoughts and motives of the mind and finds nothing there that is out of His will. Such a person is “pure” or “transparent” as Moffatt so aptly renders it.

He is also “without offence”, that is, not causing offence or stumbling in other people; and so would be filled with the *fruit* of righteousness (note the R.V. margin, “fruit” is singular). This is practical righteousness, righteousness in action, as the figure of fruit always indicates (Gal. 5:22) and this comes only “through Jesus Christ” (1:11 R.V.). The athlete does not run a race by *theorizing* or merely *thinking*, but by intense action and effort, and the final goal is “unto the glory and praise of God”. This is the acid test, not the glorification of man, or even of the believer, but the ultimate glory of God himself. Every prize winner in the Day of Christ will contribute to this glory. For it is only by the grace and resurrection power of Christ that any saved sinner can press on to the goal, breast the tape, and receive the crown and the “well done” of the righteous Umpire (2 Tim. 4:8). Such a prayer was not only necessary for the Philippian saints. As members of the Body of Christ, each one of us needs it experimentally day by day and we need to continually ponder its every statement and its outworking in our lives.

A new section now starts in which Paul informs his Philippian friends that, in spite of his imprisonment and the hostility of enemies inside and outside the church, rather than all this hindering the truth, it was actually helping it! Christ was being proclaimed more and more, and this was producing real response from those who heard.

While, therefore, on the human plane, he could have felt depressed, defeated and frustrated, he rather rejoiced, as he saw the wonderful way the Lord was working, “making all things work together for good” and for His glory.

“Now I would have you know, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the progress of the gospel; so that my bonds became manifest in Christ throughout the whole praetorian guard, and to all the rest; and that most of the brethren in the Lord, being confident through my bonds, are more abundantly bold to speak the word of God without fear” (1:12-14 R.V.).

It may be that the Philippians had sent a message by Epaphroditus expressing their concern about his welfare. If so, then these verses give them up to date news of himself and his affairs. How glad he must have been to be able to tell them that the good news was advancing (*prokope* furtherance) in spite of all difficulties! Not only this, but his Christian witness in his imprisonment was having a stimulating effect upon believers in the locality. They were losing their fear, and giving a bolder testimony to God's Word. If fear is contagious, and it often is, so is its opposite, boldness! Paul's uncompromising testimony in word and action stirred up others around him and thus the truth was being proclaimed more and more, so much so that all the praetorian guard were getting to hear of it. This was another fact that gave him great joy.

However, some were preaching Christ with a very wrong motive. They seemed to have animosity towards the Apostle, and even hoped to aggravate the irksomeness of his captivity. Perhaps they thought they could make him jealous by their success in preaching. There was a background of envy and strife, squabbling and rivalry. The meanness of such an attitude of mind seems hardly possible in a Christian, but there is no knowing what can happen when a believer comes under the domination of the old sinful nature, and the enemy working through it. If they hoped to overwhelm the Apostle, they were sadly mistaken. The glorious "What then?" of verse eighteen rings out almost in defiance. What of it? he says, or as we might colloquially say, "so what?" Whatever is happening, *Christ is being proclaimed*, he said, *and this is the chief thing*. I therefore am rejoicing and will continue to rejoice in spite of all such opposition.

What can daunt a person who can surmount his adverse circumstances so magnificently? What an example to all of us! It takes so little to get some of us down, that we should feel ashamed as we contemplate the triumphant witness that this great servant of Christ gave in the most difficult of circumstances. Another thing that must have contributed to Paul's joy was the fact that he could count on two things: (1) The Philippians' prayers on his behalf. (2) The supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ (verse 19). While in one sense the Apostle was independent, yet he valued so much the prayer support of his



fellow-believers (Rom. 15:30; 2 Cor. 1:11; Eph. 6:18,19; Col. 4:3). He knew only too well what his continual prayers had accomplished for them, and he realized that he could be upheld in the same way. Let us never forget this all-important ministry of intercession. On the surface it may not appear to be doing much. There is no outward bustle or activity to impress, but it can “move the Hand that moves the world”! Whether Paul’s “salvation” mentioned in verse nineteen meant the deliverance from prison, or the final salvation with eternal glory (2 Tim. 2:10), the context does not make clear, but there is room for both conceptions. The latter one certainly fits in with the following verse, in which the Apostle mentions his “earnest expectation” and the hope of not being “ashamed”, which looks forward to the Lord’s future assessment of his service.

“According to my earnest expectation and hope, that in nothing shall I be put to shame, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether by life, or by death” (Phil. 1:20, R.V.).

It would seem that Paul had Job 13:16 in mind, where the LXX is identical. “This also shall be my salvation” (R.V.).

The one thing that is dominant in Paul’s thought right through this section is the proclamation and exaltation of Christ; self is completely left out. “Christ shall be magnified” is the note that is stressed right through; whether he lives or whether he dies is not the first concern of the Apostle. Either can contribute to the glory of the ascended Lord Jesus as He wills.

At first glance, verse twenty-one seems to contradict this:

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain”.

Whose gain? Christ’s or Paul’s? Most expositors seem to think it is Paul’s, *but this would contradict the very spirit of this context*. It would introduce a self-motive which was completely lacking in the Apostle’s mind here. Even if chapter three is remembered with its stress on the “prize of the high calling” (3:14), we must not assume that this is the only theme that is brought forward in this epistle. Paul has certainly avoided the spirit of Peter when he said “Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed Thee, what shall we have therefore?” (Matt. 19:27). *The Companion Bible* note on Philippians 1:21 is, “if his bonds had furthered the Gospel, what might not his death

do?” and this is to the point. There is a structural *chiasm* here, which, when fully filled out, reads:

“For me to live is Christ (His gain), and to die is (Christ’s) gain”.

If we could only catch this spirit so that the whole of our life and service aims solely at Christ’s glory and magnification!

*Apokaradokia*, “earnest expectation”, is a picturesque word, used only by Paul in two contexts; Romans 8:19, “the *earnest expectation* of the creation”, and here. It was possibly coined by him and describes a keen anticipation of the future, literally a “craning of the neck” to see what lies ahead. This future certain hope bore a relationship to his imprisonment and testing, making them “a light affliction”, while he looked at this future glorious scene (2 Cor. 4:17,18), and so enabling him more resolutely to magnify the Lord *in his body*, whether in its present sufferings or in final martyrdom!

At this point the Apostle’s language becomes broken and irregular, reflecting in a vivid way his thoughts as they pass from the possibility of further service for the Lord on his release from prison, or the giving of his life for His Saviour.

“But if to live in the flesh—if this is the fruit of my work, then what I shall choose I wot not” (verse 22 R.V.).

The Revised Version margin gives the alternative reading “I do not make known”. *Gnorizo* occurs twenty-four times in the New Testament, but never in the sense of “knowing”. It is generally rendered make known, or declare, and what Paul is saying here, is not that he did not know what to choose, but he did not *make it known*. Whatever his personal desires were, he put them on one side for the will of the Lord to be accomplished and His glory furthered.

Two alternatives presented themselves to him: (1) departing and being with Christ, (2) staying in this life with the object of serving Him and His people.

“But I am in a strait betwixt the two, having the desire to depart and be with Christ; for it is very far better; yet to abide in the flesh is more needful for your sake” (verses 23,24 R.V.).

These are two opposites which put him under constraint. He was “hemmed in on both sides” (J. B. Lightfoot). If he merely

considered himself, then to be with Christ was infinitely better, with all the sufferings and imperfections of this life finished for ever. But the spirit of this intensely unselfish man so controlled him that he was willing to put self and its desires entirely on one side. It was more needful for the Philippians (verse 24) that he should stay here, and so this became the over-riding consideration.

What a lot of wishful thinking and even rubbish has been read into the statement “to depart and be with Christ”. Those who indulge in this seem to have forgotten that Paul has already dealt with the state after death and resurrection to follow in 2 Corinthians five, and 1 Corinthians fifteen, and that, being the man he was, he was not likely to contradict himself and cause confusion among the churches. The fundamental doctrine of the resurrection of the believer has been so jettisoned by modern Christianity, that many are only too glad to seize on this verse to support their unscriptural views. It can be said with certainty that, for the believer in the New Testament there is no way out of the grave except by resurrection, whether it is as the consummation of his certain *hope*, or an out-resurrection, a special one in connection with his *prize*. Those who do not believe this conveniently stress Philippians 1:23 and forget Philippians 3:11 “if by any means I may attain to the out-resurrection, out from among the dead” (literally). This was the Apostle’s great desire in chapter three, and it does *not* express an opposite sentiment to 1:23.\* The two must and do blend together. To consider departing and being with Christ, apart from his longing for this unique resurrection, shows a biased mind.

This is not the place to give a detailed exposition of 2 Corinthians five, but the reader should ponder it carefully and prayerfully and he will then see that the last thing Paul wanted was the *death state*—for that was like *being naked*. He rather longed for “*his house from heaven*”, the permanent dwelling of the resurrection body in contrast to the temporal tent of the present mortal one. Without such a resurrection, believers who had died *were perished* (1 Cor. 15:18), another verse which the wishful thinkers conveniently ignore.

As to the *timing* of either the believer’s resurrection or out-

\* See pp. 243-245 for the exposition of this important verse.

resurrection, we do not go into it here, having already dealt with this point elsewhere. Far too much has been made of the *timing* rather than the *certainly* of these resurrections, and this timing is invariably by inference rather than from the clear teaching of Scripture. As far as the *experience* of the believer goes in these matters, it will be “death and sudden glory” for those who have “fallen asleep in Christ”. There is certainly no legitimate ground here for violent disagreement or faction, and in these intensely dark and difficult days we need to take heed and not allow the enemy to come in as the divider of the brethren, and so nullify the Divine unities of Ephesians four and the practical unity in service brought forward in Philippians.

Coming back to the context of Philippians 1:24, we have noted that the Apostle Paul put any private desires of his own on one side, and considered the needs of his loyal supporters at Philippi:

“And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide, yea, and abide with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith” (1:25 R.V.).

Not only this, but he felt confident that he would be released from his prison, and be in a position to visit them again (verse 26). This would give them much joy. The Authorized Version “rejoicing” is too mild. *Kauchema* is really “glorying” (as R.V.), or better, exultation. What a rich answer this would be to their prayers for the Apostle, and how it would thrill their hearts to see him again in the flesh and share with him the spiritual riches in Christ!

Verse twenty-seven commences a section of exhortation and example, and no notice should be taken of the chapter break, for this section goes on to 2:18.

“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ . . . ” (1:27 R.V.).

The verb *politeuesthe* is correctly rendered in the Revised Version margin as “behave as citizens worthily”. It could be rendered, “let your life as citizens be worthy of the gospel”. They had a heavenly citizenship (3:20) and their present life here should reflect this, whether Paul was able to visit them or not.



We need constantly to be reminded that there is a threefold injunction to “walk worthy” in the Prison Epistles:

“Walk worthy of the calling” (Eph. 4:1)  
“Walk worthy of the gospel” (Phil. 1:27)  
“Walk worthy of the Lord” (Col. 1:10),

and this covers every circumstance in the home and outside. The Philippians, as Roman citizens, were intensely proud of their civic privileges with all the benefits that accrued by being a Roman colony. Though living far from Rome, they enjoyed privileges as though they were resident there. As Dibelius puts it, “it signifies a colony of foreigners whose organization reflects in miniature the *politeia* of the homeland”.

Similarly, from a spiritual standpoint, though far away from heavenly places, they were citizens by grace of an exalted sphere *there*, and thus could not avoid the responsibility that such an overwhelming blessing brought. We too, are in their position; from one sense very much on this earth, yet our home is not here. We are pilgrims, passing through to our eternal home in the heavenlies. May our practical response be like the Hebrew believers who by their faith and conduct declared plainly that they sought a better country, a heavenly one (Heb. 11:14–16). The new section of Philippians, upon which we now enter, commences in 1:27 with the word “only” which is emphatic, as it is in Galatians 3:2. It has the force of “above all”, for the Christian practice which follows is essential if the truth is ever to make progress. If groups of believers cannot practically exhibit in their corporate life what they profess, who is going to listen to them seriously? The word that the Apostle uses is not the usual one, *peripateo*, but *politeuesthai*, which is cognate with the word “conversation” Authorized Version, or “citizenship” Revised Version of Philippians 3:20. In the verse we are considering, the Revised Version is to be preferred. “Let your *manner of life* be worthy of the gospel of Christ”, and in the margin we read, “behave as citizens”.

We have already pointed out the force of all this. If the Philippians as Roman citizens enjoyed great civic privileges, then they must also face up to the responsibilities which these brought. Likewise, as citizens of the heavenlies, they must act accordingly, and reflect this by standing together with dauntless

courage in absolute *unity in service and witness*. There is no doubt whatsoever that this thought completes the precious unities of the Spirit, faith and body in Ephesians four, which form such an important part of the believer's "worthy walk". To talk about guarding these, at the same time to do anything that spoils the group-unity in service, is to delude oneself.

To enforce this truth, Paul's vivid mind quickly turns from the figure of civic privileges to a team of athletes united in mind and spirit:

"Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ: that, whether I come and see you or be absent, I may hear of your state, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one soul striving for the faith of the gospel; and in nothing affrighted by the adversaries . . . " (1:27,28 R.V.),

and this thought is repeated in 4:1, "stand fast in the Lord". Any possibility of the spoiling of internal harmony, such as had occurred in the Corinthian church, was dreaded by the Apostle. He knew only too well how such disruptive work played into the hands of Satan and ruined the witness for the Lord. The Philippians must stand not only individually, but *together as a company in one soul* (literally) and *one spirit*. They must *strive together, sunathleo*, a term connected with the games, which Paul uses again in 2 Timothy 2:5 Revised Version:

"And if also a man *contend in the games*, he is not crowned, except he have contended lawfully".

They must do this *together*, and this is the recurring thought in this most practical letter, which we ignore to our peril. It will be helpful to see how this has been stressed in Philippians by the number of other words Paul uses compounded with the preposition *sun*, "together with":

*Sungkoinonesantes* "To have fellowship" (4:14)  
*Sungkoinonous* "Fellow-partakers" (1:7)  
*Sungchairo* "To rejoice together" (2:17,18)  
*Suzuge* "Yoke-fellow" (4:3)  
*Sunergon* "Fellow-worker" (2:25)  
*Sullambanou* "Assist-together" (4:3)  
*Summimetai* "Fellow-imitators" (3:17)  
*Summorphos* "Conformity" (3:21)  
*Summorphizomenos* "To be conformed" (3:10)  
*Sumpsuchoi* "Equal soul" (2:2)  
*Sustratiotes* "Fellow-soldier" (2:25).

Here we have fellowship, a sharing together in suffering, in labour, in joy and in spirit. Such united steadfastness, in spite of all attempts to scare them, would be a “manifest token of perdition” to their opponents. Moffatt vividly translates “fighting side by side”, and over all this the Lord was presiding, over-ruling all to the Philippians’ ultimate salvation, and their being “more than conquerors” (Rom. 8:37), while allowing the enemies, with the powers of darkness behind them (Eph. 6:12), to manifest their own perdition.

The “faith of the Gospel” is surely all that “good deposit” of truth which they had received through Paul’s ministry, and which the enemies were seeking to overthrow. It was a privilege, not only to receive this by faith, but to *suffer* for it. The word “given”, *echaristhe*, is formed on the stem of the noun *charis*, grace. To suffer for God-given truth is not something to be regarded with dread, but a mark of His signal favour, granted for Christ’s sake. Such a view would transform the situation and enable the Philippian church to come through with flying colours whatever persecution they were called upon to endure. One is reminded here of Peter and John, who, after being flogged, departed from the Sanhedrin “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His Name” (Acts 5:41).

Such suffering then did not come by accident. The Lord was in control, and rather than being a mark of His displeasure, it was one of His approval. And moreover, the Lord identified Himself with the suffering of His children, as Paul doubtless remembered from the words of the Saviour when He arrested him so dramatically on the road to Damascus, and said “I am Jesus, Whom thou persecutest” (Acts 9:4,5). Paul reminds the Philippians that, not only were they being tested, but he himself was sharing in their sufferings, in his Roman prison. This he emphasizes by the word “same”.

“Having the *same* conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me” (Phil. 1:30 R.V.).

They were engaged in a common struggle, in part of which they had seen him involved in the early days at Philippi.

## CHAPTER TWO OF THE EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS

The Apostle now adds to his plea for practical unity with a further fourfold stress. The “if” of 2:1 is not one of doubt. There was nothing more certain than the realities to which he appeals. “If” could be rendered “since”, or supposing it to be retained, we must add the thought of “as indeed is the case”. There is no verb in the Greek and most translations supply the verb “to be”, but possibly “avails” might be better. Moffatt renders the passage:

“So by all the stimulus of Christ, by every incentive of love, by all your participation in the Spirit, by all your affectionate tenderness, I pray you to give me the utter joy of knowing you are living in harmony, with the same feelings of love, with one heart and soul, never acting for private ends or from vanity, but humbly considering each other the better man, and each with an eye to the interests of others as well as to his own” (2:1–4).

This rendering gives the sense of the passage well. *Paraklesis* in verse one can be rendered “exhortation” as well as “consolation”, and this would enforce the Lord’s authorization, “exhortation in Christ”, to what Paul was saying, showing it was more than a personal plea. “Comfort of love” is the next bond that they should have to keep them together. In Colossians 3:14 it is described as the “tie [bond] of love”. This unselfish love is God-given and should cement them together in their witness. The third is “participation in the Spirit”, practically sharing all the riches He has given through His truth. “Bowels and mercies” is best taken together as hendiadys “affectionate tenderness” (Moffatt), the bowels being looked upon as the seat of the emotional state, “the abode of tender feelings” (Lightfoot).

All this should have constituted a stirring appeal to the Philippian church. These lofty motives which have their origin in the Lord, if responded to, would complete the Apostle’s joy and would lead to a fourfold result, being “of the same mind” (2:2 R.V.), “having the same love” (the love of verse 1), “being of one accord” (together in soul, literally), “of one mind” (repeating the verb *phronein*). Paul piles up these expressions,



deliberately stressing practical and outward unity. The Philippians could be left in no doubt that this manifest unity in service was an absolute essential *in the pathway to the heavenly prize*. To ignore this was to invite the risk of running the race in vain and being disqualified by the Lord. Such an attitude of mind would lead to *strife* and *vain ambition*, and the only antidote was the opposite qualities of *unselfishness* and *humility*. This humility is stressed at the outset in the “worthy walk” of Ephesians 4:2. The Apostle himself had exhibited it constantly in his witness and dealing with the churches. He could truthfully say that he had served the Lord “with all humility of mind” (Acts 20:19). This saved him from the original sin of pride and self-exaltation. Later on in the chapter he is going to bring forward the example of the Lord Who humbled Himself (verse 8) to the lowest depths.

Real unselfishness, so often talked about but so little practised, would deliver from the bondage to self and the claiming of one's rights, “not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others” (verse 4 R.V.). The spirit that wins the prize is not concern for ourselves, but first of all for the needs of others. Self-renunciation is a hard lesson to learn, for with all of us the “I” has great pull, and we must watch constantly that self-interest does not enter into our motives for Christian service.

In order to enforce this most necessary lesson, in fact it is the very essence of this letter to the Philippians, Paul brings forward examples in the lives of others, the first being the supreme example of the Lord Himself:

“Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus . . . ”  
(2:5 R.V.).

There is no verb in the second part of the sentence. The Authorized Version and Revised Version supply the verb “to be”, but most modern expositors take the phrase “in Christ Jesus” in the usual Pauline sense of being *positionally* in Christ. F. F. Bruce's paraphrase is, “Let your purpose and attitude of heart be that which is becoming in those who are one in Christ Jesus”. This is acceptable if it does not remove the introduction of the Lord as the Example above all others. If we still keep to the Authorized Version and Revised Version rendering, we must realize that it is not the mind of Christ *as a whole* which Paul is

exhorting the Philippians to have. It would be impossible for any limited human being to contain *all* the mind of God. Here it is rather the particular aspect of complete unselfishness which the Lord so wonderfully exhibited when He left all the glory that was His before the creation, and was willing to stoop so low, ending in the death of the cross for our sakes.

The great passage that now follows, is one of the most profound in the Bible, and has been recognized as such by Biblical scholars from the first centuries onwards. It abounds with difficulties in interpretation. The Scriptures say very little about the pre-existence of Christ before creation and this very fact complicates the teaching even further. One thing we may be sure of—Paul was not writing this passage to overwhelm the believers at Philippi, nor Christians of succeeding generations. The primary purpose was not to give a complete revelation of the position Christ had in eternity past, but to stress the exceeding love which was willing to give Himself to the limit and which we must have, if we are going to “run well” in the heavenly race.

In examining this context, we shall find there are seven steps of the Lord downward from the glory to the cross, and seven steps upward to that same glory that was His, originally, and this is balanced in the structure of the epistle by the seven gains of Paul in the flesh and his seven gains in the Spirit in chapter 3:7–11.

*Sevenfold Humiliation of Christ*

- (1) He emptied Himself (made Himself of no reputation)
- (2) Became a bond slave
- (3) Likeness of a man
- (4) Fashioned as a man
- (5) He humbled Himself
- (6) Obedient unto death

- (7) Even the death of the cross.

*His Sevenfold Exaltation.*

- (1) The Name above every name
- (2) Every knee shall bow
- (3) Things in heaven
- (4) Things in earth
- (5) Things under the earth
- (6) Every tongue shall confess

- (7) Jesus Christ is LORD.

Many are the interpretations of this passage, and one might well be daunted in trying to ascertain the correct one, but we remember that the words used must have a definite meaning and have been within the comprehension of the Philippians, otherwise their important teaching would have been valueless. Before we seek to deal with this section, we wish to point out

that it was probably a hymn, and if so, it is one of the earliest examples of Christian hymnody we possess. Ernest Lohmeyer in his work *Kyrios Jesus* (Heidelberg 1928) pointed this out, noting the way the sentences are constructed and the rhythmical cadence of the lines. If this is so, one would expect it would be possible to arrange them into stanzas, and Lohmeyer has done so with six stanzas with three lines thus:

- (1) Being in the form of God  
He considered it not a thing to be seized  
To be equal with God.
- (2) But emptied Himself  
By taking the form of a slave  
Coming in human likeness.
- (3) And appearing on earth as man  
He humbled Himself  
Becoming obedient unto death (indeed death on a cross).
- (4) Wherefore God highly exalted Him  
And bestowed on Him the Name  
That is above every name.
- (5) That at the Name of Jesus  
Every knee should bow  
Of things in heaven, on earth, and under the earth.
- (6) And every tongue shall confess  
Jesus Christ is LORD  
To the glory of God the Father.

Other scholars have modified this, but it is possibly true and would fall in line with other hymns contained in the New Testament such as the Nativity Canticles in Luke, and the hymns of praise in the Revelation and elsewhere. In view of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, what more natural than that the early church should sing the praises of One Who was so rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that through His poverty we should become eternally rich and endowed with such a high and holy calling? As to whether Paul composed this section of the epistle as a hymn, or is using another's composition under the Spirit's guidance, we cannot know for certainty. That the Apostle was capable of poetry of the highest order, "the hymn to love", as it has been called, of 1 Corinthians thirteen clearly testifies.

But what early hymn has been so difficult to interpret? One writer, Karl Bornhauser, has observed that when there has been gathered all that has been written and issued on these verses, one has a library! Yet, as we have before stated, the passage must

have been such that the Philippian believers could understand it, at least in a measure, otherwise it would have been of little value to them. And so, we take heart, believing that, if we notice very carefully what has been written, and avoid either adding ideas of our own or subtracting from the Divine record, we can receive such an understanding ourselves under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

For those who are capable of deep study, and who have an up to date background of New Testament Greek, the writings of J. Lightfoot and E. H. Gifford may be consulted, together with other Biblical scholars of the Victorian period. The twentieth-century writers such as Barth, Lohmeyer, F. W. Beare, Dibelius, Jeremias, M. R. Vincent, among many others, give a different viewpoint and should be weighed over in the light of Scripture. One recent monumental work is R. P. Martin's *Carmen Christi*, but this is a work chiefly for advanced students. Mr. C. H. Welch's *The Prize of the High Calling* is an obvious choice for those who value a rightly divided exposition, although Mr. Welch would never claim that what he has advanced is the last word on this Philippian passage. However, his deep insight into the truth made known through Paul's epistles, must always command respect and should never be ignored.

There are a number of points we must carefully consider in the exposition of Philippians 2:5–11; (1) *Being* in the form of God. (2) The meaning of *morphe*, form. (3) Robbery, *harpagmos*. (4) To be equal with God, *to einai isa Theo*. (5) He made Himself of no reputation, literally, He emptied Himself. (6) He took upon Him the form of a slave (servant). (7) He was made in the likeness of men. (8) Being found in fashion as a man He humbled Himself even to the death of the cross. If we can get a Scriptural conception of these eight points, we are well on the way to understanding what lies behind this profound passage.

### *Huparchon, being in the form of God.*

The word “being” is not the verb “to be” but *huparchon* “existing”, though we must remember that this word had a weakened sense, almost equivalent to *einai*, to be, in New Testament times, as the grammarians such as Liddell—Scott,



Moulton—Milligan, Bauer—Arndt—Gingrich, and A. T. Robertson, testify. Cognate with *huparcho* is *huparxis* (Acts 2:45 “goods”) and *huparchonta*, the participle used as a substantive, also translated a number of times “goods”, thus being practically identical with “I have”. Note Peter’s use of *huparcho* in Acts 3:6, “silver and gold *have* I none”.

*Huparcho* can denote an original or fundamental possession as 1 Corinthians 11:7 shows. Man is the image and glory of God, not by acquirement, but in virtue of his original creation by God (Gen. 1:27). Whatever *morphe* consists of, it was Christ’s original possession. Very little is revealed in the Scriptures of the Lord’s pre-incarnate state, and we need to be very careful in dealing with or accepting all the statements of the creeds. One would have thought that all careful students of the Bible would have insisted that, if ever there was a place where the actual wording of Scriptures must be carefully handled and adhered to without addition or subtraction, it is here. Yet what do we find? Too often mere inference or guess-work form the basis of theological ideas which cannot therefore be equated with revealed truth. Some dogmatically push the sonship of Christ before Bethlehem, totally ignoring the fact that there is no direct statement of God’s Word or revelation on this point. Where the Divine Book keeps quiet, we should be quiet too. We are certain that Divine sonship is true of the holy Babe yet to be born, for the angel definitely states this to be the case in Luke 1:35. Note he does not say that the holy thing that shall be born is called the Son of God but “*shall be called*” so.

The two important passages which deal with Christ’s pre-incarnate existence are John 1:1 and Colossians 1:15–19. What a magnificent opportunity the Apostle John had, when writing the prologue to his Gospel, of stating the eternal Sonship of Christ, if this was truth! He could have written:

In the beginning was *the Son*, and the *Son* was with God and the *Son* was God,

but he did not do so! Before Bethlehem the Lord Jesus was the *Logos, the Word*. Here we are on sure ground. Being originally the “Word” must therefore be parallel or identical with “being in the form of God”, and had this been carefully considered, much profitless speculation that has been written on this passage would have been avoided. Of Christ’s eternal existence

we have no doubt, for if he was God, this must be true, but in *what capacity* had He always existed, is the point at issue.

Those who deny the Deity of Christ are unreliable expositors of the passage with which we are dealing. They rest on false premises. They perpetuate the fallacy of arguing from human experience, that a son implies a pre-existing father, not realizing that the word “son” is used in both Old and New Testaments divorced from the idea of generation or priority. In Hebrew, age is expressed by the phrase “the son of — years”, and the New Testament uses such expressions as the “sons of disobedience”. It was one of the commonest ways of expressing identity.

Having misunderstood this, Arians often project the father-son relationship before Bethlehem and so, with a double error, they give us darkness rather than light. John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word . . . and the Word was God”, must be before our minds all the time when dealing with Philippians 2:6–11 or we shall surely go astray. We have read a number of expositions from well-known scholars where John 1:1 is not even mentioned.

We come to the other great passage which deals with Christ in His pre-incarnate existence, namely Colossians 1:15–19, where He is designated as the “Image of the invisible God”. The Greek for “image” is *eikon* which the LXX uses to translate the Hebrew *tselem*, image, in Genesis 1:26, “Let us make man in our *image*, after our likeness”. In Daniel 3:19 we have the phrase “the *form* of his (the king’s) countenance”, where the Aramaic equivalent *tselem* is rendered in the LXX by *morphe*. In fact *eikon* and *morphe* are used as interchangeable terms in the Greek Bible which helps us in our understanding of *morphe* in Philippians two. The same can be said of *eikon* and *doxa*, glory, in the LXX, and we remember that Genesis 1:27 is directly quoted in 1 Corinthians 11:7; man is the “image and glory” of God, and the Lord Jesus Himself is described as the “Image and glory of God” (2 Cor. 4:4). The magnitude of God’s glory is such that, unmediated and unveiled, no creature can see or endure it. It can only be seen partially by creation in an Image—the Lord Jesus Christ.

To some extent the uncovered glory of God in its full blaze

of light and majesty must be veiled. This Moses had to learn when He desired to see God's glory (*see* Exod. 33:18–23). This tremendous glory then is bound up with Christ, the *eikon*, Image of God. God is spirit (John 4:24 R.V. margin) and as such He has no dimensions or shape from which a likeness could be fashioned, as in the creation of Adam. God cannot be seen in His essence; only in His Image, the Lord Jesus Christ, and He wills that all the redeemed will finally be conformed to this Image (Rom. 8:29). Even in the heathen world, it has been shown that an image, *eikon*, was not held to be a mere *representation* of an object, but was believed in some way to participate in the *being of the object* it symbolized. In some way, it *was* the object it represented, and as it has been expressed, it was “the reality itself coming to expression”. How much more is this true with the Godhead! In Christ alone we see expression of the Divine glory, “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). James 2:1 literally reads “our Lord Jesus Christ, the glory”.

Summing up then, *morphe* (form), *eikon* (image), and *doxa* (glory) are definitely connected in the Scriptures and throw light on each other. This should help us when we come to consider *morphe* by itself. It is not too much to say that a clear understanding here with respect to *morphe* gives us a good foundation for the correct appreciation of the rest of the hymn. We intend to proceed carefully and reverently, studiously avoiding ideas that are not backed up by the clear testimony of Scripture. We realize that this study is very difficult, but we have no means or ability to turn the “strong meat” of the Word, the deep things of God, into milk that all can receive without effort.

In our consideration of the profound passage in Philippians 2:5–11 we now address ourselves to the meaning of *morphe*, form—“Who, being in the *form* of God . . .”. What adds to the difficulty of interpretation is the fact that many of the keywords and terms do not occur elsewhere in the New Testament, so that we have no usage to guide us. *Morphe* only occurs once more, namely Mark 16:12. *Harpagmos* (“robbery”) does not occur in the LXX and is a rare word in secular Greek. *Huperup-soo*, “highly exalted”, is a unique word in the New Testament as is *katachthonios*, “under the earth”. Some words and ex-

pressions are used in an unusual way. The verb *kenoo* ("made Himself of no reputation") only occurs in four other contexts in Paul's writings and then in a bad sense (Rom. 4:14; 1 Cor. 1:17; 9:15; 2 Cor. 9:3). *Schema*, "appearance", is only used once elsewhere by the Apostle (1 Cor. 7:31).

*Morphe, the form of God.*

The standard commentary of J. B. Lightfoot on Philippians published in 1868 makes a convenient starting place in modern interpretation together with the work of E. H. Gifford, *The Incarnation, a Study of Philippians 2:5-11*. Lightfoot compares in detail a similar word *schema* ("fashion" in Phil. 2:8) and concludes that *morphe* stands in contrast to *schema* as that which is intrinsic and essential is in contrast with that which is accidental and outward. He cites some parallels with Plato and Aristotle and comes to the conclusion that this word is used in a sense substantially the same as it bears in Greek philosophy, not that Paul was deliberately deriving his sense from this, any more than the Apostle John did when he used the word *logos*, "word", a term already used by the Greek philosophers.

Lightfoot's conclusion is clearly stated: "Though *morphe* is not the same as *phusis*, 'nature' or *ousia*, 'being', yet the possession of *morphe* involves participation in the *ousia* also". The same understanding is found in E. H. Gifford who states that *morphe theou* "is the Divine nature actually and inseparably subsisting in the Person of Christ" (*The Incarnation*, p. 16). "The term includes the whole nature and essence of Deity" (p. 19). The same viewpoint is taken by H. R. Mackintosh, and H. C. G. Moule.

One thing we must keep in mind is that the later archaeological discoveries giving much additional light on the Greek of New Testament days were largely denied to these scholars. It is now clear that *morphe* does convey something relating to outward appearance, but at the same time we must not confuse it with *schema*, or treat the words as though they were synonymous. *Schema* refers to an outward appearance which does not express inner reality. Abbott-Smith describes the difference "as the outward and accidental" as contrasted with "the inward and essential". It may mean a "false appearance". In the



corresponding verbs, the Lord Jesus is “transformed” or “transfigured” on the mount in glorious splendour (verb from the root *morph*). Believers are being *metamorphosed* into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18), both these instances being something more than just outward appearance. But when Satan is transformed into “an angel of light”, and his ministers into “ministers of righteousness”, the verb used is a compound of *schema*, for this transformation is something outward only—merely a disguise.

As we have *morphe* again in verse seven, “He took upon Himself the *morphe* of a slave”, it would be helpful if we inquired as to what *morphe* can mean in this connection and here, as we are *within the realm of human experience*, we can come to a true understanding which should certainly assist us in our consideration of the “form of God”. We are amazed that so many expositors have not done this. Did a slave in New Testament times merely *look different* from his master, or did this go much deeper? Obviously it did, for a slave had no rights or possessions of his own; he belonged body and soul to his master and was virtually his property, to be bought or sold or even killed as his owner wished. The *morphe* of slave then is clear. It denoted the *status* of a slave which doubtless reflected itself in his outward appearance, for we cannot imagine that a slave’s outward appearance was the same as his master’s. There was therefore both an *inward* and *outward* aspect of the *morphe* form, of a slave. It can hardly be possible that the word *morphe* can be used in a completely different sense *in the previous verse*. There is no need therefore to make the word mean *essence* only (as Lightfoot and others), nor just outward appearance as the glory of God (as many modern commentators). It is not an either/or position, but *a combination of both*.

Moulton and Milligan say that *morphe* “always signifies a form which truly and fully expresses *the being which underlies it*” (*Vocabulary of N.T. Greek*). As Greville Ewing (*A Greek and English Lexicon*) expresses it, “this word is sometimes used to denote the *nature itself* or *substance* of anything” (our italics). Marvin R. Vincent in *Word Studies in the New Testament* states “*Morphe*, form, is identified with the *essence* of a person or thing”. “To say that Christ was in the form of God, is to say that He existed as essentially one with God”. The

expression of Deity through human nature, thus has its background in the expression of Deity as Deity in the eternal ages of God's being. Whatever the mode of expression, it marked the Being of Christ in the eternity before creation. "As the *form* of God was identified with the *Being* of God, so Christ, being in the form of God, was identified with the being, nature, and personality of God".

J. J. Muller in a footnote (*The Epistles of Paul to the Philippians and Philemon*) says, "*morphe* denotes the *inner being*, as it *actually* and *concretely* realizes itself in the individual". We therefore come to the conclusion that this difficult word refers to an *outward* visible manifestation of an *inner* essence or reality, not just one or the other. The Lord Jesus, in His pre-incarnate state, as the Image of the invisible God, appeared to the heavenly beings as God *because in reality He is God* (John 1:1). His outward visible appearance expressed His essential nature and character and this nature and character is that of God. As one scholar puts it (T. A. Thomas) "If He were not truly and fully God, He could not have been in the *morphe* of God".

As we have before noted, *morphe* and *eikon* image are closely linked, and it has been shown by commentators that even in ancient thought an image was not held to be a *mere representation* of an object but in some way to participate in the *being* of the object it symbolized. In some sense it *was* the object it represented, "the reality itself coming to expression". This is all in line with the meaning of *morphe* in Philippians two.

*He thought it not robbery to be equal with God.*

Our next problem is the meaning of *harpagmos* "robbery". We have no help from its usage, for, as stated before, it occurs nowhere else in the New Testament and not once in the LXX. Furthermore, it is very rarely used in Greek literature generally. The word may be taken actively as the Authorized Version, or passively as in the Revised Version. "Counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God". One view means that equality with God was Christ's normal possession and inherent right. It was not a thing to be seized, for in the "form of God" He had no need to grasp after that which He already had. The other

view is that the Lord did not consider equality with God a thing to be maintained at all costs, "a prize which must not slip from His grasp" (Lightfoot), but emptied Himself and became incarnate. The question is not only which view fits the present context, but also *the remoter context of John 1:1 and Colossians 1:15-18*. We feel that this has been forgotten by many expositors. Furthermore, are the expressions the "form of God" and "on an equality with God" parallel expressions? Those who say "yes" hold the view that the pre-incarnate Word already possessed equality with God and therefore there was no need for Him to attempt to seize it, but on the contrary, He voluntarily humbled Himself. The other view postulates that before Bethlehem Christ had not this equality. He could have seized it, but rather than doing so, chose the lowly path of obedience and humbling, waiting for the Father to exalt Him as Lord and give Him this equality which He did not have previously. This latter view has been largely followed by expositors since Lightfoot's day. We ask therefore which view fits the context of the *whole* of Scripture dealing with the Word Who was God and then in due time, God manifest in the flesh? In appealing to the *example* of Christ, do we expect to read of a right which He did not possess and might have seized, or a glory which He had and renounced for us and for our salvation, and one day will receive back again manifestly to all creation?

For ourselves, though not the fashion at the moment, we believe the latter view is the true one. However, there are modern scholars who accept it, such as S. H. Hooke (*Alpha and Omega*) and W. Barclay (*Great Themes of the New Testament*). Dr. Barclay writes, "Jesus Christ did not consider His own equality with God an act of seizure and of plundering. There was no necessity that He should do so, for that equality was His . . . by right".

We are told by some expositors that this view does not fit the context, but we are absolutely at a loss to understand why this is so. In our estimation it fits not only the context we are dealing with, but, as before stated, the remoter context of John 1:1 and Colossians one, which is apparently forgotten by these critics and *must be taken into consideration* if a Scriptural and correct understanding of Philippians 2:5-11 is desired. This may seem to raise a problem in the exaltation mentioned in the verses

that follow but we must not try to trim the first statements of this hymn in order to fit (as we may think) its final lines.

The pre-incarnate Word was God and therefore equality with God was not something which the Word had any need to seize or usurp. But this very expression to “seize or usurp” seems to imply a contrast, and this has been seen by many expositors, some of whom contrast the Lord with Adam who grasped at the knowledge of good and evil, and others with Satan, who as Lucifer, attempted to seize divine honours.

With the former view, 1 Corinthians 15:47 is brought in with its teaching of Christ as the second Man and last Adam. Even here we must take care not to exceed what has been written, for some have done this, picturing the pre-incarnate Christ as little more than a heavenly man who descended to the earth. Quite a number of expositors have taken the view, that Adam fell for Satan’s temptation recorded in Genesis 3:5 “ye shall be as God”, thus grasping at Deity which he certainly did not possess.

However, this is surely a misunderstanding of Genesis three. To begin with these interpreters only *partially quote* verse five, and thereby miss the full meaning. The whole verse reads:

“For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods (or God), *knowing good and evil*”.

What Adam was grasping at was the knowledge of good and evil, not the position of God Himself. To believe the latter is to read into the verse what is not there. Adam’s sin was bad enough without adding to it. There is always a right time for knowledge and in Adam’s case God saw that this had not yet come. Doubtless as he developed, at some future time this knowledge would have been imparted, but knowledge without adequate moral and spiritual development is fatal, and looking on the world scene today, this should be obvious. When will some of our modern educationalists learn this? Man is acquiring knowledge which he is not fit to have, and in almost every case this is being twisted to wrong ends.

That the “knowledge of good and evil” can be a good thing Hebrews 5:14 testifies, “but strong meat belongeth to them that



are of full age (i.e. mature), even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised *to discern both good and evil*". Such knowledge is for the mature mentally and spiritually; it is not for undeveloped babes, and this is what Adam was at the beginning.

No one surely is going to argue that the "mature" who attain to the knowledge of good and evil, thereby attain to Deity and become God!

Furthermore, there is no hint anywhere else in Scripture that Adam was deliberately grasping after the position as God. Romans five deals clearly with Adam and his fall, but there is not a hint here of any such ambition. The whole of this extraordinary idea comes from partially quoting Scripture and thereby misquoting it, and should be a warning to us all.

If any contrast is intended with Christ in the Philippian passage, then it is much more likely to be with Satan, who certainly did grasp after God's position, and still seeks it. Isaiah fourteen and Ezekiel twenty-eight show us that Satan in his unfallen state was probably the first and the most glorious of the angelic host, the chiefest of God's creation, but he was not satisfied with this. He said, "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God . . . I will be like the most High" (Isa. 14:13-14). In other words he tried to seize God's position and to be God himself. This was in utter contrast to the Lord Jesus, the pre-incarnate Word, Who was willing to humble Himself and stoop so low.

We must also take account of the Heavenly man theory which links Daniel 7:13,14 and 1 Corinthians 15:45-47. Some, like Lohmeyer, assert that Paul used the gnostic myth of a primal man, who, as a heavenly Redeemer, descends from heaven to accomplish a saving mission, and re-ascends back to heaven, taking back with him the trophies of victory. This we reject absolutely. God's revelation in His Word is not dependent on the darkness of pagan philosophies; rather it is the other way round. Gnosticism is often a corruption of Divine truth.

But there are some who hold to a similar theory and maintain that it can be substantiated from Daniel seven and 1 Corinthians fifteen. However, a careful scrutiny of these passages will show

the falsity of such a view. If we take what is probably the grandest description of Old Testament theophany, namely Ezekiel 1:4–28, we find the prophet trying to describe what is really indescribable. All he can do is to use human terms to set forth in some measure what he saw, hence the frequent use of “like” and “likeness”. Above the firmament he saw “*the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire, and upon the likeness of the throne, was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it*” (1:26). He speaks of the *appearance* of fire of His loins, and the bow that is in the cloud.

All these were the nearest human terms to describe the vision, but the reality utterly transcended his words. His eyes took in something of the Lord of glory, just as Isaiah did, when he too saw “the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the Temple”, and his ears heard the solemn worship of the seraphim crying “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke” (Isa. 6:1–4).

In neither case did these prophets see someone who was just an exalted man. What they saw in a measure was the pre-incarnate Christ and His overwhelming glory. With this accords Daniel 7:11–14. Daniel likewise saw One *like* a son of man (R.V.), but the prophet is careful not to say that he saw a man, but One Who had a human appearance, which is quite a different thing.

When we come to 1 Corinthians 15:45–47 we must take care not to read into it what is not there. Scripture is very clear that Christ took upon Himself manhood at Bethlehem and not before. He Who, as the Word, was God (John 1:1) in due time became flesh (1:14) and so became the Second Man and Last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45,47). He was not “flesh” before His Nativity and those who describe Him as the Primal Man in glory before His incarnation are exceeding the revelation of Scripture, and to bring any of these utterly inadequate ideas into the context of Philippians we are studying is disastrous to its understanding.

Proceeding with our consideration of this passage, we read in the Revised Version:

“... Christ Jesus, Who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself, *taking* the form of a servant, *being made* in the likeness of men” (verses 5-7).

It is to be noted that the Authorized Version “made Himself of no reputation” is literally rendered “emptied Himself”. The Greek is *kenoo*, hence the term *kenosis* and the utterly unscriptural “kenotic” doctrine that Christ here gave up His Godhead and became just a human being. If this were true then Divine redemption collapses, for a man cannot redeem men (Psa. 49:7,8). God alone can be man’s Saviour, “I, even I, am the Lord: and beside Me there is no Saviour” (Isa. 43:11) and never do we read in Scripture that God has delegated this supreme work to anyone else.

What does *kenoo* mean? Volumes have been written on this. The verb is generally used in a bad sense. The adjective means, “empty-handed”, “vain”, “useless”. C. H. Welch points out that the LXX uses *kenoo* twice as the equivalent of the Hebrew *amal* “to become weak”. This helps us considerably, for the testimony of Scripture is that the Lord Jesus became “poor” and “weak” on our behalf as part of His great stooping down to our desperate need (2 Cor. 8:9). F. W. Beare says that the English equivalent is He “beggared Himself”, “became poor as a beggar”, and this was really true for He had no home (Matt. 8:20), or enough money even to pay His tax (Matt. 17:27); He Who, before His birth, had all the wealth which accompanied His Godhead!

Another important point which helps us understand the real meaning of “emptying Himself” is to note that, instead of the conjunctive “ands” between the two clauses as Authorised Version (“*and* took upon Him . . . *and* was made . . .”) which are not in the Greek, the Revised Version rightly renders the Greek aorist participles as, “*taking* the form of a servant, *being made* in the likeness of men”. The aorist here is of “coincident action” (J. H. Moulton) and the clauses are therefore *explanatory*. In other words these phrases are explaining what “emptying” means. This again guides us and prevents us from importing ideas into the context which are not really there. Christ emptied Himself *by taking the form (morphe) of a slave, and by being made in the likeness of men.*

We have seen that *morphe* means more than “essence” on the one hand or “external appearance” on the other, but is a combination of both. So if the question is asked—did Christ empty Himself of the *morphe* He had originally?—the answer must be that *He divested Himself of the external glory of that morphe*, for this could not be a part of the status of a slave. One thing is certain. This was *voluntary*. It was not that the Father stripped Him of His dignities, *He stripped Himself* of all external attributes of that glory which then became concealed or veiled. Calvin says, “He laid aside His glory in the view of man, not by lessening it, but by concealing it”. Lightfoot puts it, “He divested Himself . . . of the glories, the prerogatives of deity”.

This concealed glory on one occasion only, shone through His human body, at the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1–8), and its effect was to almost stupify the three disciples who were with Him. It is obvious then that He could not walk among men like this, for they would have been overwhelmed and His ministry would have been impossible.

That we are on the right lines here is amply confirmed by the Saviour’s prayer recorded in John seventeen. “And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self *with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was*” (17:5).

*It was of this tremendous outward glory that He divested or emptied Himself*, and thus His Deity was untouched.

But what love, what condescension is here! Can we even begin to fathom it?

We have already seen that if we keep the meaning of *morphe* to external appearance only, we make it practically synonymous with *schema*, and the words are *not* identical. To say, as some expositors do, that Christ as the Image and Glory of God fulfils all that *morphe* means, is thus not going far enough, and, as we have already pointed out, if we place such a limitation on the meaning of this word in verse six, we must consistently do so in verse seven, which will then mean that the Lord in taking the *morphe* of a slave, merely *looked like one externally*. This is surely too trivial to even consider. In “emptying Himself”, He so stripped Himself that He not only became man (even if He became the greatest of men it would be a tremendous



condescension for One Who was God) but He became a man Who had the *lowest status*, that of a slave. Can we ever fully appreciate this? Surely this is part of the “love that passes knowledge”! (Eph. 3:19). *How* He became man the Bible nowhere *fully* states. Luke 1:34,35 and Hebrews 10:5 go as far as we shall get an explanation.

Paul, in writing his first letter to Timothy, declares that Christ’s taking upon Himself a human body is a *great secret* (1 Tim. 3:16), and how do we finite creatures ever expect to *fully* comprehend a great secret of God that He does not fully explain?

The language of Scripture is very careful and guarded when it touches the Lord’s humanity. “Being made in the *likeness* of men”. This is parallel to Romans 8:3, “God sending His own Son in the *likeness* of sinful flesh”. God most certainly did not send His Son in *sinful flesh*, for if Christ partook of Adam’s sin, He would have needed a Saviour Himself; He could never have been a Saviour for others. The sinlessness of the Son of God is of the utmost importance in the Divine plan of Salvation. The whole scheme of God collapses if this is not true. We are amazed at the light way some evangelicals treat the Virgin Birth as though it is of little consequence.

The angel, speaking of His birth to His mother, Mary, declared: “therefore also *that holy thing* which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God”. There has been no other *holy* baby since Adam’s fall. The germ of sin is in everyone born into this world, and in due time surely manifests itself. The Lord Jesus could say with truth, “the prince of this world (Satan) cometh, and hath *nothing* in Me” (John 14:30), a statement which would be a lie if made by any other human being. And Hebrews 7:26 asserts that He is “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners”.

That His body was a *real* one, there can be no doubt. “A body Thou hast prepared Me” (Heb. 10:5), and nowhere in the Scriptures is there any hint that this was not so in actual fact. It was a body that could eat and sleep and manifest weariness, a body that could be seen, touched and heard. But it was a body that owed nothing to a human father, and everything to the action and overshadowing of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35).

The early Docetic doctrine was an error of the first magnitude, for if Christ did not possess a *real* body, He could not have really died on the cross, and again the whole of God's redemptive plan would have been brought to nothing. "And being found in fashion (*schema*) as a man, He humbled Himself" (verse 8). In this verse we now have *schema*, meaning *an outward appearance* only, and not the deeper meaning of *morphe*.

The Arndt-Gingrich Lexicon gives a good illustration from Josephus of a king who exchanged his royal robes for sackcloth and took on a *schema tapeinon*, "a lowly appearance". He obviously did not relinquish his position as king in so doing. It was his *outward appearance* that changed. So it was with the Lord Jesus.

If any should regard the phrase "in the likeness of men" as meaning no more than He became *like* a man but was not so actually, this next phrase corrects such an idea. Scripture talks about the "days of His flesh" (Heb. 5:7), and in the eyes of all who saw Him He was a real man; His humanity was no pretence.

The Apostle continues, "He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (verse 8). Here we come to the lowest depth of His humiliation. Both the main verb and the participle here are aorists, and the participle explanatory. He humbled Himself in becoming obedient unto death, and not a noble death at that, but the degraded one that was reserved for slaves and criminals.

In recording that He deliberately yielded Himself in obedience to such a death, the Scripture clearly teaches, as it does elsewhere, that the Lord Jesus Christ is more than man, for death is the ultimate end of all men, whether they will it or not. They have no choice in the matter, but our Saviour asserted, "no man taketh it (life) from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (John 10:17,18).

This atoning death is the very centre of God's redemptive purpose and the whole Divine plan of the ages rests upon it. This is the main object of the Lord's seven steps downward from the glory that was His before Bethlehem. "The wages of sin is death", and those wages must be paid if ever these two monstrous things, sin and death, which directly oppose all

God's purposes, are ever to be eradicated. There was no other way for this to be achieved, and we may be sure that, had there been one, God would have taken it and avoided the great cost to Himself.

We now trace the seven steps upward of the Son of God from the lowest depths to the highest heights which places Him as Lord of the universe.

"Wherefore also God highly exalted Him, and gave unto Him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (9-11 R.V.).

"Wherefore also" (*dio kai*) could be translated "that is why", the rest that follows being the consequence of such sublime renunciation. This is a vindication of all the obedience involved and is the completion of the glorious story. "Highly exalted" (*hyperupsosen*) is kept uniquely for this exaltation of the Saviour, literally "hyper-exalted". Quite a number of commentators think there is a contrast here with His pre-incarnate state. In which case they assert that He is finally raised to a higher position than He had before Bethlehem. This is the logical end of interpreting, as so many do today, "thought it not robbery to be equal with God", as a *prize* which Christ might have seized for Himself, but did not do so.

This view brings many difficulties which conflict with other passages of Scripture; the chief being that the pre-incarnate Christ could not have been God in the fullest sense. In some respect He must have been inferior. This goes right against the general tenor of revealed Truth, for monotheism is one of the Biblical fundamentals. There never have been two Gods, one inferior to the other. This borders on the darkness of pagan polytheism and is really a species of the early Arian heresy. Bringing in the doctrine of the Trinity at this point does not solve the problem. It is true that these expositors do not state things so boldly, but it is what such a view logically means. Furthermore such teaching goes right against the clear statements of John 1:1 and Colossians 1:15-18 regarding the Lord's pre-incarnate Deity. We are perturbed to see some conservative evangelicals taking this position and we are bound to reject

such a view absolutely, and also their exposition of the passage we are now dealing with, treating it as a prize for Christ, giving Him finally a position which He never had before. The error here is contrasting the Lord's exaltation *with His pre-incarnate state*, whereas the contrast is with *His earthly humbling*. Professor F. W. Beare's comments here are so much to the point that we quote them in full. "... The thought is not that God exalts Him to a higher rank than He held before, as being in the form of God. *No such comparison between the pre-existent state of Christ and His exalted state is envisaged.* We must altogether reject the notion, widespread as it is among the commentators, that Christ received as the reward of His humility the high station of equality with God which He refused to seize for Himself as plunder, by storming the heights like a Titan. The contrast is not between the pre-existent condition and the present exaltation, *but between the earthly condition of slavery (self-humbling, obedience) and the consequent exaltation.* Here is given, as it were, the archetypal pattern of the divinely established law: 'whoever shall humble himself will be exalted' (Matt. 23:11). It is *in His manhood* that Christ is now exalted and endued with all authority. Even the verb 'conferred' (granted as an act of grace), suggests that God is here dealing with Christ as man. God 'giveth grace to the humble' (1 Pet. 5:5,6)" (*The Epistle to the Philippians*, pp. 85,86. First two sets of italic ours).

We believe this puts the case clearly and is according to truth. The other view would surely have been treated as heresy in the early centuries, for, however much they failed to grip the distinctive teaching of the Apostle Paul, they were at least clear on the Deity of Christ and held on to it tenaciously.

The Name which is above every name can only be one, that of LORD which designates Jehovah, the one great God. Jesus was His *earthly* name, the name of His humbling, and this is not mentioned by the Apostle as the signal for genuflection, as so many think. The supereminent Name is that which now *belongs to* Jesus in His superexaltation, that of LORD, and the Old Testament makes it abundantly clear that there is "none else" beside Him. It is not that He is a step higher than other exalted beings, but rather that He is *unique*, in a class apart because He is the *incomparable One*.



“To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto Him?” (Isa. 40:18).

“To whom then will ye liken Me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One” (40:25).

“To whom will ye liken Me, and make Me equal, and compare Me, that we may be like?” (46:5).

Romans 14:9 asserts that “. . . Christ died and lived again, that *He might be Lord* both of the dead and of the living” (R.S.V.). Philippians 2:9–11 looks forward to the day when this shall be *manifestly so*, when He shall have the universal homage and worship of all creation. It is the will of the Father that “all (men) should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father” (John 5:23). The Apostle John in a heavenly vision foresees such a glorious goal:

“And every created thing which is in the heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and on the sea, and all things that are in them, heard I saying, Unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb, be the blessing, and the honour, and the glory, and the dominion, for ever and ever. And the four living creatures said, Amen” (Rev. 5:13,14 R.V.).

What the Apostle Paul writes in our present context reinforces all this, for he does not hesitate, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to apply one of the most magnificent contexts of the Old Testament, emphasizing the greatness of the one God, to the Lord Jesus Christ:

“Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: *for I am God, and there is none else*. By Myself have I sworn, the word is gone forth from My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that *unto Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear*” (Isa. 45:22,23 R.V.).

It is inconceivable that Paul in so doing had any doubts concerning the full Deity of Christ. He proclaims Him not just as Lord of the Church, but finally as Lord of the whole universe *manifestly*, and it is this that forms the magnificent climax of this section in Philippians. What He is *now* as Lord and Head of the Church, the Body of Christ, He will then be *openly to the whole creation*.

We cannot be absolutely sure what “things” or beings “under the earth” comprise. Most likely they refer to evil spirits under Satan’s control. We do know that the abyss (bottomless pit A.V.) is linked with the sea (Gen. 1:2 LXX), and that the book

of Revelation reveals that the abyss is the abode of demons (Rev. 9:1–3; 13:1; 17:8), and this may be also true of the earth, in which case this great scene of exaltation is one of complete victory, for even the demons have to acknowledge the Lordship of Christ with the rest of creation. *Exomologeisthai*, does not mean just to make a confession of faith, but, as recent scholarship has shown, to “admit”, “acknowledge”, “own” or “recognize”. All this is to “the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:11).

Two things stand out here. First, that there is no rivalry between divinities. Such an idea was rife among the gods of surrounding paganism. Second, that the mediatorship of Christ still exists at this point of time. Not yet has the goal been reached when *all* rule, authority and power has been brought to nought, and Christ takes complete control (1 Cor. 15:24). But this scene of tremendous glory is the outward and visible vindication of His earthly humiliation and rejection by men. The One that was “despised and rejected of men” and opposed by the powers of darkness, is now universally recognized as King of kings and Lord of lords. All this is as much to the Father’s glory as it is to His. It is not only to Christ’s glory, but equally to the glory of the Father. Here is no glorification of the one as against the other. The Father and the Son are one in every sense; in the redemptive purpose before creation, in its performance, and finally in glorification.

We are conscious that the consideration of this most profound passage in Philippians has been “hard going”. But, as we have stated elsewhere, we have no means of simplifying “strong meat” so that it becomes “milk”. It has been difficult for the writer, as it must be for anyone who seeks to expound this passage honestly and carefully. It may be as well to sum up.

These verses were not introduced by Paul to give a profound account of the Godhead before Bethlehem or afterwards. They were written, possibly incorporating a primitive hymn, to enforce the injunction concerning *unselfishness*, each believer being exhorted not to look on his own things, but rather on the things of others, and *here was One Who did that very thing* and gave Himself to the limit for us men and for our salvation.

Christ Jesus was in the *form (morphe)* of God. This meant that He *was* God *manifestly* so, in a glorious form—The Image of

the invisible God. (We have seen that *morphe* goes deeper than *schema*, an outward appearance.) As such, there was no need for Him to try and seize this position for His own ends, but seeing the tremendous need of all His people involved in sin and death and a ruined heaven as well, He emptied Himself of the glory attached to this *morphe*, and took upon Himself a human body, in order that He might bear the penalty of sin, namely death, in the place of His children. That glory was veiled by His humanity, but on one occasion (the Transfiguration) it shone through and overwhelmed the three disciples who were with Him.

He not only condescended to make the great step downwards from the throne of glory to the frailty of a human body, but deliberately chose the status of a slave and finally yielded Himself to crucifixion, the shameful death of a criminal and in that death He was “made sin (or a sin-offering) for us, Who knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21). The Lord laid upon Him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6). He was the One “Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree . . . ” (1 Pet. 2:24).

This, praise God, was not the end of the story. He was raised from the dead and “highly-exalted” (a unique word). Before the crucifixion He had prayed to the Father “glorify Thou Me with Thine own self *with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was*” (John 17:5). This prayer was abundantly answered, for He is now in that glory which was His before Bethlehem, the One Who was the Logos and was God (John 1:1); He Who was and is the Image of the invisible God. The goal for Him is to be manifestly acknowledged as LORD, the Supreme One, by the whole universe, including His enemies and all who oppose His rule. This is not only to His glory but also that of the Father.

We conclude with some recent words of Professor T. A. Thomas on the “emptying” of the Lord Jesus Christ:

“Whatever effects His incarnation may have had upon our Lord, they can in no way be construed as diminishing from His absolute Deity. He was God incarnate, God manifest in the flesh, in full possession of all the attributes of Deity. Anything less than this is completely out of accord with the picture that we have of Him in the inspired inscripturated Word”.

It is indeed refreshing to read this at a time like the present when there is so much false teaching concerning the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is truly “our great God and Saviour” (Titus 2:13 R.V.) now supremely exalted.

The central point in the great hymn to Christ that we have been considering was His *obedience* unto death (Phil. 2:8; Heb. 5:8). The Apostle Paul now brings the thought of obedience to bear upon the situation at Philippi:

“So then, my beloved, even as ye have always *obeyed*, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to work, for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12,13 R.V.).

He says, in effect, as the Lord obeyed, so should you also! Paul does not seek to force this obedience in a harsh way. He addresses them as “my beloved”, but at the same time his commands are definite and must be carried out. Just as they were obedient when he preached the gospel to them at the beginning (Acts 16), so they must continue to do so as believers, whether he is present or absent.

The next phrase has sometimes been taken out of its setting to teach that man can work out salvation for himself if he tries hard enough. The constant negation of human works and merit in connection with the sinner’s salvation all through Paul’s writings, makes this impossible. “Working out” is not the same as “working for” salvation. Salvation is received as a free gift by faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8,9) but, once received, it must be “worked out” in daily life and practice by the believer.

It must not be inferred, however, that such a one is left to do this in his own strength, for “God works in” and gives the grace and strength so to do. Here we have the seeming paradox of Divine power and human responsibility illustrated. Whether the Apostle has in view the church at Philippi as a whole, and not individual Christians, as some expositors assert, is debatable. To say that the individual cannot be in view here because of the former injunction not to consider self but the interests of others, is misunderstanding the situation. The self-interest to be avoided is the concern for self-advantage in the things of *this* life, not the spiritual things concerning the life to come, and in



any case, a church's spiritual growth is geared to the growth of each individual member.

This "working out" must be done, not with swagger and a false assurance, but with "fear and trembling". The same phrase is used in 2 Corinthians 7:15 for the attitude of the Corinthians to the visit of Titus, or the attitude of the servant to the master, with Christ in view (Eph. 6:5). This "fear and trembling" recognizes the frailty of the flesh, realizing how easy it is to stumble and fail the Lord. Here indeed we can have "no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3), but every confidence in the Lord's empowering, God *working in us*, so that we can accomplish this to His glory. The verb *energeo*, "works in", has the same root as our word "energy"; it is mostly used of Divine action in the sense of causing action in someone else (compare the mighty resurrection power that "worked in Christ", Eph. 1:19,20).

This dynamic power is ours by the appropriation of faith, so that not one of us can say that our "working out" day by day is impossible. This practical response is well-pleasing to the Lord; it leads to His "good pleasure", and seeking to please Him should be first priority in every believer's life and aim. This is the key to continual fruitfulness and satisfaction.

Paul now adds a word of warning:

"Do all things without murmurings and disputings; that ye may be blameless and harmless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye are seen as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life" (2:14,15 R.V.).

The Apostle goes back to the failings of the people of Israel when journeying in the wilderness. As the Old Testament record shows, their walk was disfigured by constant grumbling against the Lord and His servant Moses. They could not stand up to the test of faith that such a journey imposed. The comment of the epistle to the Hebrews is clear: "... they could not enter in because of unbelief (or disobedience)" (Heb. 3:19). This chapter and 1 Corinthians ten should be carefully weighed over in this context. "Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer" (1 Cor. 10:10).

In fact God's longsuffering lasted out until the tenth time

that they grumbled and rebelled (Num. 14:22,23), and then He solemnly pronounced that such a generation should not enter into the promised land and thus they all died in the wilderness, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua, who had fully responded in faith to the Lord.

The Philippian believers were warned to remember this and we should do the same. Too often grumbling is looked upon as something that we can indulge in without sinning too much, but we should bear in mind that such conduct has at its root, unbelief, which God can never tolerate, nor does it go with a life that is manifestly Christ-centred. The Philippians must not be content with just being believers; they must be *manifestly* so in their lives. The word “be” in verse fifteen is not the verb “to be”, but *genesthe* “become”, or “show yourselves to be”. Inward saving grace must be manifested by outward conduct, specially to a world of darkness and ignorance of the Lord. This is enforced by the words *amemptoi* (blameless) and *akeraioi* (harmless).

*Amemptos* means “irreproachable”, a life at which no finger of criticism can be pointed. Such a life results from the “working out” of the “in-working” Divine power that the context stresses. *Akeraios* is the word the Lord uses in Matthew 10:16, “*harmless as doves*” or in Romans 16:19 “*simple concerning evil*”. In contemporary Greek it is employed of *undiluted* wine, or metals which have no weakening *alloy*, hence unmixed or pure. These words set forth vividly the will of God for His children. Their lives must be such that their “public behaviour is above criticism” (Rom. 12:17, J. B. Phillips) and no foreign element must intrude to undermine their witness.

We must not understand verse fifteen to teach that such conduct is the means of salvation. “That ye may be . . . the children of God”, means *manifestly so*, very much like the Sermon on the Mount, “. . . love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you . . . *that ye may be the children* of your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:44,45). Likewise the Philippians must “shine as lights in the world”.

The imperative seems required here rather than the indicative and the Greek can read either way. Paul calls upon the Philippian church not to obscure the light of testimony by

wrong doing, but rather to shine brightly in the surrounding darkness of a world that knows not God and is at enmity with Him. It may be that the Apostle has the Song of Moses in mind in connection with apostate Israel (Deut. 32:5), and is concerned lest his converts at Philippi should backslide in this way.

We do well to remember that we are surrounded by a world that is hostile and critical; one that is in gross spiritual darkness. The only real light that can pierce such darkness is that of One Who said "I am the light of the world", and strictly speaking, the believer in Christ is a light reflector or light bearer. True light does not originate from us; it comes solely from Him Who is Life and Light. What we are required to be is the bearer of His light, giving an unobscured daily testimony, His light thus shining through us. We should beware of the things that can obscure this light. In His earthly ministry the Lord said:

"Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick?" (Mark 4:21).

The "bushel", a measure of commerce, can stand for business and all its commitments, and the "bed", the love of ease, two things that can easily quench the light of faithful witness. These two things and anything else that hinders, must be avoided at all costs. Paul then urges the Philippian believers to remember the duty and the privilege of light-bearing, just as he wrote to the Thessalonians and reminded them that they should all be "children of light, and the children of the day; we are not of the night, nor of darkness" (1 Thess. 5:5). *Epechein* can mean to "hold fast" or "hold out, offer" and both shades of meaning are true in Philippians 2:16.

If his friends at Philippi faithfully adhere to the Word of life and hold it forth, the Apostle is assured in his mind, that at the great day of Divine testing of Christian witness and service, the Day of Christ, he will not have laboured in vain, for they will be concrete evidence of the fruit of his labours. The Apostle, while he delighted to call himself the "slave of Christ", working tirelessly for Him, yet had a dread of labour in vain, the expenditure of strength to no purpose. To the Galatians he wrote:

"I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain" (Gal. 4:11).

To be of any worth, Christian service must accomplish something for the Lord, and while we may not always *see* the fruit of our labours in this life, yet there are occasions when it is obvious that energy expended in certain directions is wasted, and the Lord does not ask us to spend our strength needlessly and to no purpose. We need heavenly wisdom at times like these to take the right course of action.

The Apostle now comes to the most solemn personal reference in the epistle. In his witness for the Saviour, Paul had spent himself without stint. Here he stresses the fact that this might cost him his life. While he hopes to be released and visit Philippi again, he cannot be absolutely sure at this stage:

“Yea, and if I am offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all” (2:17 R.V.).

From this we can see that the possibility of execution is vividly in his mind, but rather than be afraid or depressed, he rejoices. What a spirit! *Spendomai*, “if I be *offered*” is a word of sacrifice, alluding to the drink-offering which accompanied some of the Old Testament ritual. In no sense did Paul imagine that this had any redemptive value, either for himself or anyone else, but it did represent the fact that he was prepared to go to the very limit for Christ, in giving his life, if the Lord willed, as a libation poured forth unto Him, a tribute of his love and gratitude. However, he did not keep the thought of sacrifice to himself and his own witness and suffering. He spoke of the “sacrifice and service” of the Philippians’ faith. Later on in the epistle he is touched by the gift they sent to him and calls it “an odour of a sweet smell, a *sacrifice* acceptable, well-pleasing to God” (4:18). When he wrote to the church at Rome, Paul urged them to “present their bodies a *living sacrifice*, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1).

In view of all this, surely sacrifice should mark all our service for the Lord. Can there be any value in work for Him that costs little or nothing? And it should be *joyous* sacrifice too. The Apostle, though contemplating the possibility of martyrdom, yet rejoices and bids the saints at Philippi to join with him in such rejoicing (Phil. 2:17,18). How easy it is to get depressed if the Christian way and witness results sometimes in personal loss!

Yet this touch of sacrifice should not occasion surprise. We



should expect it and be ready to accept it as the normal experience of those whose home is not here, in a world of unbelief, but, rather, in heaven, as Philippians 3:20 so clearly indicates. Let us remember that this epistle teaches us that it is not only a gracious privilege to believe in Christ, but also to suffer for His sake, if it is His will (1:29).

After likening his service for the Lord and the Philippian church to a “sacrifice”, a joyous one, for he bids these believers to rejoice with him, even though the cost may be his life, Paul now looks to the future. He expresses his hope concerning his imprisonment and his intention of sending Timothy on a mission of goodwill.

“But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. For I have no man likeminded, who will care truly for your state. For they all seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 2:19-21 R.V.).

The Apostle intended to send Epaphroditus with the letter without waiting until his own case had been dealt with. He realizes that the believers at Philippi will be anxious to know the outcome of his trial, so he informs them that he will send Timothy with the news and possibly follow after with a visit himself. If there is no early release for him, then Timothy, as well as giving them valued advice and help, will be able to bring back news of them which Paul trusts will be encouraging for him. Whenever the Apostle plans for the future, he always acknowledges that God’s will must be paramount (see Rom. 15:32; 1 Cor. 16:7; Philem. 22) and this is also true in the context with which we are dealing.

Note he does not say “I hope in *Christ*” or “*Christ* Jesus”, but uses the practical title of “Lord”, which always expresses the believer’s relationship to God when service is in view. A practical owning of the *Lordship* of Christ means that He is in control of all our planning and activity. We have no right to try and shape our future without consulting Him first, otherwise tragic results may follow.

Paul is saying that, if it is the Lord’s will, Timothy will visit them with a twofold object: to give them first-hand knowledge of himself and encourage them, and also that he (Paul) will be

cheered when Timothy brings back good news of them. The Apostle now gives a very high commendation of his son in the faith. Like-minded, *isopsuchos*, literally “of equal soul” is a rare word, as is *eupsuchein* “be of good comfort” of the previous verse. *Isopsuchos* is used once in the LXX of Psalm 55:13 (54:13 LXX), “a man mine equal” showing that it is used of close friendship, but with what a difference! The close friend of the Psalmist treacherously betrayed him, whereas here, Timothy stayed with the Apostle right to the end.

As Paul considers the brethren that are with him and the saints of Caesar’s household, there is no one who exhibits the deep concern of Timothy for the Philippians. Like the Apostle, Timothy was genuinely unselfish, with a real practical concern for the needs of others. He was willing to share in the “care of all the churches” like Paul, so he was the ideal choice to be sent on the journey to Philippi.

When the Apostle says “all seek their own”, he cannot mean that every believer in the Philippian church was selfish, for he has already commended some for their practical fellowship in the Gospel (1:5). He must be making a general statement concerning those around him. The mission to Philippi called for wisdom, tact and patience and a genuine concern for the state of believers there, and there was no one at hand so fitted for the task as his beloved son Timothy. They knew his proven worth (22), for Timothy had been with Paul when he first brought the Gospel to them (Acts 16). He had been tested and found worthy. “Proof”, *dokime* is related to the verb “approve” in 1:10.

The relationship of Paul and Timothy was not the cold one of master and servant, but the intimate one of parent and child. In 1 Corinthians 4:17 (R.V.), Paul describes him as a “beloved and faithful child in the Lord”, and in this close way they had worked together as the slaves of Jesus Christ. “Served” is *edouleusen* literally “to serve as a slave”, not that Timothy was Paul’s slave, but they had together served as the Lord’s slaves for the extension of the Gospel and the truth committed to the Apostle, and this should remind us that the only position of honour in the church is one based on faithful service to the Almighty One, Who took the form of a slave (2:7) and was among His own as “He that serveth” (Luke 22:27).

Verse twenty-three shows how Paul's mind balances the prospects on the one hand of martyrdom, or being released from prison. His hope is that there will be a favourable verdict at his trial and that he will be able to visit the Philippians himself. Through it all there is a confident trust in the Lord, for His peace was reigning in his heart freeing him from anxiety. He leaves all to the Lord's will, for the phrase "in the Lord" is the equivalent of "if the Lord wills". What is sure is that he will send Timothy as his representative, and if possible, he will follow shortly afterwards.

Paul now turns to the immediate present and commends Epaphroditus to the church at Philippi. The name has a pagan origin, being formed from the name of the Greek goddess, Aphrodite. A shortened form was Epaphras, which at once makes us think of the Epaphras of Colossians 1:7; 4:12, although we cannot identify the two as the same person for certain, for Epaphras was a common name. The Apostle speaks of him in glowing terms, as a *brother*, a *fellow-labourer* and *fellow-soldier*, one who had worked hard and closely with himself. He had come as a "messenger" (literally "apostle") from the Philippian church bringing their gift to Paul in his prison. The Apostle now plans to send him back, presumably as the bearer of the letter he was now writing. While Epaphroditus waited for the completion of the letter, he ministered to Paul's needs (verse 25).

Unhappily he had fallen ill. The news of his sickness had reached Philippi and the friends there became concerned about him. A report of their anxiety had evidently reached Epaphroditus, which greatly distressed him. He longed after them all *epipothon*, the word used for Paul's keen desire to see them all (1:8). Not only this, but he (Epaphroditus) was sore troubled (2:26 R.V.). This word *ademonēs* is used of the Lord's agony in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:37), a strong word indeed, expressive of distress that follows a great shock. Note he was not upset because he was seriously ill, but rather because the *Philippians had come to know of it* and this had brought anxiety upon them. Here again is the spirit of the Philippian epistle, namely concern for others, rather than concern for self.

We do not know what his illness was, except that it was con-

nected with his Christian service (verse 30). It must have been extremely serious, because Paul tells us Epaphroditus was “nigh unto death” (verse 27). What an opportunity the Apostle had to exercise his miraculous gift of healing, so evident during the Acts! (19:11,12; 28:8,9).

If Paul still possessed this evidential gift after Acts twenty-eight, it is utterly incomprehensible that he did not use it in connection with such a close friend and valued fellow-labourer who was in such desperate physical need. The same could be said of Timothy’s frequent physical weaknesses (1 Tim. 5:23) and the illness of Trophimus (2 Tim. 4:20). Dispensational truth alone has the Scriptural answer. Instantaneous divine healing was one of the earthly kingdom miraculous signs of the Acts period and passed away when the earthly kingdom people, Israel, passed into their spiritual darkness, deafness, and hardness of heart, making them unusable by the Lord during this parenthetical age of grace.

The healing of Epaphroditus was the direct result of God’s mercy, not only on him, but on the Apostle also (verse 27). Had the Lord not intervened, Paul would have had the sorrow of bereavement in addition to his prison sufferings. Resuming the statement of his immediate plans, Paul writes that he is more eagerly, or very eagerly, sending him back to them. This is possibly in case anyone in the Philippian assembly should criticize Epaphroditus for leaving Paul in his imprisonment and need. He should be received with all joy and held in honour (verse 29) or highly valued. Verse thirty shows the extent this faithful servant of the Lord was prepared to go for Him. Note the Revised Version “*hazarding* his life” as against the Authorized Version “not regarding his life”. The omission of one letter in the Greek gives this deeper meaning and this is supported by modern editors generally. *Paraboleusamenos* is a gambling term and thus Epaphroditus almost gambled with his life for Christ’s sake. This means more than being ill; it suggests some special danger to which he exposed himself for His Lord, the Apostle Paul and the Philippian assembly, who were unable to help the Apostle owing to the distance that separated them (verse 30). This is Christian service indeed, where self is forgotten and the claims of the Lord and His people are first and foremost.



## CHAPTER THREE OF THE EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS

Chapter three commences with the phrase *to loipon*, translated in the Authorized Version and Revised Version “finally”, which gives the impression that Paul is concluding his letter. However, one peculiarity of the Apostle’s style is the habit of “digression”, the holding up of his main argument to explain or expand a point. (Note the parenthesis of Ephesians 3:2–13 and there are many other examples.) MacKnight states that *to loipon* is put for *kata to loipon*, “as for what remains”, for *loipos* means “something left over”.

Thus we need not deduce that Paul is now going to end immediately this epistle. He had still something remaining to say to the Philippians and this is seen in chapters three and four where the real concluding remarks begin (4:8). His call to “rejoice in the Lord”, repeated in 4:4 is characteristic of the epistle as we have seen. But realizing certain dangers which lay ahead, he straight away turns to serious warning. For the protection of those under his charge, the Apostle frequently had to repeat himself. He assures the Philippians that this was not “irksome” (R.V.) for him and it was certainly safe for them that he did so. Evidently he had a hostile group of Judaizers in mind whom he describes in three ways (1) dogs, (2) evil workers, (3) the concision, or self-mutilators. The scornful term “dogs” was given by the Jews to the Gentiles, who were Israel’s enemies and refers to the scavenger dogs that roamed the streets (Matt. 15:26,27; Rev. 22:15) and were regarded as unclean. Paul hurls back the epithet against those of his own nation, who so constantly opposed him and the Gospel that he sought to make known. They followed him wherever he went, seeking to bring Gentile converts under the bondage of the Mosaic law, and in the epistle to the Galatians, he largely has them in mind. They were “malicious workers”; he calls them “deceitful workers” in 2 Corinthians 11:13, and like the Lord Jesus Himself said of the opposing Pharisees, they would “compass sea and land to make a proselyte, and when he is made . . . make him twofold more a child of hell” than themselves.

The third term is a play on words. *Katatome* is a parody on the similar word for circumcision, *peritome*. The putting away of types and shadows in the Gospel message of salvation, which found their realization in Christ and His finished work on the cross, now made circumcision merely self-mutilation and on a par with the pagan practices forbidden in Leviticus 21:5 (compare 1 Kings 18:28).

The physical rite that once upon a time put an Israelite into covenant relationship with God had passed, and its spiritual equivalent could now be applied to all God's redeemed people, whether Jew or Gentile. They are the real circumcision who have the inward reality, not just the external rite (Phil. 3:3; Rom. 2:28,29).

After warning the Philippian church of the activities of the "circumcision after the flesh", the Judaizers, the Apostle Paul asserts "for we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3 R.V.). The Authorized Version reads "in the spirit". The earliest manuscript witness, the Chester Beatty papyrus, the word for "God" is omitted and the sense then is "who worship *in spirit*", the new nature, as opposed to the flesh, the old nature of sin. This accords with the important statement of the Lord Jesus in John 4:24 Revised Standard Version. "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth", that is to say, *truly in spirit*, apart from the natural mind or the flesh.

This sweeping statement searches deeply into all worship, and that this is of great importance from God's standpoint is seen by the following words: "The Father seeketh such to worship Him . . . ". As the Father continually seeks for such *real* worship, how much does He find in Christendom as a whole? This is a solemn thought which should exercise the minds of all believers. When will Christians realize that they cannot worship God with the senses alone? There is so much sensual worship in the churches today that it is difficult to find any who are concerned with true worship in the spirit. That the senses can be employed in some degree in the *outward* expression of worship is true enough. But outward forms and ceremonies can never produce acceptable worship by themselves. We do well to keep this constantly in mind.

We should note too, that *latreuo*, the word translated worship, is rendered “to serve”, sixteen times, and “do service” once. So that we must not limit the context to worship only, but also include the thought of *acceptable service*. Such service can never come from “the flesh”. It can only proceed from the “spirit” or the new nature bestowed on the believer by God Himself (2 Pet. 1:4). Christian service done in the strength of the flesh will be counted as “wood, hay and stubble”, to be consumed as worthless in the day of Christ’s testing the work of believers (1 Cor. 3:12–15).

Another mark of the true church is that each member rejoices or boasts in Christ Jesus and has no confidence in the flesh (3:3). *Kauchaomai* “to exult or boast” is almost exclusively a Pauline word, being used by him over thirty times. The statement in Philippians shows up the innate tendency of the human heart to secure by its own effort and merit, approval and acceptance with God. To place one’s confidence or trust in anything outside of Christ is to have “confidence in the flesh”. This is a lesson that so few seem to learn, but it is basic to all growth in grace and knowledge of the Lord.

There was a time when Paul himself had not learned this lesson, as he is now going to tell us. If he sets aside personal advantages of birth and up-bringing, it is not because he did not possess them. He did, in full measure, but he was going to cut the ground from under the Judaizers, by showing how empty and futile this was in God’s sight and with spiritual growth in view. He now turns back to his pre-Christian life and declares to the Judaizer and all who boast in self or self-made religion that if there was a competition between them, he would emerge as head of the list. He was indeed a true, full-blooded Jew and he details seven points to illustrate this.

(1) “Circumcised the eighth day”, according to the provisions of the law (Lev. 12:3). This proved that he was no ordinary proselyte, circumcised after his conversion to Judaism. He was so from birth, and thus put into covenant relationship with God from the beginning of his life.

(2) Of the race of Israel, the elect nation that God called out from all other nations and endowed them with such mighty privileges as Romans 9:3–5 clearly shows. When contrasting

himself with some of his opponents in the Corinthian church, he could say “Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I” (2 Cor. 11:22).

(3) Of the tribe of Benjamin. In spite of its smallness (Ps. 68:27) the tribe of Benjamin was regarded with esteem. Situated in the south, it probably resisted pagan influences from the north and it had the privilege of containing the holy City and the Temple within its borders. It remained loyal to David after the disruption of the monarchy and further, Israel’s first king, namely Saul, was drawn from its ranks. Saul was the Apostle’s original Hebrew name, in which he took pride.

(4) A Hebrew of the Hebrews. This either means an eminent Hebrew, one who took special pride in belonging to Israel’s race, or it could mean as Moffatt’s translation, “a Hebrew son of Hebrew parents”, informing us that the language in which he was reared was the ancestral mother tongue. Ability to speak in Hebrew and Aramaic was a mark of faithfulness to the old culture, showing that his parents had not succumbed to their environment by forgetting the ancient languages. The three privileges that follow were Paul’s own acquirement.

(5) As touching the law, a Pharisee. This meant that he was a member of a sect which was most strict in its adherence to the law of Moses. As Josephus expressed it “a body of Jews who profess to be more religious than the rest, and to explain the laws more precisely”. Their one aim was to provoke the same zeal in others and bring them to a similar conformity.

We cannot help but remember the stinging reproaches of the Lord Jesus concerning some of the Pharisees of His day. “Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites . . .” (Matt. 23:13,14,27). At the same time we must point out that not *all* Pharisees merited this condemnation. Some were sincere men, even if misguided. Paul does not use the name Pharisee as a reproach, but as a title of honour, and the Pharisees were highly regarded by masses of the people. His one aim was to safeguard the sacred Torah and in doing this, he conceived it to be his duty to try and stamp out any movement that appeared to oppose it. Hence Paul’s rigorous persecution of the early believers of the Acts period.

(6) “As touching zeal, persecuting the church”. Whilst it seems



ironical that the one to whom was committed the doctrine concerning the church of God should write, “concerning zeal, persecuting the church” (3:6), yet this was the mark of his faithful adherence to Judaism as a Pharisee of the Pharisees, imagining he was doing God service! He enlarges this in Galatians 1:13,14. “You have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond all measure, and ravaged it—and I was making progress in Judaism beyond many of my own age in my nation, being exceedingly zealous for my ancestral traditions”. Years later when writing to Timothy he reflected on God’s mercy to him, describing himself as a persecutor, a blasphemer and injurious (1 Tim. 1:13). He never ceased to marvel at the grace of God that met him on the road to Damascus and changed him from Saul the Pharisee, to Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles with a dispensation of grace and glory beyond computation (Eph. 3). It was inconceivable that the Apostle, looking back on the bondage of Judaism in which he had been so proficient, could allow this grievous yoke to be fastened upon the Gentile converts. True, he had been zealous, but what a danger zeal can be without knowledge! It is so easy to be zealous in the wrong thing, because of blindness or perverseness! Saul of Tarsus, like his nation, had a “zeal without knowledge” (Rom. 10:2), and there are thousands today like him, even among professing Christians.

Christian witness is so often judged merely by *activity* and *keenness*, but these of themselves cannot produce acceptable service in the sight of the Lord. His truth must be the foundation and substance of *all* service first and foremost, and to err here is to err everywhere else. On the other hand we should avoid a knowledge of the truth without zeal. Such knowledge is cold and lifeless and produces no fruit for the Lord. The truth, rightly held, should certainly lead to warm response. The Lord wants all the keenness possible from His children, but first of all directed by His truth for the present age and a knowledge of His will.

(7) “As touching the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless” (3:6). The Apostle does not say he was blameless in the sight of God, but, as far as the *observance of the law was concerned*, he was blameless. We can now therefore understand

the Lord's warning "I tell you except your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the Kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20). It is not that men are called to produce a higher degree of the same righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, but rather they are brought into contact with a different kind of righteousness, as Paul now explains, *the righteousness which proceeds from God and is according to faith*.

This leads him now to the other side of the balance sheet, for what we have here is a statement of liabilities and assets and the advantages of birth and attachment to God's earthly people which he formerly set down in the column of assets, he now transfers to the column of liabilities, for in Christ he has something that is so infinitely better, that he must now seek to set it forth in seven further statements. Before he does this, he gives the reason for this dramatic revaluation:

"But what things were gain (lit. gains) to me, these I have counted loss for Christ, Yea, verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (3:7,8 R.V.).

"Everything as loss", that is anything that previously he would have counted as advantage to him. This goes wider than the religious privileges he enjoyed through being one of God's chosen people Israel. It included everything which might be reckoned as good by the natural man. It was as though the Apostle put them all in a parcel and consigned them to the refuse heap, so worthless were they in comparison with the excellency of the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We must distinguish between *knowing about* a person and actually *knowing him*. Paul is not here thinking of facts pertaining to Christ, as getting to know Him personally by faith. A close bond was formed between the Saviour and the Apostle on the Damascus road, and this became more intimate and deeper and wholly absorbing as time went on. There is no doubt that Paul conceives of God in terms of Christ. For him, getting to know Christ, was getting to know God, and with this there was nothing earthly that could compare with it, not even his religious beliefs that once meant so much to him as a Pharisee. In fact he tells us that for Christ's sake he had suffered the loss of all things, or forfeited everything. This would possibly

include personal property which could have been confiscated on his renunciation of Judaism and certainly it included the high status which he once held therein. Everything had gone which would generally have been esteemed to be desirable in this life. But with his new valuation, seen through the enlightened eyes given by the Spirit of God, this meant little or nothing. And he is now going to tell us why in a sevenfold statement:

(1) “. . . that I may gain Christ, (2) and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of mine own, even that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: (3) that I may know Him, (4) and the power of His resurrection, (5) and the fellowship of His sufferings, (6) becoming conformed unto His death, (7) if by any means I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead” (verses 9-11 R.V.).

The word “gain” is cognate with the “gain” of verse seven. What does Paul mean when he says that I may *gain* Christ? We must surely not forget the aim of the epistle as a whole, that is, not just to present Christ as Saviour or to give a setting forth of the Gospel of salvation. It assumes the readers already experience this and now are prepared to *work out* that salvation in witness and practice with a prize or reward in view. Hence the figure of a race given later in chapter three which the Apostle always uses in a context of service with reward or loss in view (cp. 1 Cor. 9:24-27) “Gaining Christ” was getting to know Him *as Rewarder*, even as Moses of old who esteemed reproach for Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: “for he had respect unto the *recompense of reward* . . . he endured, as seeing Him Who is invisible” (Heb. 11:24-27).

To know Christ as Rewarder presumes that first of all one is “found in Him” and the Apostle explains this by equating it with the gift of God’s righteousness through faith in Christ. The possession of this righteousness is the one essential for acquittal at the tribunal of God. It is in entire contrast to any human righteousness on the basis of law-keeping. This standard is far too low for that utter perfection which is the final condition of the whole of creation when the Divine redemptive purpose has been reached. There will then be not one blot or blemish in God’s universe. Isaiah had already written of God’s covering righteousness symbolically “. . . He hath covered me with the

robe of righteousness . . .” (Isa. 61:10). God is the sole Author of this complete and saving righteousness which He is ready to impart to sinful men on the ground of complete trust in Christ. This is a perfect standing indeed. Millions labour to get it by their own efforts and must fail. The tragedy is that the very thing they are working so hard to get God gives as a free gift to those who accept His Son! To the Apostle, who had realized this astounding fact years earlier, this meant that he gladly gave up all his previous attempts to work out his own righteousness. This justification by faith is the main theme of his Roman epistle.

“That I may know Him” has been interpreted in several ways by expositors but this surely represents Paul’s aim now he has realized in experience what this glorious standing is. The next step and one that never ends during this life, is to get to know Christ more deeply and intimately day by day. The phrases which follow are the filling out of this personal knowledge.

We can say with certainty that a real knowledge and acknowledgment of God is the highest goal that the saved human mind can attain in this life—though even then it is but “partial” (1 Cor. 13:9–12) this side of glory. Israel’s tragedy of old, with all their constant failure, was due to the fact that, as God lamented concerning them:

“The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib:  
*but Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider*” (Isa. 1:3),

and so, in this respect, Israel had fallen lower than animals, in spite of all God’s loving dealings with them.

The unsaved person does not “know God”. If the world as a whole did, we could not be in the terrible condition that we see all around us. One of the great aims of redemption is to bring the redeemed to a true knowledge of the Redeemer and this should colour the whole life of the believer in Christ. Paul had used the close, warm phrase, “Christ Jesus my Lord” expressing his gratitude and devotion. His greatest aim was to get to know Him better and to “win Him”, though this was not done without some loss on his part, “for Whom I have suffered the loss of all things” he states, but without any sense of self-pity, for his



present great gain made all these things seem of no more value than “refuse” (verse 8).

Verses ten–twelve are an expansion then of what getting to know Christ means and this is developed in terms of *power* and *fellowship*.

“... that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming conformed unto His death” (3:10 R.V.).

The Apostle was not content to know the Lord in His earthly life. Thousands of believers today are, and do not go on to know the *risen* and *ascended Christ*—the One Who said after His resurrection “All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth” (Matt. 27:18). Paul discounted a knowledge of Christ after the flesh (2 Cor. 5:16). It was the *risen* Christ he had personal dealings with and to know Him meant getting to realize something of the greatest of all powers, namely that which conquers death, the power of His resurrection.

We live in an age of power and through scientific discovery have come to know the power that the Creator has locked up in matter. But we may be sure of one thing, atomic power will never bring someone from the grave and give him eternal life! Later on Paul prays for the Ephesian believers that they might know “the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places ...” (Eph. 1:19–23). From this one can see that such a mighty power is at the disposal of the believer *for service*. How much better than one’s own puny strength! No wonder Paul stated that he could do all things through Christ Who *empowered* him (Phil. 4:13). Realizing this, one can appreciate better how he longed to know the “power of His resurrection”.

We may all join in such longing, but what about the item that follows—the fellowship of His sufferings? *Koinonia* fellowship or sharing, describes the close association between the Lord’s sufferings and those of the Apostle (2 Cor. 11:23–28). He could truthfully say that daily he bore in the body “the dying of the Lord Jesus” (2 Cor. 4:10). These sufferings “for Christ’s sake”, he bore gladly, for at the very beginning the Lord had said

“For I will show him how great things he must suffer for My Name’s sake” (Acts 9:16). It was this measure of sufferings he was anxious to “fill up” (Col. 1:24) in faithfulness.

Let us be quite sure of this, that the Christian pathway designated by the Lord will include suffering. We can sometimes avoid it, by departing from the Lord’s will, but “no cross, no crown”, is true for every believer. We need not shrink from it, for the wonderful promise of 1 Corinthians 10:13 is for ever true.

Fellowship in the Lord’s sufferings leads to “conformity to His death” (Phil. 3:10) and this is best explained by the teaching and experience of Romans six with its stress on identification with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. In Him we die to the dominion of the sinful old nature and in Him rise to newness of life, but the *experience* of this demands obedience to Romans 6:11 to *reckon* this to be true, otherwise this remains doctrine and nothing more. It is important to note that Paul puts resurrection power *before* fellowship in the Lord’s sufferings. To experience the latter without the former would be to commit spiritual suicide, for we could not endure such an experience in our own strength.

“Being conformed” or “conforming myself”, is the present participle and suggests a daily and continual experience of this conformity. Each day brings its tests and temptations which can only be met successfully by the power that conquers death and a daily dying to everything that is out of the Lord’s will.

The goal of all this is expressed in verse eleven “if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection from the dead” On the surface this seems an anti-climax. Did Paul who was undoubtedly saved, doubt whether he might be raised from the dead after death? The answer is definitely “no” and the problem comes because of the translation not being adequate. Literally he wrote “the *out*-resurrection, *out* from the dead”, the preposition *ek* being used twice, thus being emphatic. The doctrine of resurrection was a part of orthodox Judaism. When the Lord said to Martha concerning Lazarus, “thy brother shall rise again” (John 11:23), Martha replied, “I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day” (verse 24) for this was the hope of every Jew. We can better understand the force

of *ek* in Philippians 3:11, if we turn to Mark 9:9,10. The Lord charged the disciples to tell no one of the things they had seen until He was risen from (*ek*) the dead. This puzzled them, for they questioned what the rising *from* or *out of* the dead could mean (verse 10). A general resurrection was understandable, but a *selective one*, leaving others behind was something new to them.

We know that this is new also to many believers today for the creeds as a whole, teach one general resurrection at the end of time, whereas the Scriptures teach that it will be "every man in *his own order*" or *rank* (1 Cor. 15:23), as God wills. Not all will be raised at once, but according to the working out of the Lord's purpose for the various groups of His children. His timing is correct and no one can alter this. There is a resurrection which is the realization of *hope* and the consummation of salvation for the people of God. Romans 8:23 definitely teaches that this is the final out-working of redemption, the "redemption of the body" and redemption is not complete without it. Redemption from sin is the *beginning* of salvation, and redemption from death which embodies resurrection is the *climax* or *goal*.

However, in addition to this there is a resurrection which leads to a prize or reward and this must not be passed by or confused with "hope". In Luke 20:34,35, the Lord, in answer to the Sadducees, declares that marriage belongs to the present age, but those *who are accounted worthy to obtain that age and the resurrection out (ek) from the dead*, do not marry. Here is a selective resurrection depending on personal worthiness or faithfulness and when we get the double *ek* in Philippians three, we have similar teaching. The Apostle had not the slightest doubt that, if he died, he would be brought back to life. This was an essential part of his hope. But in Philippians he was pressing on in his eagerness to obtain not the hope but *the prize* in connection with the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, and this would be pre-fixed by this special *out-resurrection* which "if by any means" he endeavoured to obtain. Let us therefore not confuse these two distinct aspects of teaching.

Some find the doctrine concerning resurrection in its various aspects difficult to grasp. One feels this is largely because the average Christian mind is dominated by the Platonic idea of the

immortality of the soul which is unknown to the Scriptures of truth. Modern Christendom is leavened with ideas which have their basis in paganism if traced back far enough and this is one of them.

Professor F. W. Beare is undoubtedly right when he says:

“Paul, unlike us, was affected by Greek notions only in a secondary way. His inheritance was Hebraic, and the Hebrew thought instinctively of the person *as a whole*; for him the body was a valid expression of the *whole* person, not a more or less indifferent frame for the soul. Paul was constitutionally incapable of thinking of life eternal in terms of a ‘soul’ existing in some disembodied state . . . a ‘spiritual’ resurrection would to him be no resurrection at all; a disembodied existence would be no better than the shadowy and unsubstantial existence of a shade” (*Epistle to the Philippians*, pp. 125, 126, italics ours).

It is significant that the Scriptures never use the phrase “the resurrection of the *body*” which we find in the creeds, but always the resurrection of the *dead*, for it is always *the person* that is in view.

The Apostle now uses a favourite metaphor of a race, drawn from the Olympic Games. We have references to this in 1 Corinthians and Galatians and it is significant that the epistle to the Hebrews likewise uses it (12:1,2). When this figure is employed, we are not dealing with God’s free gift by grace apart from merit or works, that is salvation and its kindred aspects, but *service* and the possibility of reward or loss. This is clear in 1 Corinthians 9:24,25 and it is just as true in the Philippian context we are now considering. Paul was longing to reach the full end for which Christ had saved him. As J. B. Phillips puts it: “grasping ever more firmly that purpose for which Christ grasped me”. This means he is not content with being just saved, as so many are, but eagerly pressed forward to reach maturity, or full-growth (perfection), for attached to this is a Divine *prize* or *reward*. God has no crowns for immature Christians!

“Brethren I count not myself to have yet apprehended: but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (3:13,14 R.V.).

Here is the concentration of the disciplined athlete and



runner. He is not going to be distracted. “*One thing* I do”, nor is he going to turn his head backwards and glance at the “things that are behind”, but with his eye on the goal, the Lord in heaven’s glory, he is pressing forward with the greatest speed possible.

Sometimes God’s Word exhorts us to remember. Sometimes it is equally important to forget. It was indeed a sad day for Israel when they said “we *remember* the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick . . . let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt” (Num. 11:5; 14:4). The insidious “remembering” and looking behind at that from which they had been freed and redeemed, soon led to the wish to go back to the place of bondage, although their fickle memories forgot the suffering and misery connected with it.

We need to take a lesson from this and ask the Lord to deliver us from such deceiving memories. “Looking back” has no place for the urgent runner who is eager to obtain the prize. Paul’s one aim was that he might “finish his course with joy” (Acts 20:24) and so he must “run without swerving” (1 Cor. 9:26 Moffatt) for the prize of the high calling of God *in Christ Jesus*.

It is remarkable how often this phrase is misquoted and the last three words omitted. Some translate it “the upward call or summons” and while this sounds attractive it hardly fits in with the “calling which is *in* Christ Jesus”, not a summons *to* Christ Jesus. “In Christ” is always *positional* as used by Paul, and this wondrous calling or vocation is *in* Christ and cannot have any reality apart from this glorious position.

We should not translate the genitive, prize *of* the high calling, as one of apposition, meaning the prize, that is to say, the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. This would make the wondrous calling of Ephesians and Colossians one of personal attainment, instead of one of sheer grace as these epistles so clearly teach. It is rather the genitive of relation, meaning the prize *in relation to* this high calling. We must therefore distinguish between the “one hope” of this calling with its riches of grace, and the prize, which is something to be striven after even as the Apostle Paul was doing in the context we are studying. Those who are perfect

(mature) must be “thus minded” said the Apostle. Whether he was referring to some in the Philippian church who claimed to have reached this position, it is difficult to say. It is hard to believe that any at Philippi had progressed further than Paul himself.

However in verse fifteen we have the gracious promise that God would illuminate the minds of any who had real difficulty in understanding and in any case, each must walk and put into practice the light they had already received (verse 16).

The Apostle now commences a section of warning. He was indeed the Apostle of freedom, but freedom did not mean licence or self-indulgence. “For brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, . . .” (Gal. 5:13). Evidently there were some at Philippi or elsewhere who were doing this very thing. Some have tried to maintain that unbelievers are referred to here but a careful consideration of the statements made, makes this impossible.

“Brethren, be ye imitators together of me and mark them which so walk even as ye have us for an example. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is perdition, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things” (17-19 R.V.).

Let us take the last phrase first, “who mind earthly things”. It would be idle to accuse an unbeliever of doing this, as he of himself could do no other. How can an unbeliever mind heavenly things?

Again, these people against whom the Apostle is warning the church are said to “walk”—a term used consistently of believers. One can then understand his profound sorrow, even to tears, that such could so degenerate in their daily life. Further than this they are said, not to be enemies of Christ, but of *His cross*. Now the cross stands for specific doctrine in Paul’s epistles, standing between the believer and the flesh (Gal. 5:24) and the world (Gal. 6:14). It would have no meaning in the lives of those “dead in trespasses and sins”.

The mind is all-important here, specially in relation to the runner in the race for the prize, which is a heavenly one. To

attempt this with a mind whose bent is on earthly things is to court disaster. Writing to the Colossian church Paul insisted:

“Set your mind on the things that are above, where Christ is seated on the right hand of God” (Col. 3:2 R.V.).

This the runner must continually do. If his gaze is distracted he is likely to swerve from the track and drop out of the race. It is possible that some had succumbed to antinomianism at Philippi, that is, the throwing off of all restraints under a wrong conception of grace and freedom. Some expositors think the Apostle is not necessarily meaning that all this was necessarily happening at Philippi, but that Paul had knowledge that such things were taking place elsewhere and so he warns the Philippians in advance. It does not really much matter, as long as the warning was given and heeded by those to whom he was writing, and by us today.

In direct contrast to all this Paul continues:

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subject all things unto Himself” (verses 20,21 R.V.).

*Politeuma*, can be translated as “citizenship”, “commonwealth”, or “colony of heaven” (Moffatt). Just as Philippi was a Roman military colony directly related to the capital city of Rome although far removed geographically, so we are citizens of a heavenly commonwealth far removed from this earth, and are pilgrims passing through this earthly territory to our real home in the heavenlies “far above all”.

“From whence”, *ex hou*, can refer only to *politeuma* and not to *ouranois*, heaven. “We eagerly await a Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ”. Paul seldom uses the word Saviour in connection with Christ. It may be because the term was frequently used in the heathen world for their gods and the Roman emperors were designated as “saviours”, so the term might be misconstrued as applied to Christ. Certainly salvation is not fully complete until we see Him face to face and are made like him. Now we have this body of our *humbling* (the word is cognate with “He *humbled* Himself” of chapter 2:8). “Vile” is too strong as a translation today though the English word in 1611 had a less

intense meaning (cp. “vile raiment” Jas. 2:2). The body is not “vile” in this sense. It is indeed frail and mortal and cannot stand up to the conditions of the heavenly sphere of our calling. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

“We shall bear the image of the heavenly (One)”, Christ in glory (1 Cor. 15:49). The body of the Lord’s glory is the prototype of the believer’s spiritual body, fashioned by the Lord’s mighty transforming power. This power is so great that it will at long last align all things (subject) under the headship of the Lord Jesus. His omnipotence brings all things under His control, and nothing less than this is the glorious goal in which members of the Body of Christ and the redeemed of all callings will finally participate.



## CHAPTER FOUR OF THE EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS

Although we have a chapter break at Philippians 3:21, it is evident that the first verse of chapter four is linked with the previous subject matter:

“Wherefore, my brethren beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my beloved” (Phil. 4:1 R.V.).

The exhortation to “stand fast” has been stressed in 1:27. The *oneness* of spirit, soul and mind of 1:27 is repeated in 4:2 as is the thought of “striving together” *sunathleo* (1:27 and 4:3). Paul includes words of endearment reminiscent of his tribute to the Thessalonian believers (1 Thess. 2:19) “my joy and crown”. *Epipothetoi*, “longed for”, recalls the words of 1:8 where he expresses his ardent desire to see the Philippians again. They would be his “crown” in the Day of Christ, the seal of his apostleship, but the all-important thing was to “stand fast” and not yield an inch in faithful witness to the Truth, and this is just as important today and should constantly be before the minds of all of us.

The Apostle now addresses a personal message to two women who were evidently prominent in the Philippian church:

“I exhort Euodia, and I exhort Syntyche, to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yea, I beseech thee also, true yokefellow, help these women, for they laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow-workers, whose names are in the book of life” (4:2,3 R.V.).

These believers had evidently quarrelled and imperilled the unity of the assembly. Women figured prominently in the beginning of the work at Philippi (Acts 16:13) and were held in high esteem in this part of the world. Bishop Lightfoot comments:

“The active zeal of the women in this country is a remarkable fact, without parallel in the Apostle’s history elsewhere and only to be compared with their prominence at an earlier date in the personal ministry of our Lord”. \*

\* See p. 177 in connection with the position of women in Macedonia.

The rift between the two women mentioned had its dangers for there was always the possibility of a split developing in the church, some supporting one and some the other. This has happened countless times in Christian circles, much to the delight of the evil one whose object is to divide the brethren and ruin the witness. Paul now appeals to a third person whom he addresses as “true yokefellow”. As this adjective is in the masculine form it must refer to a man and there have been many guesses as to who he was. Some link him with Epaphroditus or Luke. Others take the two words together as a proper name—“Syzygos (comrade), truly so called”, but no trace of such a name has been found elsewhere.

Clement is the name of a believer in the Philippian assembly otherwise unknown. Some have tried to identify him with Clement, the bishop of Rome, but this is an unlikely conjecture. The name was common in the first century and would be familiar in a Roman colony like Philippi.

It is better not to guess, and one thing is sure—even though we do not know his name, he was certainly not forgotten by the Lord, for his record was in the “book of life”. God’s record in a “book” occurs in the Old Testament as well as the New (Ex. 32:32; Ps. 69:28; Ps. 139:16) and in Luke 10:20 the Lord bids His followers to “rejoice, because your names are *written in heaven*”. The Revelation has a lot to say concerning the record contained in “books”. *Biblion* occurs nineteen times; and *biblos* five times in connection with the “book of life”. The important thing to realize is though men forget Christian virtues and service, God never does. He takes note and will praise and reward at the last all that has been faithfully accomplished with His glory in view.

Paul now sounds a stirring note:

“Rejoice in the Lord alway: again I will say, rejoice”  
(4:4 R.V.).

Earlier on we noted that, in spite of the suffering and conflict, real and abiding joy was possible. It is important to note that the *ground* of the believer’s rejoicing is the *Lord* not circumstances. These may indeed be adverse and perplexing, but the Saviour, Who is the “same yesterday, today and for ever” is

the solid Rock on which we can always rely and in Whom we can constantly rejoice.

The Apostle now appeals for “moderation” or “forbearance” (verse 5 R.V.). It is not easy to find an English equivalent for *epieikes*. Kindliness, thoughtfulness for others, graciousness, yieldingness, are some of the shades of meaning it contains. C. H. Welch puts it beautifully when he says “grace alone can enable the believer to exhibit at the same time inflexible tenacity, infinite gentleness, incorruptible loyalty, and a willingness to yield to every legitimate claim made by others” (*The Prize of the High Calling*, p. 183).

“The Lord is near”. This is another reason given to show forth this Christian grace. Some expositors read this as though it said “the Lord’s *coming* is near”, but *parousia* does not occur in the context, nor is there any need to supply it. Psalm 145:18 declares that “the Lord is near to all them that call upon Him” and this has been always a consoling truth. He is always near at hand to guide, strengthen, encourage and bless. Paul continues:

“In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus” (verses 6 & 7 R.V.).

*Merimnao* is translated in the Authorized Version “take thought” with the future in view six times in Matthew six and is misleading, for wise provision for the future is right (1 Tim. 5:8). It is foreboding or worry that is wrong and the Lord is referring to *anxiety* in the first Gospel. It has been said that “hard work seldom kills, but worry does”. There was surely never a time like the present when increasing pressure is being brought to bear on us all in so many ways. Hence the turning to drugs and tranquillizers to ease the tension. But the wise believer, who casts all his cares on the Lord experiences something that is infinitely better and always works! In the place of worry comes the “peace of God that passes all understanding”. He may not get all his requests answered in the way he desires, but he is assured of one answer always, the answer of peace.

“Our requests” cover every problem both spiritual and temporal to which the ingredient of “thanksgiving” should

always be added. Ingratitude is one of the basest of sins. We may not know how to pray as we ought, but we can always *praise*! A moment's reflection on the many blessings spiritual and physical which we constantly receive will provide subject matter for our prayers, and if we are kept in this grateful state of mind, ever realizing what we owe to the Lord, we shall not stray far from His will day by day. "Peace *with* God" is the experience of the believer on realizing what salvation and justification by faith in Christ really mean. The peace *of* God can be the permanent possession as all anxieties are cast upon Him. He offers to be our permanent burden-bearer! (Ps. 55:22), and then we can continually know what it is to have the *God of peace* with us and near us (Phil. 4:9) all through our journey home to glory. Then indeed our hearts and minds are "guarded" or protected by Him and nothing can enter that can harm.

"Finally, my brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (verse 8 R.V.).

It is important in this context to realize that *logizesthe*, "think" does not mean merely to "meditate upon", but to "reckon" or "take account of" (see R.V. margin here). It is one of the important words of Romans four where it is translated "reckon", and "impute". This long list of graces is not given just to think about, but to "take account of" in our own lives and the lives of other believers.

Instead of the tendency to criticize others, which we all have in some measure, how much better it would be to note these graces in other fellow-members of the Body of Christ and to thank God for them! How much easier Christian work and witness would be if this was our daily practice! It has been pointed out by expositors that this list gives the ideals and accepted virtues of pagan morality. If this was so, how much more should they be present in the life of the redeemed! "Virtue" is a frequent word in classical Greek, and is only used here by the Apostle Paul. It only occurs elsewhere in the New Testament twice in Peter's epistles (2 Pet. 1:3,5). Perhaps "excellence" is the best translation of it.

"Praise" can be construed as "what deserves praise" or



“anything that calls down the approval of the Lord”. The Apostle who followed the Lord so closely could point to his own example without egotism, for pre-eminently Paul was a man who practised what he preached to others. *Learned, received, heard* and *seen* show how true this was and we should remember that before there was a complete New Testament the truth of God was *learned, received, heard* and *seen* in the lives and practice of the Apostles. They were indeed a living Bible! May we in our measure *live* the truth every day in the sight of others who are often totally ignorant of God and His Word.

The Apostle Paul now gives attention to the gift the Philippian church had sent by means of Epaphroditus (Phil. 4:18):

“But I rejoice in the Lord greatly, that now at length ye have revived your thought for me: wherein ye did indeed take thought, but ye lacked opportunity” (4:10 R.V.).

The arrival of the gift caused great rejoicing in the Apostle’s heart to the Lord. Paul was a man who was obviously sensitive where gifts of money or goods were concerned. The last thing he wanted was for anyone to think that he *expected* them to give him presents. He had a natural independence that could never stoop to begging. Yet on the other hand, when such gifts were made as a free expression of love, he was deeply touched and showed his appreciation. This is seen quite clearly in the context we are considering.

He declared that the Philippians’ concern for him had flourished again. Not that they had forgotten his needs, but they had had no previous opportunity of showing practically their regard for him. *Anethalete* is found only here in the New Testament but is used in the LXX of Ezekiel 17:24 of trees “blooming again”. *Ekairisthe* (you were unable to find occasion) is another word occurring only once in the New Testament and rarely elsewhere. Normally Paul supplied his own needs by working with his own hands, although he had declared that those who proclaim the Gospel should live of the Gospel (1 Cor. 9:11–15), yet he hated to be a burden to anyone:

“... I seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children” (2 Cor. 12:14).

Although he was obviously in need in his Roman prison, yet he would never complain about it, and now he is going to explain to the Philippians how it was possible to be completely *independent of circumstances*:

“Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know also how to abound: in everything and in all things I have learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want. I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me” (verses 11-13 R.V.).

The Apostle had indeed “learned”, but it was not from a book but rather in the school of experience. *Autarkes* is yet another word only occurring here, meaning “self-sufficient, independent” (*Manual Greek Lexicon of the N.T.* by Abbott-Smith). “Content” as the Authorized Version is misleading, as is the translation “therewith”. The Revised Version is the better rendering, “therein”. Paul was not *content with* his circumstances, but he was *independent IN them*. The Stoics used the same word and tried to face with equanimity and resolution all that life brought to them in difficulty and sorrow, but they attempted this in their own strength and often failed. Paul, however, is going to reveal his secret as to how he lived victoriously under all conditions however extreme. He could possess everything and yet nothing. He could be full and at another time empty; he could be abased and yet abound. “I have been initiated into a secret” he declared, using *mueo* a word which primarily meant “to initiate into the mysteries” of the pagan cults.

The Lord had made known to Paul many secrets. He was indeed a steward of the mysteries (secrets) of God, and many of us are rejoicing in the great ones revealed in Ephesians three. But here was a secret devoted entirely to practice:

“I have strength for everything in Him Who makes me strong” (4:13).

The Apostle had no “confidence in the flesh” (3:3). He was well aware of his own weakness, yet realized that it was in this condition he could experience the mighty resurrection power of the risen and ascended Christ.

To him the Saviour revealed:

“And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for *My strength is made perfect in weakness*. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, *that the power of Christ may rest upon me . . .* for when I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Cor. 12:9,10).

Here is the secret then that we all must learn to put into practice if we are going to triumph over all circumstances instead of being overwhelmed by them, that is absolute confidence in the power of the Lord’s resurrection that can “work in us”, and no confidence in self. No wonder Paul aimed at realizing more and more in experience of the “power of His resurrection”! (3:10) and the Lord’s ability to match every situation that could occur.

Paul now resumes his appreciation of the Philippian church’s assistance: “Howbeit ye did well, that ye had fellowship with my affliction”. To “have fellowship” or “share” meant more than appreciating doctrine together. It meant to share practically in another’s need, and this characterized the Philippians’ relationship with the Apostle from the very beginning of his Gospel work at Philippi (verse 15) and later on when he was at Thessalonica. They had sent gifts to him “once and again”, that is, more than once they had practically remembered him. The Apostle here uses commercial terms *fruit, abound, account*. He did not personally seek any gift. His over-riding desire was “fruit that increaseth to your account” (17 R.V.). Moule translates this as “the interest which is accruing to your credit”. The Philippian gift was like an investment that would repay rich dividends in the service of the Lord, as accumulating interest stands to the credit of a depositor which, in the day of Christ, would not go unrecognized by the righteous Judge (2 Tim. 4:8).

“But I have all things, and abound: I am filled, having received from Epaphroditus the things that came from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God. And my God shall fulfil every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus (4:18,19 R.V.).

“I have all and abound”. The papyri throw light on the special meaning of “I have”, *apecho*. In everyday use it meant “I have received”, a technical expression for drawing up a receipt. The Revised Standard Version renders it “I have received full payment, and more”. The Apostle uses this in an illustrative sense, and now he describes the gift as not only pleasing to

him, but pleasing to the Lord (verse 18). It was like an “odour of sweet smell” using Old Testament symbolism in connection with the sweet savour sacrifices which ascended to the Lord as something *especially fragrant*. The Apostle used terms which he employed of the supreme sacrifice of Christ in Ephesians 5:2. What an honour that any service for the Lord can be bracketed with His! Paul’s own service had been likened to the pouring out of a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of the faith (2:17). It looks as though all real and effective service for the Lord will be touched *by sacrifice*. What costs us little is not worth much in His sight. And is not our love for Him measured by how much we are prepared to spend ourselves, just that and no more? David said “neither will I offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which doth cost me nothing” (2 Sam. 24:24). May we ever be willing to give without stint to Him of ourselves and our possessions and then the next verse in Philippians will be true in our experience:

“And my God shall fulfil every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (19 R.V.).

The Authorized Version “but” is misleading. Verse nineteen is not disassociated from verse eighteen as “but” suggests. The thought is “you have been generous to me, *and therefore* God will be generous to you”. Some take verse nineteen out of its context and do not fulfil the condition of verse eighteen and then they wonder why the nineteenth verse does not work in their experience. However can mean Christians expect to know in reality the overwhelming generosity of God? It was to a generous church this tremendous promise was made. Note the measure of the Lord’s giving. It is not OUT OF His wealth but ACCORDING (*kata*) to it. Who can estimate the range and depth of this richness? (cp. Rom. 11:33). If a millionaire gives *out of* his riches, he could just give a penny and no more. If he gives *according to* his wealth, he would have to give a very large sum indeed. God will be no man’s debtor and we are dealing with a heavenly Father Whose generosity is beyond our computation. His riches are IN glory IN Christ Jesus Who is seated in the heavenly holiest of all above everything that can be conceived. What immense wealth is here!

The final greetings are now given from “all the saints” specially “those of Caesar’s household”. This does not mean



the relatives of Caesar, but persons employed in the domestic and administrative establishment of the Emperor. Most of them would be slaves and freed men equivalent to civil servants, some of whom had come into contact with Paul and thereby a knowledge of salvation. Such a "household" existed in every Roman colony, but this does not militate against a Roman origin for this epistle, for such an establishment existed at Rome and must have numbered hundreds of employees in the capital.

Paul's last words, as always, refer to the Lord's abiding grace and thus ends this precious epistle, a wonderful balance to the Ephesian letter, with its stress on "working out" in practice what God has so wonderfully "worked in", with a view to the *prize* in connection with the "high calling of God in Christ Jesus". May we all participate in this "working out" day by day.

## CHAPTER ONE OF THE SECOND EPISTLE TO TIMOTHY

We now come to Paul's last epistle, his second letter to Timothy. That this is Paul's last divinely inspired writing, there can be no doubt. In chapter four, verses six and seven we read:

“For I am already on the point of being sacrificed; the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (R.S.V.).

These words are perfectly clear. They can be interpreted in no other way than that the Apostle had reached the end of his Christ-appointed ministry and his martyrdom was near at hand. But it has been represented that Colossians 1:25 should read: “According to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to *complete* the Word of God”, instead of “fulfil” as the Authorized Version and Revised Version, and thus Colossians was not only the last epistle of Paul, but also the last writing of the New Testament.

However, such an idea is completely foreign to the context, where the Apostle is dealing with his special ministry in connection with the Body of Christ which revealed the Mystery. It was this that fulfilled the Word of God relating to this exalted company of believers. When Paul wished to refer to the *Scriptures* he used the words *grammata* and *graphe*, “all *Scripture* is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16) and if the completion of the Bible had been his subject in Colossians one these were the words he would have used. The word translated “fulfil” he uses in Romans 15:19:

“Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, *I have fully preached* the gospel of Christ”.

He certainly did not mean that his Gospel witness by voice and pen ended here because it was completed in the sense of being finished. In Colossians 1:25 the Revised Standard Version rendering is “to make the Word of God fully known”. Professor A. T. Robertson's comment here is:

“A fine phrase for a God-called preacher, to fill full and or give full scope to the Word of God. The preacher (Paul) is an

expert on the Word of God by profession. See Paul's ideal about preaching in 2 Thessalonians 3:1" (*Word Pictures of the N.T.*, p. 484).

Those who deny that 2 Timothy is Paul's last epistle take refuge in the argument that the Apostle *thought* he had finished the race when he wrote this epistle, not knowing there was a further ministry ahead of him. But if this is true, Paul made some serious statements which proved to be *mistakes* on his part. If he erred here, how can we accept any statement in this epistle as being God's truth? He might have made mistakes in other places, in which case the very foundation of Truth is undermined. This idea must be resisted at all costs.

Furthermore much is made of the fact that the word "mystery" does not occur in 2 Timothy. But then neither do the words "redemption", "hope" and others that are vital to the good deposit of truth made known through the Apostle of the Gentiles. Are we to assume that Paul had given up the thought of redemption and also "that blessed hope" when he wrote this epistle?

Let it be said quite clearly that no one with any wisdom bases doctrine on *negative arguments alone*. This is a foundation of sand. Negative statements are of value only when they are accompanied by strong positive ones. If it had been incumbent on Paul to mention every item of doctrine that was of importance when he wrote to the churches or to individuals, he would have had to write books instead of epistles. Furthermore they had the great benefit of his *oral* teaching, making such writing unnecessary. (For this, compare 2 Thessalonians 2:5 and note the context.) There is no doubt whatsoever that the second epistle to Timothy is Paul's last divinely inspired writing.

As regards human authorship, the unbroken tradition of the professing church up to the nineteenth century was to regard the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) as the work of Paul and therefore authentic. The first determined attack upon the apostolic authorship was made in 1807 by Schleiermacher, followed by Eichorn, Baur, deWette and others. Some have denied Pauline authorship, but have sought to keep a few genuine fragments, such as Harrison in his book *The Problem of the Pastorals* (1921), despite the fact that this argument has

not a shred of documentary evidence on which to rest. However, this viewpoint has been ably answered by scholars such as D. Guthrie and E. K. Simpson.

As to the supposed author of such a concoction, Simpson writes:

“If the solemn avowal of these epistles that they are the apostle’s authoritative missives be not instinct with the most sterling honour and integrity, but an equivocation, or if they are a patchwork of truth and falsehood, they form no part of the Church’s treasures, but sink to the level of pious frauds. . . .

Dr. Harrison . . . tries to varnish the matter by asserting his factotum’s ‘loyal devotion to Paul’s name’, but how a fraudulent abuse of that name breathes the spirit of loyalty is hard to perceive. . . .

He was a sorry specimen of a Paulinist, this pseudo-Paul, conjured up from a nameless grave by the magic hand of criticism to vend smuggled wares under sacred auspices with such cool effrontery” (*The Pastoral Epistles*, pp. 6 & 7).

If any reader wishes to pursue this any further, he is referred to the works of these two scholars. For ourselves, we unhesitatingly believe that Paul was the human author of this great epistle and this attitude is maintained throughout this study.

The structure (by C. H. Welch) of the epistle is now given and those who find such structures helpful should note the balancing sections carefully which will act as a guide to interpretation. The opening verses give the salutation and stress the Apostle’s ministry which, as he frequently stated, accorded with the will of God. This is an essential ingredient for all Christian service and witness. The believer who wishes to be accounted faithful by the Lord dare not run unsent. He has to be certain that he is in the centre of God’s will, for without this, it is valueless. Paul was a divine messenger with a divine message for the outcast Gentile world, and in this he was unique in his lifetime. He goes on to add “according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus”. He was at the end of his earthly course and death was not far away. In these circumstances, what more precious thing could there be than the promise of endless life which was treasured up and only found in the Lord Jesus Christ? In comparison with this, the present life is nothing more than a shadow, transitory and without any permanent endurance.



*The Structure of 2 Timothy as a whole*

A 1:1–7 Salutations and Remembrance. Lois, Eunice

**FORSAKEN**

B 1:8–18 Paul and his message forsaken  
 The Lord his Keeper  
 Phygellus and Hermogenes “turned away”  
 Onesiphorus “The Lord give mercy”  
 Paul the herald to the Gentiles (*kerux*, verse 11)

**CROWN**

C 2:1–13 Teach things heard of me (*exclusive*)  
 Suffering and reigning  
 The good soldier (*kalos*, verse 3)  
 The crown  
 Suffer evil (*kakopattheo*, verses 3 and 9)

**APPROVED**

D 2:14–26 Hymenaeus and Philetus err concerning truth  
 “Shun”  
 They will increase  
 “Approved” (*dokimos*)  
 Repentance to acknowledging of truth

**DISAPPROVED**

D 3:1–9 Jannes and Jambres resist the truth  
 “Turn away”  
 Shall proceed no further  
 “Disapproved” (*adokimos*)  
 Never come to acknowledgment of truth

**CROWN**

C 3:10–4:8 Followed my teaching (*exclusive*)  
 Suffering and reigning  
 The good fight (*kalos*, verse 7)  
 The crown  
 Suffer evil (*kakopattheo*, verse 5)

**FORSAKEN**

B 4:9–18 Paul and his message forsaken  
 The Lord his Keeper  
 Demas “hath forsaken me”  
 Alexander “The Lord will recompense him”  
 Paul heralding to the Gentiles (*kerugma*, verse 17)

A 4:19–22 Salutations Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, Claudia  
 Benediction.

“God hath given to us eternal life *and this life is in His Son*”  
 corroborates John in his first epistle (1 John 5:11). We now

have *God's promise* relating to it. That promise is fulfilled in resurrection, when this corruptible puts on incorruption and this mortal puts on immortality. Then indeed death will be swallowed up in victory (1 Cor. 15:51–54), and the “life which is life indeed” will commence, never to have an end. Such is absolutely fundamental to our “high calling of God in Christ Jesus”, for how could this be enjoyed without life unending?

The Apostle adds “mercy” in verse two to his usual salutation of grace and peace. Paul uses this word twelve times and it signifies “compassion” and strikes a tender note here. We have a God Who is rich in mercy and in understanding of our every need and Timothy would be reminded that this was so. The bond between the Apostle and the young man was close, indeed closer than that of any other of Paul's fellow-workers. While he appreciated all those who faithfully laboured with him, his relationship with Timothy, as a father and son (Phil. 2:22), was unique, warm, intimate and specially dear to his heart, as the second verse of this letter makes clear where he addresses Timothy as “my beloved child” (R.V.).

This led to constant intercession on the part of the Apostle, for he knew the great importance and value of this ministry of prayer on behalf of others (cp. Rom. 1:9; Phil. 1:4; Col. 1:3). As he thinks of Timothy he thanks God (verses 1–3) Whom, he declares, he served “from my forefathers”. While God's leading and revelation had taken him away in many respects from Judaism, so much so that he was deemed a heretic, “. . . after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets” (Acts 24:14), yet he had not left their God. He still served Him with a pure conscience (1 Tim. 1:5), this assuredly helping him to hold on his way, although it was often a way of loneliness and misunderstanding.

The intercession for Timothy was in no sense spasmodic, it was continuous, “without ceasing, night and day” (verse 3) which shows the seriousness of the Apostle's purpose, reminiscent of Acts 20:31. This was not only true in relation to his son in the faith, but also for all the churches. It provides a wonderful example to us all. How often believers have to mourn the poverty of their prayer life!

Paul now refers to the young man's tears, evidently at their last parting. He was obviously deeply attached to the Apostle and felt the severance keenly. Paul does not disguise his own pleasure at the prospect of seeing Timothy again "greatly desiring to see thee" (1:4), "that I may be filled with joy". As we have seen, the word "fill" (*pleroo*) is one of the great words of the Colossian epistle and Paul uses it no less than twenty-three times. Here his joy would abound as he contemplates their meeting once more if possible, and he is reminded, as he contemplates Timothy's "unfeigned faith", of his Christian background, his godly grandmother and mother. These powerful home influences and the saintly atmosphere had evidently greatly impressed Timothy, and many a believer today has to thank God for the influence of an out and out Christian home.

The indwelling faith in Timothy is paralleled in Paul's epistles by the indwelling God (2 Cor. 6:16), the indwelling Spirit (Rom. 8:11; 2 Tim. 1:14) and the indwelling Word of Christ (Col. 3:16). The illustration of a building is often used by the Apostle to express the inner characteristics of the truth of God. There was no doubt whatsoever of the reality and genuineness of Timothy's faith.

There occurs a threefold reference to "remembrance" in chapter one and we shall find the number three stamped on this epistle as it was on Ephesians. Paul now reminds Timothy that he needed no new gift for his Christian service but rather a re-kindling of that already received. We need not be disturbed because the young man was asked to stir up a gift that was given him during the Acts period. Some of the Pentecostal gifts were basic to faithful ministry and so were beyond dispensational limitations. The Apostle does not describe this gift, so it is useless to try to guess what it was, but it was evidently as needful to Timothy at this juncture as when it was first given. The word is used of re-kindling the dying embers of a fire. Something needed reviving in Timothy's experience, hence the exhortation. The times had become difficult and dangerous indeed. Paul's young son in the faith could not afford to neglect any source of strength. As we look around today, we are in a similar position. Let us lean hard upon the Lord's strength and the greatness of all His promises that can never fail.

Paul now reminds Timothy that "God has not given us the

spirit of fearfulness, but of power and love and discipline” (2 Tim. 1:7 R.V.). *Deilia* (“fearfulness”) means shrinking to the point of cowardice and here the Apostle is delicately reminding his sensitive son in the faith of the need of being brave and not playing the coward, however difficult and dangerous were the times. For this the almighty resurrection power of Christ was at his disposal to make him more than sufficient, together with the peace of God that “passes understanding”, both of these leading to self-control and practical prudence which would be invaluable in the outworking of the “good deposit” of truth.

Now comes a threefold reference to being ashamed (R.V.):

“Be not *ashamed* therefore of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner” (verse 8) . . . “I was appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher. For the which cause I suffer also these things: yet I am not *ashamed*” (verses 11,12) . . . “Onesiphorus . . . oft refreshed me, and was not *ashamed* of my chain” (verse 16).

We need not assume that Timothy had already shown symptoms of shame, but Paul is evidently seeking to strengthen his mind should the temptation arise. The Apostle was now living for the most part in loneliness and rejection. Imprisonment for the truth evidently carried with it a social stigma and the danger of giving a public witness to a religion that was now illicit, made the possibility of shame a real one.

At first sight it seems extraordinary that the Apostle should couple himself with the Lord. We can well understand the need to urge Timothy not to be ashamed of his Saviour, but at the same time to say “do not be ashamed of me either” appears to be sheer egotism. This is not the only time he seems to push himself forward. Note the following:

“. . . the gospel; whereunto *I* am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles” (verses 10,11).

“Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard *of me*” (verse 13).

“All they which are in Asia be turned away *from me*” (verse 15).

“The things that thou hast heard *of me* . . . commit thou to faithful men . . .” (2:2).

“Remember that Jesus Christ . . . was raised from the dead according to *my gospel*” (2:8).



“Thou hast fully known *my doctrine*, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, love, patience . . .” (3:10).

“Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that *by me* the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear” (4:17).

This stress on *self* would be sheer egotism apart from the position given him by the ascended Christ as His mouthpiece to us who are Gentiles. When Paul refers to himself alone, he is “less than the least of all saints” (Eph. 3:8), and “the chief of sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15), and he can say with truth, “not I, but Christ” (Gal. 2:20). But when he speaks as the Apostle of Christ to the Gentiles, he is then the channel through which the Lord Himself is speaking, and he writes and teaches with all His authority. When this is understood, the constant references to himself and his ministry can be seen in their true light and we therefore do not talk of “Pauline doctrine” as though his epistles were just the putting forward of his own ideas.

To be ashamed of Paul and his ministry is to be ashamed of the Lord and this reminds one of His solemn words in Luke 9:26, “for whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father’s, and of the holy angels”. Alas, it is only too easy to deny, by word or deed, the special testimony given through Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, or to keep silence when we should speak, for fear of other believers and their attitude towards us. May we ever be delivered from the “fear of man that bringeth a snare”, and any attitude or mode of life that can be construed as being ashamed of the glorious deposit of truth given through Paul’s prison ministry.

Timothy is now reminded that he must be ready to accept any hardship that a faithful witness to this “good deposit” might bring:

“ . . . suffer hardship with the gospel according to the power of God” (8 R.V.).

*Sunkakopatheo* (“suffer hardship”) seems to have been coined by the Apostle “to share suffering with someone else” (compare also 2:3). Timothy is invited to share Paul’s sufferings and this evil treatment meted out to those who determined to be faithful is a recurring theme in this epistle (2:9; 4:5). Later the Apostle

states, “all that would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (3:12 R.V.) and this is a reminder to all of us that there is a price to be paid if we want to be counted among those whom the Lord deems “faithful”. Let us not therefore be surprised when the tests and difficulties come.

However, it is indeed good to realize that the almighty power of God is the source of all strength, wisdom and endurance and again and again the Apostle relied alone on this and urged other fellow-believers to do the same. To trust in anything else is to court disaster; to rely on the exceeding power that conquered death is to find it always more than sufficient for every need. So Timothy is urged not to fear the consequences of standing loyally for the sacred trust committed to him, for this glorious power could be his at all times, enabling him to triumph over all the trials and persecution through which he might have to pass.

Paul now continues:

“God, Who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose (plan) and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the age-times” (verse 9 R.V.).

While the Bible is the revelation of a mighty plan conceived by God in past eternity involving both heaven and earth, how wonderful it is that the individual child of God is not lost in all its vastness! Each member of the Body of Christ did not come into this relationship by accident or human choice. It was all part of the Lord’s design and exceeding grace and love. Human merit could not come into it, for there was none (“not according to our works”). Just as Ephesians 1:4 assures each member that he was “chosen in Christ *before* the foundation of the world”, so here a glorious part was given to every member in Christ Jesus *before* the age-times (literally), a unique time period, as we have seen when studying Ephesians. Other phases of God’s purposes are linked with the period “*since* the foundation of the world” and if words mean anything, these two periods must be distinct, for *before* an event and *after* an event express two distinct aspects of time. We have the same expression in Titus 1:2 which the Authorized Version translates “before the world began”. J. N. Darby renders both “before the ages of time” and Weymouth’s original version reads “before the commencement

of the ages”, which are both truer to the original God-inspired Greek than the Authorized Version.

In contrast to this vast look back into the past and the beginning of God’s great plan for His creation is the *now* of manifestation:

“But hath *now* been manifested by the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, Who abolished death, and brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel, whereunto I was appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher” (verses 10,11 R.V.).

This is parallel again to the opening of the epistle to Titus, the “now” of 2 Timothy corresponding to the “due times” of Titus 1:3 Authorized Version, or as the Revised Version renders it:

“God, Who cannot lie, promised before times eternal (lit. age-times), but in *His own seasons* manifested His word in the message *wherewith I was intrusted* according to the commandment of God our Saviour”.

God chooses His own time in His perfect wisdom to reveal the various phases of His redemptive purposes, and these time periods are always exact and fitting. The accurate student of the Word will always recognize this and seek to avoid the error that comes from reading past truth into the present and vice versa. Much confusion in Christendom could have been avoided if this had always been carried out. How often do we read of an explanation of the Mystery of Ephesians three that takes us back to the Old Testament, when it is clearly stated that, at that time, it was hidden in God! (Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:26). The revelation of this great Secret to the children of God and its heavenly calling and destiny is *now*, according to God’s own *season*, and is made known through Paul “the prisoner of Christ Jesus”, according to His commandment.

The epistle continues:

“... our Saviour, Christ Jesus, Who abolished death, and brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel, whereunto I was appointed a preacher (‘herald’ margin), and an apostle, and a teacher” (verses 10,11 R.V.).

“Abolish” is too strong a translation, for we know only too well that death is still with us. *Katargeo* (“abolish”) is one of

Paul's favourite words, for he uses it twenty-five times. It is a rare term scarcely used outside the papyri. It means to frustrate, nullify, disempower or more literally, to put out of gear or render inoperative. We notice its usage in Romans 6:6 where it is translated "destroyed", again too strong a rendering, for we know, alas, from practical experience at times that our sinful old nature has *not* been destroyed.

It has been "rendered inoperative" by being crucified with Christ and this becomes true in our experience when we "reckon" it to be so. Death was not abolished at our Saviour's first advent, but He defeated it by His redemptive work on the cross, and by His glorious resurrection took the sting out of it for the believer, which is sin (1 Cor. 15:56) and so the "king of terrors" has been robbed of his domination and fear, for the Lord Jesus has tasted all death's bitterness in our stead and for us who know Him as Saviour and Lord, we only "fall asleep". Death cannot finally hold the believer, for he has been united to the Conqueror of death, and because He lives, we shall live also eternally.

Not only did the Lord Jesus make death inoperative for the believer, but by His sacrificial work on the cross He brought life and incorruption to light by it. We have already seen that this incorruptible life and immortality are to be found only in Christ and not in fallen humanity. Any teaching that man possesses these apart from the Lord and His salvation is pagan in origin, flatly contradicting the Scriptures and comes from the father of lies. The Apostle refers to his threefold office of herald (preacher or proclaimer), apostle and teacher once more in 1 Timothy 2:7. He was a proclaimer of the truth committed to him by the Lord Jesus, a sent one (apostle) by Him and a teacher of the Gentiles, and to emphasize the importance of his ministry he declares "I lie not" (1 Tim. 2:7), showing that he was not inventing or exaggerating the unique position given to him by God, as His mouthpiece to the Gentile world.

The Apostle Paul, having referred to the Gospel which had been committed to him by the risen Christ (2 Tim. 1:10,11), now reminds Timothy of the cost: "for which cause I suffer these things". His imprisonment and treatment as a criminal was the direct result of his faithful stand for Christ and his



ministry during the perilous time in which he was living. Yet, in order to encourage Timothy, he states:

“Yet I am not ashamed; for I know Him Whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to guard that which I have committed unto Him against that day” (2 Tim. 1:12 R.V.).

The margin of the Revised Version reads “or, that which He committed unto me” (Greek: my deposit). Paul did not say “I know *what* I have believed”, but “I know *Him Whom* I have believed”, and this is immeasurably greater and better. The knowledge of Christ Jesus is the summing up of all truth, and the goal for the believer is “that I may get to know Him” (Phil. 3:10). This will include, of course, the precious deposit of truth which He has committed to us to guard and proclaim for His glory. This truth He will most certainly protect until “that day”, and Paul’s continuous assurance of this is made clear by the perfect tense in the Greek.

*Paratheke* (deposit) is the shortened form of the full term for a legal deposit *parakatatheke*, and many examples of its use can be found in the papyri. This word occurs in verse fourteen and 1 Timothy 6:20 describing the truth deposited with Timothy and it has the same meaning in verse twelve. Paul is not thinking of something which he had deposited with the Lord, but rather the wondrous revelation of truth *the Lord had deposited with him* to make known primarily to the Gentiles. This is further explained in verse thirteen:

“Hold the pattern of sound words which thou hast heard of me in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus”.

*Hypotuposis* (form or pattern) is only used in one other place in the New Testament where the salvation and ministry of Paul is declared to be a “pattern” for those who would hereafter believe (1 Tim. 1:12–16). The word means delineation or outline. Arndt and Gingrich in their *Greek–English Lexicon* give the meaning as *standard*, which fits the context in 2 Timothy perfectly. All the truth deposited by the Lord with the Apostle Paul was the divine standard of truth for Timothy, and still is the standard by which all Christian preaching, teaching and service must be measured. As the Apostle of the Gentiles his ministry specially fits this Gentile age. How thankful we ought

to be that we have this divine standard by which we can test all we hear and read with so many conflicting ideas on every hand. This is the only sure way we can sort out for ourselves truth from error and know exactly where we stand.

Although Timothy knew of the ministry of Peter and John he is not directed to this by the Apostle. Such constituted the standard of truth relating primarily to the faithful remnant of Israel and it will be so again at a future time when the Lord takes up Israel again just prior to His Second Advent. Timothy must now guard what he had heard and received from Paul in faith and minister it in love (13). The Apostle reminds him of the one source of power that is sufficient, namely “the Holy Spirit that dwelleth in us”. The important word “deposit” is another term occurring three times in 2 Timothy. We have had it in 1:12,14 and in 2:2 it occurs in a verbal form and is translated “commit”.

It is well to be clear as to what this “good deposit” embraces. It surely consists of all the truth made known through Paul’s Prison Epistles, namely the glorious news of salvation by faith in Christ Jesus through grace, apart from human works or merit. This he received directly from the Lord Jesus (Gal. 1:8–12). But this is not all. It is a profound mistake to stop here. This Gospel is certainly the foundation, but upon it rest the truths of sanctification, consecration in service and then, to crown all, the revelation of the Mystery (secret) concerning the joint-Body, the church which is Christ’s fulness (Ephesians 1 and 3 and Colossians 1). Its special constitution, witness, walk and hope are at the heart of this “good deposit” which Paul declares was made known to him by revelation of the Lord Jesus (Eph. 3:1–3). In the mercy and purpose of God this has been preserved by the Lord and come down to us today. Have we entered into it by faith and, rejoicing in it, do we regard it as a sacred trust?

Timothy is thus encouraged by the Apostle to hold fast and guard the special teaching that had been delivered to him by God. Now he warns Timothy of some who had not done so:

“This thou knowest, that all that are in Asia turned away from me: of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes” (verse 15 R.V.).

The defection of the Asiatics is spoken of as a fact well known

to Timothy. It has been suggested that witnesses for the Apostle who had come from various centres in Asia Minor became terrified when they realized the attitude that Rome was now taking to Christianity and, out of fear, forsook Paul lest they should become involved. This may have been true, but such a number could hardly justify the phrase "all *in* Asia", nor can this be construed as meaning "all *from* Asia". That the perils of the day played a large part in this defection there can be no doubt. Any who publicly associated themselves with the Apostle took their lives in their hands and, if they failed to stand with him, who are we to judge them? Are we prepared to give our lives for the Saviour if need be? Two Christians are named who would be known to Timothy, namely Phygellus and Hermogenes. These were evidently leaders in this defection who failed Paul in his hour of supreme need and would therefore be a warning to his beloved son in the faith. Even allowing for the danger of the times, we can see that the spiritual condition of the sphere in which Paul had laboured could not have been healthy. No mention is made of local churches by Paul in this epistle nor their attitude towards him at this time of his severe testing. The Apostle was making a lonely stand. In 4:16 he says, "at my first defence no one took my part, *but all forsook me*; may it not be laid to their account". We quote the words of Dr. H. D. M. Spence on this passage in chapter one:

"The simple and more obvious meaning is here to be preferred, and we assume as certain that the forsaking, the giving up St. Paul, took place in Asia itself. Large numbers of Christians, if not whole churches, repudiated their connection with the great father of Gentile Christianity, and possibly disobeyed some of his teaching. What, in fact, absolutely took place in Asia while St. Paul lay bound waiting for death in Rome, had been often threatened in Corinth and in other centres. Party feeling ran high in those days, we know, and one of the most sorrowful trials the great-hearted St. Paul had to endure in the agony of his last witnessing for his Lord, was the knowledge that his name and teaching no longer was held in honour in some of those Asian churches so dear to him. The geographical term Asia is rather vague. It may, and indeed strictly speaking does, include Mysia, Phrygia, Lydia, Caria; but such widespread defection from Pauline teaching seems improbable and there is no tradition that anything of the kind ever took place. St. Paul probably wrote the term more in the old Homeric sense and meant the district in the neighbourhood of the river Cayster".

There are some expositors who deny that there was any large scale apostasy at this time, but one comes to a different conclusion when one searches for the distinctive truths of his prison ministry in the early centuries that followed. While there must have been the faithful who had eyes to see and divine courage to hold fast to the good deposit of truth, for the most part Paul's witness has made little impression upon history all down this age. The early believers and leaders did not fully grip this doctrine and gross spiritual darkness soon followed, coming to its climax in the Middle Ages up to the Reformation. Even the basic truth of justification by faith was lost, so it is not to be wondered at that the great truth of the Mystery was all but unknown. Since the Reformation, truth has been in the process of recovery in the inverse order in which it was lost.\* If today we are glorying in the spiritual riches revealed in Paul's prison ministry, let us not only rejoice and be thankful, but also realize the great responsibility this brings and the need for absolute faithfulness to witness to this sacred trust.

The Apostle Paul now refers to the testimony of one who had remained loyal to him and therefore was an example to Timothy:

"The Lord grant mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus, for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; but, when he was in Rome, he sought me diligently, and found me (the Lord grant unto him to find mercy of the Lord in that day); and in how many things he ministered at Ephesus, thou knowest very well" (1:16-18 R.V.).

Onesiphorus was a brave man, for we have pointed out the danger of anyone linking himself publicly with Paul. How easily he could have excused himself by saying Paul's whereabouts were difficult or impossible to find! But instead of this, he searched "diligently" for him till he discovered where he was imprisoned. Not only this, but the Apostle declared "he often refreshed me". The word translated "refreshed" is unique in the New Testament. As a noun it occurs in Acts 3:19, "the times of refreshing", referring to the blessed effects of the Lord's Second Advent. Moffatt's translation is "he braced me up".

\* See the author's *The Early Centuries and the Truth*. The first truth to be lost was the Mystery, then the doctrine of the Second Coming, followed by Justification by faith.



The simple ministry of this believer was like a refreshing breeze to the Apostle, undergoing the rigours of his Roman imprisonment and would not be forgotten by the Lord “in that day”, that is the day of His assessment of Christian witness and service. Onesiphorus was not ashamed of the witness for which Paul stood and this gives us the third occurrence of the word “to be ashamed” in this epistle.

Because Paul refers to the *house* of Onesiphorus some have argued that he must have been dead when the Apostle wrote. But he could just as easily have been away from home and in any case we should realize that the head and his household are inseparable. The Roman church has tried to make capital out of the prayer here offered by asserting that this was an example of prayers for the dead.

One thing is certain, that such a practice finds no foundation whatsoever in any part of the Scriptures, and a person must be hard pressed to try to extract this meaning from these verses.

The Apostle’s son in the faith knew very well of his friend’s loyal service at Ephesus, for Timothy was the overseer there, and this again would be an encouragement for him to emulate the faithfulness and courage of Onesiphorus.

We live in similar days of testing and difficulty. The need is great for us to avail ourselves of the Lord’s strength so that we can say in Paul’s words:

“I can do all things through Christ Who makes me strong”  
(Phil. 4:13).

## CHAPTER TWO OF THE SECOND EPISTLE TO TIMOTHY

The second chapter commences with the word “therefore” which links it with what has gone before:

“Thou therefore, my child, be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 2:1 R.V.).

The encouragements and warnings of the first chapter must be constantly borne in mind by Timothy and the one thing needful to face up to these adequately was *to be strong*. The only strength, however, that would be all-sufficient was found alone *in Christ Jesus* and for Timothy to trust any other was to court disaster. This is a practical word for us all. We are brought back once more to the *grace of God*, and it is a profound mistake to limit such grace to initial salvation; “Unto every one of us is grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ” (Eph. 4:7). Divine grace not only saves, but it equips and strengthens us for Christian service, however exacting this may be. The word translated “be strong” is used eight times in connection with the Apostle Paul. This is the number of resurrection and it is no less than *resurrection power* that is at our disposal by faith (Eph. 1:18–21). This is the greatest of all powers, the power that conquers death. How foolish we should be not to trust it to work in and through us rather than to rely on our own feeble strength!

Paul’s message to Timothy continues:

“And the things which thou hast heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit (deposit) thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2:2 R.V.).

The Apostle had received this sacred deposit of truth from the risen Lord Jesus and had made it known through his oral and written ministry (Gal 1:11,12; Eph. 3: 1–7; 1 Tim. 1:11). In this way Timothy had received it, and with the Apostle’s witness so soon coming to an end, he was about to assume the leadership and full responsibility for this great revelation of truth.

In his turn, he must look to the future, for Paul was ever solicitous for the preservation of this distinctive and precious

witness, and such preservation must never be left to chance. Timothy must pass on or *deposit* this teaching (*paratithemi* a word linked with *paratheke*, deposit, which we have already considered). But this must be to (1) faithful men, (2) with the ability to pass it on and teach others. Let us note the order, for it is of the utmost importance; it is absolute *loyalty* first and *ability* afterwards. Many times this has been reversed with disastrous consequences. A man is given prominence in Christian work because he is an able speaker; or he is a brilliant scholar; or he has a winning personality and is very capable. None of these qualifications will be sufficient without the necessary ingredient of *faithfulness*. "It is required in stewards, that a man be found *faithful*" (1 Cor. 4:2). "Well done, thou good and *faithful* servant" (Matt. 25:21,23). Over and over again this is stressed in God's Word, for the Lord requires not *quantity* first but *quality*. Those who ignore this do so at their peril, for there is the judgment seat of Christ to face for all of us in regard to our Christian service. Without utter faithfulness, all our efforts may be regarded as "wood, hay and stubble", to be consumed by the fire of God's holiness (1 Cor. 3:11-15).

Faithfulness may well be costly to us of course, sometimes leading to a pathway of loneliness and misunderstanding, but what does this matter when the Lord Himself has promised never to leave or forsake us, and in the day of resurrection, His smile, His commendation, His reward, will more than outweigh either the praise or the condemnation of men. It is important too to note that in this context we have the only "apostolic succession" known to the New Testament. All else is based on claims that cannot be substantiated by the Word of God.

We have already seen in our Ephesian studies the importance of *teaching*. The teacher is as much a gift of the ascended Christ as the evangelist (Eph. 4:11). For the most part today the evangelist gets the prominence, while the teacher is relegated to second place, or no place at all! Is it any wonder that churches and chapels contain babes in Christ who never advance and grow spiritually? Such cannot receive more than the milk of the Gospel (1 Cor. 3:1,2). The "strong meat", the exceeding spiritual riches of Paul's prison ministry is beyond them, and this is one reason why the unsearchable riches of Christ are so little known and received among God's children today.

Another reason is the difficulty and often isolation of the way that accompanies faithful witness to this truth. This has been so from the beginning, for Paul now says to Timothy:

“Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 2:3 R.V.).

None of us likes hardship and the temptation is to desert the straight and narrow pathway of loyalty when we see it coming. The Apostle does not paint this pathway in rosy colours. Timothy is warned beforehand of the cost (compare also 1:8), and to emphasize this Paul uses three illustrations (1) the soldier, (2) the athlete, and (3) the farmer or husbandman.

(1) The good soldier is brought forward first, but it is not fighting qualities or prowess that are stressed! Indeed the faithful servant of the Lord is told that he “must not fight (strive A.V.)” (2 Tim. 2:24). Rather it is *suffering* and *endurance* and the complete freedom from all entanglements which was demanded of the Roman soldier. A good soldier must be prepared to “rough it”, to endure hardness and discomfort. Not for him are the comforts and luxuries of the home. Soldiering must be a full-time occupation without any distractions:

“No soldier on service entangleth himself in the affairs of this life: that he may please him who enrolled him as a soldier” (2:4 R.V.).

The word *bios*, life, has a different shade of meaning from *zoe* the more frequent word. It is translated “living” in Mark 12:44; Luke 8:43; 15:12. It means “livelihood” or getting one’s living by one’s business or daily work. Now there is nothing wrong in this *until it entangles*. When this happens it begins to occupy the place of Christ-directed service and with the result that we are weighed down in the heavenly race. The earnest runner must be on the alert for this, for weights must be laid aside (Heb. 12:1,2) if we wish to run like the Apostle did and finish our course with joy.

(2) Paul further enforces his point by referring to the athlete in the Olympic Games:

“And if also a man contend in the games, *he is not crowned, except he have contended lawfully*” (5 R.V.).



Many points could have been stressed in connection with the athlete, but the one brought forward here by the Apostle is the need “to contend lawfully”, in other words *to keep the rules*. The rules governing the Olympic Games were strict. Athletes had to state on oath that they had completed ten month’s training before they were eligible to enter the contest. Any runner who had not done this would have no chance to win and *be crowned*, but would also lower the standard of the Games. Severe penalties were imposed on all who infringed the rules. The application to the believer is clear. Saving grace has placed our feet at the beginning of the heavenly race, but there is no possibility of receiving the Lord’s approval at the end and *being crowned* by Him unless we have kept the rules which are so clearly set out in the practical sections of the Prison Epistles which make known our “high calling of God in Christ Jesus”.

### (3) The Farmer:

“The husbandman that laboureth must be the first to partake of the fruits” (verse 6 R.V.).

The reference here is to the *labouring* husbandman, i.e. the farmer or gardener who works. Everyone knows that hard work must precede any lasting results in gardening or farming. The lazy man gets no results. His land, covered with weeds, is an open indication of his idleness. In this section of the epistle therefore, the stress is on *Christian service* and all that it entails. In the Scriptures distinction is made between the believer looked at as a saved sinner and justified in the Lord’s sight by faith and grace, and the believer as a *servant of the Lord* who can render to Him either good or bad service. Let us be quite clear with regard to this. Some, not recognizing the all-sufficiency of God’s work in justifying the sinner who believes in Christ, try to combine this with human works and so attempt to supplement what God has done. This is serious indeed for it denies the finished work of Christ on the cross. When He said “It is finished”, the work of redemption was completed in the fullest sense of the word and needed no human additions.

Indeed, all such are an evidence of unbelief. On the other hand, there are others who so stress salvation by grace apart from works that “good works” form no part of their conception of truth. They have forgotten that although Ephesians 2:8,9

states that grace-by-faith-salvation is “not of works”, yet it is “*unto good works*” (verse 10). In other words “good works” or Christian service and witness should flow from such free and unmerited salvation. The sinner has been *saved to serve*, and let us make no mistake, every true believer is called by the Lord to serve Him and to discover His will in this respect. It is only self-deception to refuse to recognize this. The words servant and service so permeate the epistles that it must be deliberate blindness that eliminates such service and responsibility to the Lord from the Christian’s life. To the believers at Colossae Paul wrote “ye serve the Lord Christ” (Col. 3:23,24) and what a privilege it is to be allowed to serve such a Saviour and Master! On the other hand let us remember that the Lord has no conscripts among His people. Service will never be forced by Him. It must rather be the practical response of our love and gratitude to Him. We can be good servants or bad servants, faithful or unfaithful, and a righteous heavenly Father must and will take account of this, in the day of reckoning for what we have done in His Name during our earthly lifetime.

In the section of 2 Timothy we are studying we repeat that it is the *labouring* farmer that is being stressed. How far are we prepared to really *labour* for the Lord? Are we prepared to sacrifice and tire ourselves for Him? We can often tire ourselves in our pleasures, but what about our daily service for the One Who has given His all for us? The true answer to this shows the extent of our love for Him, no more and no less. Let us stir ourselves while the day of opportunity lasts and make the most of the time remaining to us!

The Lord will not be in any man’s debt and He takes account of all loyal and practical response to Him. Crowns and rewards are for *faithful* servants, those who have pleased Him in their outworking of His truth and have been prepared to suffer if need be. “No cross, no crown” expresses this truth. 2 Timothy is really going over the same ground as Philippians but with different illustrations. In both it is the response of the believer that is stressed, with the possibility of a prize or crown at the end. Never let us forget that prizes or crowns may be lost, but equally they may be won. We are deciding each day which it is to be in our experience when we meet the Lord in resurrection face to face.

Let us sum up the teaching of these three illustrations:

THE GOOD SOLDIER. Endurance. Non-entanglement.

THE DISCIPLINED ATHLETE. The Crown. Keeping the rules.

THE PRACTICAL FARMER. Toil. Then first partaker of the fruits.

Verse seven continues:

“Consider what I say; for the Lord shall give thee understanding in all things” (R.V.).

*Noeo*, translated “consider”, means “to think over”, “to grasp the meaning” and if Timothy will do this, the promise is that the Lord will supply all needed understanding. For our encouragement we should remember that if we ponder and apply God’s truth to our own lives, the Lord will increase our power of understanding which will blot out our ignorance and conform our lives closer to His will.

Paul has not only brought before Timothy God’s truth, but also what it would cost, if faithfully lived and proclaimed. There were “afflictions of the Gospel” (1:8) and he would be called to suffer hardship with the Apostle (2:3) and in order to come triumphantly through these experiences, Timothy’s gaze is now directed to the risen Christ just as it is expressed in Hebrews 12:1–3. So Paul goes on to say:

“Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, of the seed of David, according to my gospel: wherein I suffer hardship unto bonds, as a malefactor; but the Word of God is not bound” (2 Tim. 2:8,9 R.V.).

The Authorized Version reads “Remember *that Jesus Christ . . . was* raised from the dead” as though the Apostle was asking Timothy to remember *the fact* of His resurrection. There was no need to ask Timothy to accept the truth that Christ had been raised from the dead. As a genuine believer, he could not do otherwise. What the Authorized Version has missed is the passive participle (*egegermenon*) which draws attention to a *present experience of the risen Lord*. He is saying in effect, “look away from the present testing and hardship to the risen One Who is all-sufficient for your needs”. Paul was doing this very thing, for although he was now being treated as a criminal, chained night and day in a Roman dungeon, yet the risen and ascended Lord Jesus was his constant sufficiency. The Apostle’s reference to Christ as the “seed of David” takes us back to

Romans 1:3 where, as in our present context, he is dealing with the Gospel he had received from Christ (Gal. 1:11,12). But this Gospel was not without its cost to Paul. He was able to endure all his sufferings “for the elect’s sakes”. He realized that although nominally he was the prisoner of Nero, in actuality he was the “prisoner of the Lord for you Gentiles” (Eph. 3:1). He was in this position by Christ’s permission, and although he himself was chained, yet the Word of God was still free and making headway in bringing sinners to a knowledge of salvation and then to the deeper truths resident in Christ. Satan might rejoice that Paul was shut up in prison, yet he could never imprison the Word of God! “The Word of God is not bound” (2 Tim. 2:9). These triumphant words still ring out with truth today.

There was a reason for his sufferings as a prisoner at Rome. They were “for the elect’s sakes” (2 Tim. 2:10), that is, not only for those who had already responded to the Truth, but for those in the future who would yet do so. The Apostle doubtless had in mind the whole company of God’s children who constitute the Body of Christ, those whom the Father had elected in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3,4). His desire was not just that they might be saved but might experience “that salvation *with eternal glory*” (2 Tim. 2:10) which takes the thought much further. It is comparable with the salvation *to the uttermost* of the epistle to the Hebrews, which, like Philipians and 2 Timothy, is stressing in parallel teaching the maturing of the saint; the running of the race with respect to the recompense of *reward* (Heb. 11:24–26) as Moses did.

That there is such a difference the following verses of 2 Timothy make clear. To enforce this, Paul quotes the fourth of the five “faithful sayings” of the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:11; Titus 3:8). These were probably fragments of hymns in which doctrine was embodied. This one reads:

“Faithful is the saying: for if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him: if we endure, we shall also reign with Him: if we shall deny Him, He also will deny us: if we are faithless, He abideth faithful; for He cannot deny Himself” (verses 11–13 R.V.).

We shall have problems with this context unless we recognize



two distinct lines of truth that we have already touched upon when dealing with the Philippian epistle. We must distinguish between (1) salvation by grace and all it entails, which is not of works, but is the free gift of God and is received personally by faith in Christ and what He has accomplished on the cross, and (2) Christian service which should follow or “accompany” salvation, resulting in a prize or crown which will be awarded by the Lord if that service is reckoned by Him as faithful. If not, the crown or reward will be denied, as the above verses teach, but initial salvation cannot be lost, for “He abides faithful, He cannot deny Himself”, or take back what He has given *as a free gift* for the “gifts and calling of God are without repentance”, that is, change of mind on His part (Rom. 11:29). The reader should carefully ponder 1 Corinthians 3:10–15 where a sharp distinction is made between reward for service and salvation by grace.

Since all believers died with Christ in God’s reckoning, they will all live with Him in resurrection somewhere in that new heaven and earth that He is yet to create when the present universe passes away. Their dying with Christ does not depend upon their faithfulness or unfaithfulness in service; it is solely God’s doing. Likewise their living with Him by being raised from the dead and changed into His likeness does not depend on them either. It is the consummation of the glorious work of salvation wrought by the Lord Jesus and will be brought about by Him “that quickeneth the dead”. He said “Because I live, ye shall live also” (John 14:19).

But in 2 Timothy 2:12 we step out of the realm of free grace into the realm of responsibility and service. We are saved to “*work out* our salvation” (not work for it) which God has worked within us (Phil. 2:12,13). If we do this faithfully, then this context assures us that we shall not only *live* with Christ, but also *reign with Him*. The word “also” shows this is something additional to salvation. We have millions of people *living* in Great Britain, but only one, our Queen, is *reigning* on the throne. There is a vast difference between living and reigning, even in human affairs. It is the *reigning*, symbolized by the *crown*, that the Lord will deny His children if they are counted by Him as being disloyal or unfaithful. The passage may be set out as follows:

- A “Faithful is the saying, for if we died with Him, we shall also *live* with Him
- B If we patiently endure, we shall *also* reign with Him
- B If we deny Him, He will also deny us (the reigning with Him, sharing His throne)
- A If we are faithless, He abideth faithful, He cannot deny Himself” (that is, He cannot deprive such of their resurrection life with Him).

Living with Christ does not depend upon the faithfulness of the believer, for resurrection to eternal life is the culmination of salvation *by grace*. The believer is eternally linked with the One Who said “I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (John 11:25). The believer’s subsequent failures after salvation cannot alter the initial fact of his future life with Him. But when we come to the question of sharing Christ’s *throne* and His reign over the whole creation in heaven and earth, we are dealing with something *additional to salvation*. Whether we are considered by God worthy as good servants, for a “crown”, obtaining a “prize”, receiving a reward or in other words reigning with Christ, depends upon our response to the claims of His Truth here and now.

When we study the word translated “deny”, we find it to be equivalent with the words “to be ashamed”:

“Whosoever therefore shall be *ashamed* of Me and of My words . . . of him also shall the Son of man be *ashamed*, when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:38).

“But whosoever shall *deny* Me before men, him will I also *deny* before My Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 10:33).

We can now better understand the statement “if we deny Him, He will deny us” and the link with not being ashamed in 2 Timothy 1:8,12,16 and also the most important verse fifteen of chapter two, “a workman that needeth not to be ashamed”. There is not one of us today who does not need a clear understanding of these distinct yet related truths and a constant reminder of their practical implications. To be denied by the Saviour is surely a solemn thing, and thus to lose the matchless privilege of sharing His throne will be a terrible loss indeed.

These are such important truths for the believer to apprehend

that Timothy is now instructed to remind those under his charge of these great facts:

“Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them in the sight of the Lord, that they strive not about words, to no profit, to the subverting (overthrowing) of them that hear” (verse 14 R.V.).

This is not the first time that Paul had warned Timothy concerning this senseless and dangerous striving (1 Tim. 1:4,6,7; 6:3–5,20; also Titus 1:10,14; 3:9) which could only lead to the overthrowing of the faith. The word *katastrophe*, “subvert” literally means “to turn upside down”, the very opposite of edification or building up. It may not be possible to say exactly what the “endless genealogies” were, but it seems clear that Satan had fabricated a scheme involving ages and false mediators (angelic princes), which was a travesty of the Truth revealed in the Scriptures which is centred in Christ. The Colossian heresy, as we have seen, was probably linked with a similar conception. This led to endless debates and arguments and word battles which only accomplished what the enemy was aiming at, namely the dividing of the people of God and turning them away from Christ as the fulness of God.

The next section of 2 Timothy revolves around the great subject of the Truth of God. The word “truth” occurs three times, “rightly dividing the word of *Truth*” (verse 15); “those who concerning the *Truth* have erred” (verses 17,18) and “repentance to the acknowledging of the *Truth*” (verse 25). Can anything be more important to the practical believer than a knowledge of God’s Truth? How can he *live* the Truth and pass it on to others if he does not apprehend it himself? If what he believes proves to be error, then he is a deceived person and becomes a tool of Satan the arch-deceiver and is a misleader of other people. The “girdle of Truth” (see Eph. 6:14) is an essential part of the protective armour of God against the wiles of the devil. Surely we come here to the heart of all Christian service and witness. If we are wrong here, we shall be wrong everywhere.

But what is Truth? Pilate’s question comes ringing down the centuries and many thousands have asked it since, apparently oblivious of the fact that the Saviour has already answered it in John 14:6 “I am the Truth”, and “*Thy Word is Truth*” (17:17).

To show the great importance of this subject, the Apostle links our attitude to it with the approval of God:

“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth” (verse 15).

The word *spoudazo*, study, does not refer to reading books. It occurs again in 4:21 where it is translated “do thy diligence”. It has the notion of persistent zeal and could be rendered in up to date language, “do your utmost”, the aim being to present oneself approved unto God, a workman without any shame. What greater aim than this can there be for the servant of God? The approval of men can be discounted. The only approval or commendation that matters is one that comes from God when we stand before Him and give an account of our stewardship.

It is this that must constantly be in the forefront of our minds as we live day by day. All else is of secondary importance, for stupendous things are resting on the way we have handled and used the sacred Scriptures, the Word of God, in this day of opportunity. If we have handled the Word unfaithfully or with slackness, then, as the previous section of this epistle has shown, we shall have denied God’s Truth and He will deny us the supreme privilege of reigning with Him over the restored universe. We shall be ashamed before Him, and He will be ashamed of us as *unfaithful servants*. The perfection of our standing in Christ must not be brought in here to try to undo as it were the serious statements of the context we are studying. We are amazed how some who claim to see the Mystery do this and so stress grace that service and responsibility before the Lord are ruled out! Yet they constantly quote 2 Timothy 2:15 and talk about “right division”! This verse makes perfectly clear that only those who are *unashamed workmen* have rightly divided the Work of God. In other words these are *practical people, workmen*, who have rendered acceptable service to the Lord in the way they have handled and proclaimed the Truth of the Scriptures.

*What does “right-division” mean?*

The faithful workman is one who has “rightly-divided the



Word of Truth". *Orthotomeo* is not easy to define because it is used nowhere else in the New Testament and only occurs twice in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament used by the Lord and the apostles). The passages are Proverbs 3:6 and 11:5 where, instead of "He shall *direct* thy paths (from the Hebrew text) we have "He (or it, referring to wisdom in verse 5) shall "*rightly divide thy paths*". The illustration here is that of a sign-post dividing off and pointing to the right road out of a number before the person concerned. This would certainly influence Timothy's understanding as he knew the holy Scriptures (the Old Testament) which had made him "wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15).

The word *orthotomeo* has a primary meaning of "cutting straight". It also has a secondary meaning of "handling aright" and translators have used either of these two meanings. We give a selection:

"Skilfully handling the Word of truth"	<i>Rotherham</i>
"Rightly handling the message of truth"	<i>Cunnington</i>
"The way you handle the word of truth"	<i>Moffatt</i>
"Rightly handling the word of truth"	<i>Revised Standard Version</i>
"Correctly handles the word of truth"	<i>New International Version</i>
"Cutting in a straight line the word of truth"	<i>J. N. Darby</i>
"Correctly analysing the message of truth"	<i>Berkeley Version.</i>

The Berkeley Version is suggestive here. "To analyse" is "to divide or resolve into constituent parts", and as the Word of God is a supreme revelation of "the eternal purpose (or the purpose of the ages) in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 3:10,11) which touches the heavens as well as the earth, we need to divide or distinguish between these wonderful facets of God's almighty plan which lies behind the creation of the universe. If we do this and give due weight to all the revelation that God has given in His Word, we shall be "handling it aright" with that faithfulness which God demands from everyone who seeks to know it and proclaim its unsearchable riches which are treasured up in Christ Jesus.

Now what are the practical implications of verse fifteen? First of all let us state what it is not. "Right Division" does not mean chopping up the Bible into sections of our making which

may accord with the pet ideas that we hold. When properly understood, it is not *divisive* in the wrong sense of the word. What it does in its application is to recognize the distinctions that the Author, God the Holy Spirit, has Himself made. The margin of Philippians 1:10 tells us “to try the things that differ” and this is with the object of “approving things that are excellent”, in other words getting to know *God’s best*. The word “better” is one of the key-words of the epistle to the Hebrews and “better things” can only be appreciated by believers who are doing this. We believe that this is the way God wants us to approach and handle His precious Word. Right Division is therefore a great principle of interpretation of the Scriptures and we will try to indicate its application to this great Book of Truth.

### *Examples of Right Division.*

(1) If we obey the injunction of 2 Timothy 2:15 we shall note the various *time periods of Scripture* and not confuse them. Time is of the utmost importance in the revelation of God’s redemptive plan for earth and heaven. God’s clock is always correct and there is always a special time for the revelation of His Truth. He is never a moment too soon or too late.

The importance of God’s time is seen in Titus 1:1,2:

“Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God’s elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness, a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, Who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, and *at His appointed season* He brought His Word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Saviour” (N.I.V.).

The truth given through Paul’s ministry therefore was divinely regulated as to *time* as well as to its *content*. It would have been out of place before this and too late if it had been postponed to the future. We must therefore learn from this and *distinguish between the time periods of Scripture*. What was true and according to the will of God in the Old Testament times is not necessarily true today. If a believer sins now, he does not bring an animal sacrifice to God in order to be forgiven. Yet this was God’s command to Israel in the Old Testament and refusal to obey it would have resulted in judgment from Him.

It was truth then; it is not truth *now*. This is obvious, but it is a plain example of a principle that obtains throughout Scripture.

Conversely, the present must not be read into the past. For instance, the great Secret (mystery A.V.) concerning the Body of Christ, dealt with in Ephesians and Colossians (Eph. 3:1–9; Col. 1:24–27) which God *hid in Himself* from past ages (time) and generations (people) must not be read into the past or in fact any time *before* this was revealed to Paul as the chosen human channel (carefully note this in the last two Scripture references). The time of its proclamation was from his Roman prison after the Acts period. He alone claims to be the appointed minister by Christ in connection with this favoured heavenly company of believers. If we do not distinguish the time periods of the Bible we make the Word of God contradict itself, which is a serious thing in the sight of God, and we turn it from truth to falsehood and rob ourselves of the glorious revelation it contains.

We must also note that the future must not be read into the present. The future prophetic period of wrath and judgment of God known as the Day of the Lord must not be read into the present age of grace (Isa. 2:12; 13:6–9; Zeph. 1:14,15; Joel 1:15; 2:11).

*The example of the Lord Jesus in connection with Right Division.*

We have a supreme example of the Lord Jesus applying this principle to the time periods of Scripture in Luke 4:14–21. He gave the public reading of the Old Testament in the Synagogue which was taken from Isaiah sixty-one. The reader should turn to this reference and read it carefully and then compare it with what the Lord did. His reading was indeed short. He stopped in the middle of verse two, closed the book and sat down. No wonder His listeners were surprised and gripped, not only at its brevity, but also for the fact that He stopped reading after the phrase “to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord”. Had He gone on and read “and the day of vengeance of our God” He could not have said with truth, “*this day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears*” (Luke 4:21), for He came, as He had taught, not to judge and condemn, but to save (John 12:47).

Now is the age of grace. Grace now reigns (Rom. 5:21) and God does not sit on a throne of grace and judgment at the same time. Judgment and wrath are now held back, and in infinite patience God waits for the repentance and response of a sinful race. But He does not wait for ever. The age of grace has its end and then wrath and judgment must follow.

That Christ believed and taught this too the context of Luke 21:22 makes perfectly clear and Revelation 6:16,17 solemnly reveals that the future wrath of Christ will be a terrible reality. This may not be popular theology, but it is revealed truth.

Here then we have an example given by the Lord Jesus of “rightly dividing the Word” and separating the present “acceptable year of the Lord” from the future Lord’s Day of wrath and judgment and all who handle the Word of God are surely without excuse with this divine example before them.

(2) We must distinguish between *Law* and *Grace*, especially with relationship to the Gospel and the way of salvation. Salvation by faith in Christ, the forgiveness of sins and eternal life are the free gifts of God, and can never be attained by attempting to keep the law. Man’s imperfect sinful nature makes this impossible for God requires *perfect* keeping of His law (Jas. 2:10,11), if this is the ground that man chooses to approach Him. Salvation and righteousness are “not of works (human merit or attainment) lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8–10), but it is “*unto* good works” *after* salvation. This we have already stressed and “right division” will carefully note the difference between receiving the gifts of grace by faith (God’s favour to the unworthy) and human attempts to obtain salvation by one’s own unaided efforts.

(3) This leads to the difference between *salvation by grace*, apart from works, and *prize or reward* resulting from faithful service following salvation which we have already touched upon. The former is sure and certain because it depends solely upon what Christ has done on the cross and what He is now doing for us in resurrection and not in any way upon the believer. The Lord will surely finish the salvation He has begun:

“... He Who began a good work in you will *carry it on to completion* until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6 N.I.V.).



*Prize or reward* is *not* certain. It is only for those believers who have been faithful to the truth committed to them and have endured even through suffering and loss for the truth's sake. (See pages 245, 246, 282, 283.)

(4) "Right division" will also distinguish between the *standing* and the *state* of the believer, the distinction being what the believer is made to be by God, in Christ, holy and clothed with His righteousness, and his state, what he is *in himself* in thought, word and deed. All the believers at Corinth were addressed as *saints* (holy ones, 1 Cor. 1:2), but many of them were anything but saintly in their walk and witness as the epistle shows. Our constant aim must be to balance our state with our standing and seek to do this in the strength of the Lord.

(5) We must learn to distinguish between the various *judgments* of Scripture. The assessment of a believer's service by the Lord (2 Cor. 5:9,10; 1 Cor. 3:10–15) must not be confused with the judgment of the living nations at the Second Advent of Christ (Matt. 25:31,32), and the judgment of the Great White Throne (Rev. 20:11).

(6) There is more than one resurrection in the Word of God and these must not be confused. Scripture knows nothing of a "general resurrection". It is "every man in his own order" (1 Cor. 15:23). The *first* or *former* resurrection *before* the Millennium (Rev. 20:5) cannot be the same as the Great White Throne judgment with its resurrection *after* the Millennium (Rev. 20:11–15). The word "first" clearly indicates there must be more than one.

(7) *The future spheres of blessing* indicated in Scripture for the redeemed should be noted carefully. If "the meek shall inherit *the earth*" (Matt. 5:5) is the same as being "seated together *in the heavenly places, far above all*" (Eph. 2:6), where Christ is now enthroned, then words have lost their meaning and Bible study is a waste of time. Yet, in spite of this, many Christians believe that *all* the saved will go to *heaven*, while others insist that all the saved will be blessed on *earth*. Both cannot be right. God's Word reveals that there are three goals for companies of the redeemed: earth (Matt. 5:5), the "heavenly Jerusalem" which finally descends to the new earth (Rev. 3:12; 21:2,10) and heavenly places "far above all" (Eph. 2:6; Phil. 3:20; Col. 3:1–4).

If these are confused or not apprehended, how can a clear hope for future glory be entertained?

The above are some examples of the great interpretative principle of 2 Timothy 2:15 in practice. They have only been lightly touched upon since a large volume would be needed to do the theme justice. This principle governing interpretation ramifies throughout the Bible, going much further than distinguishing dispensations, which are often confused with ages or periods of time. A dispensation is the administration of some important aspect of the truth of God. It is in the realm of time of course, but is much more than a time period.

Some translators, as we have seen, insist that *orthotomeo* must be rendered with its secondary meaning of “handle correctly”, rather than “rightly divide”. Even if this is allowed, provided it is faithfully followed in our exposition of the sacred Scriptures, the results will be the same. How can the Word of God be “correctly handled” if the foregoing lines of teaching are confused or ignored? Some truths in the Bible are true for always. They are basic or foundational, not dispensational, e.g. sin, and its remedy, God’s salvation, sanctification and consecration. Others, as we have seen, are true only for a limited time, e.g. the Mosaic law of type and shadow, or they are separate lines of truth which must not be confused.

We believe that this is a sane and reverent way of handling the Word of God, and moreover it is a principle we all carry out to some degree in our daily lives. Who would mix up the contents of the bedroom, lounge and kitchen in their homes, or the various departments of their business? The same sanity is needed in the approach to and interpretation of the Word of God.

If the principle of 2 Timothy 2:15 is not obeyed, then confusion reigns and we see the result of this in the divided state of Christendom around us. All denominations appeal to the Bible yet they are all in disagreement on many points of doctrine. If this sacred Book can be interpreted in any way one pleases without any divine guiding principle then it becomes like a musical instrument that plays any tune the player wishes. Even Satan can and does quote Scripture but he never rightly divides! The most serious consequence is that *Truth is not obtained*

however much the Bible is quoted. Every text has a context, and each context is related to truth that is linked to the company of the redeemed to whom God has sent it.

Taken out of the setting in which God has placed it, the Bible becomes untruth and we believe this is why such solemn consequences follow the refusal to obey 2 Timothy 2:15. Nothing can be more serious than turning the Word of truth into error and if we do so we must not be surprised if we do not receive God's approval in that future day of glory.

Too often this is treated lightly by Christians, but we say with definiteness that no believer can consistently disobey the divine command of 2 Timothy 2:15 and be "approved of God". The divine "crown" will not be his, this heavenly prize will be forfeited.

On the other hand if "right division" or "correct handling" is faithfully carried out and its result is manifest in our lives, we can confidently look forward to God's richest blessing here and now and His exaltation of us to His throne in the next life.

One more important fact needs to be brought before the reader namely that, when 2 Timothy 2:15 is consistently applied, *every statement of the Scriptures can be taken without alteration*. It allows God to mean what He says and have a meaning for everything He says. There are no contradictions, and everything falls into its proper place in the outworking of the great purpose of the ages centred in Christ Jesus, and is finally seen to be carried out to a glorious conclusion by Him Who works all things after the counsel of His own will.

The Apostle Paul now goes on to bring before Timothy two professing Christians who failed to "rightly divide the Word of truth", namely Hymenaeus and Philetus:

"But shun profane babblings: for they will proceed further in ungodliness, and their word will eat as doth a gangrene: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; men who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some" (2 Tim. 2:16-18 R.V.).

Hymenaeus is referred to in 1 Timothy 1:20 where the Apostle delivers him to Satan so that he might learn not to blaspheme. Evidently he had already gone off the track of truth. Of Philetus,

we know nothing, but both were obviously well known to Timothy.

Paul takes a very serious view of their false teaching, likening it to a spreading gangrene which was dangerously affecting other believers. In what way could they have taught that resurrection (there is no definite article) was past already? They could not have been referring to the Lord's resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20) for this was already a blessed historical fact and certainly past at the time Paul wrote. It could therefore only refer to *the resurrection of the believer*. They either denied the need of the believer for a bodily resurrection by spiritualizing and interpreting it as a purely spiritual experience, or they taught that believers who had died had already received a bodily resurrection. Either denies the truth of a *literal bodily resurrection in the future at the manifestation of the Lord*.

The Apostle had already clearly emphasized this:

“We wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory” (Phil. 3:20,21 R.V.).

There is teaching today that comes perilously near to the two false ideas mentioned above. We need to watch carefully lest we fall into the same error as Hymenaeus and Philetus. Let us note that they did not deny the *fact* of resurrection as some had done at Corinth (1 Cor. 15:12), they merely misplaced it *as regards time*, putting a future truth into the past. Here is a definite example of *wrongly dividing the Word of truth* and it stands out all the more vividly in a context that stresses the supreme importance of *right division*.

Not nearly enough attention has been paid by expositors to the *time element* in Scripture. As we have pointed out before, all truth has its time setting and is made known by an all-wise God not a moment too soon or too late. Let us note 1 Timothy 2:5-7 and Titus 1:1-3 “. . . Christ Jesus, Who gave Himself a ransom for all; the testimony to be borne in *its own times*” (R.V.); “. . . the knowledge (or acknowledging) of the truth which is according to godliness . . . but in *its own seasons* (marg.) manifested His Word in the message, wherewith I (Paul) was intrusted”. There is a right and fitting season or time for the revelation of God's truth which must be recognized.



The Apostle now turns away from error to the firm foundation of God that stands sure and unchanging and likens it to a seal or coin whose two sides represent (1) the infallible Lord and His knowledge, "the Lord knoweth them that are His"; the tares and the wheat are all known to Him, and (2) "Let everyone that nameth the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness" (verse 19). The first is internal and unseen by men and may be likened to a *root*. The second is external and can be seen by all and may be compared with *fruit*. "By their fruits ye shall know them". We should be thankful that the final sorting out between the true and the false will be accomplished by the Lord Who will make no mistakes.

An allusion is made to Numbers 16:5 and 26 in which the Israelites are reminded of this fact. God unerringly knows His own children and while we have both Divine sovereignty and human responsibility here, it is the fact of *responsibility* that the Apostle wished to bring home to Timothy. Consequently he now brings forward the illustration of a great house and its furniture:

"But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour (or no honour). If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work" (2 Tim. 2:20,21).

The vessels unto honour may be likened to the ornaments of beauty in the drawing-room or lounge, the baser vessels, those of a lack of honour or beauty, in the kitchen. The stress here is not the use of these articles, but on their quality or worth. Paul is urging Timothy to aspire to be a vessel of real worth to the Lord, one who can bring glory to His Name.

Hymenaeus and Philetus and those who followed them could be compared with vessels of dishonour, and there was only one course open to Timothy, namely to purge himself and separate himself from such. Only then could he be true to the name Timothy, which means "one who honours God" or is "honoured by God". The tenses of the verb here should be rendered, "having been sanctified" and "having been prepared", that is by God, "unto every good work". The root meaning of sanctification is *separation*, and here we have *separation for*

*service* (the Master's use). By separating himself from all who taught false doctrine, Timothy would be taking to a practical conclusion the sanctification which was his in Christ. Only by so doing could he be loyal to the Lord and the truth committed to him and thus be a vessel of beauty and honour, a vessel that the Lord could use to His glory. Doubtless by so doing he would render himself open to the charge of being narrow and unchristian, but there must be no compromise, whatever the cost.

All who wish to become honoured servants of the Lord must follow the same pathway. Such must choose whether they wish to please men or please the Lord, remembering the words of the Apostle Paul in another context, "for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10). Paul continues:

"Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, love (charity), peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2:22).

We have seen that the word translated "lust" is sometimes used with a good meaning in the Scriptures (see Luke 22:15; Phil. 1:23; 1 Tim. 3:1). It denotes any strong feeling or wish, either bad or good. Inasmuch as strong inclinations can be fraught with danger, specially during the impetuosity of youth, Timothy is exhorted to avoid such and exhibit the fruit of the Spirit that alone could make him outstanding as a leader for the Lord.

Again he is warned to avoid those who quibble and cause quarrels, thus breaking the unity of the Spirit:

"The Lord's servant must not strive (fight), but be gentle towards all, apt to teach, forbearing, in meekness correcting them that oppose themselves" (verses 24,25 R.V.).

How difficult it is to be gentle and meek, yet inflexible where God's truth is concerned! How often opposition stirs the very worst in us and we hit back in the strength of the sinful old nature and spoil our witness! Only by consciously and continually drawing upon the Lord's inexhaustible grace can we yield "no, not for an hour" (Gal. 2:5), yet avoid fighting and anger which so often have disfigured controversies in doctrine. Those who oppose may be temporarily in the devil's snare, and

they need that change of mind to the acknowledging of the truth, so that they may recover themselves out of it (verse 26). The Lord's servant should remember he follows One Who did not strive or cry, but rather enlightened and instructed (Matt. 12:19).

Graphic words are used in the closing verses of the chapter. The word *ananepho*, "recover themselves", literally means "that they may return to soberness" (R.V. margin) as though they have been duped, intoxicated and paralysed by the devil. Let us never forget that all around us the great battle for the domination of man's mind goes on unceasingly, for whoever controls this controls the whole personality. The unsaved are walking according to the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2) and only God's saving power can break this terrible bondage and bring liberty. The believer who has already been freed can become enslaved again if he gives place to the devil and it is these things that Paul has in mind when he warns Timothy of this possibility.

We must be careful here with the pronouns *him* and *his*. To whom do they refer? The Authorized Version suggests in both cases ("taken captive by *him* at *his* will") the devil is the antecedent. The Revised Version margin reads "by the devil unto the will of God" which we feel is what Paul is teaching. It is difficult to believe that Satan can capture any believer who is walking worthy, *just whenever he chooses*. This would take away all assurance and make Christian service and witness one of uncertainty and fear. The devil can only touch the child of God with His permission (as in the case of Job), or the believer can walk in the flesh and expose himself to Satan's activities (as Hymenaeus and Philetus). Even here it is under the Lord's control, and the enemy's domination can be snapped by a change of mind (repentance) which the Lord can give to those who realize and acknowledge their sinfulness and foolishness.

## CHAPTER THREE OF THE SECOND EPISTLE TO TIMOTHY

Chapter three opens with a preview of the last days of this present age and it does not make pleasant reading:

“... men will love nothing but money and self; they will be arrogant, boastful and abusive, ... they will be implacable in their hatreds, scandalmongers, intemperate and fierce, strangers to all goodness, traitors, adventurers, swollen with self-importance. They will be men who put pleasure in the place of God, men who preserve the outward form of religion but are a standing denial of its reality” (2 Tim. 3:1-5 N.E.B.).

While Timothy lived to see the beginning of this terrible state of affairs, the Apostle concentrates on the end of this Gentile age with all its godlessness and corruption.

Wherever this is dealt with in the Scriptures, whether in prophecy, symbol or doctrine; whether in the Gospels (and specially note the Lord's discourse concerning the end of the age in Matthew twenty-four) or in the epistles, the picture is as black as it can be. In fact Christ depicts a time of world trouble whose climax has never been equalled in the past or ever will be in the future (Matt. 24:20,21). It is a time when humanity can annihilate itself and would do so unless God steps in (verse 22). This He will do and cut short these terrible days by the personal coming to the earth of the Lord Jesus Christ in power and great glory (verses 29 and 30). Only by God's personal intervention in this way can world deliverance be accomplished and Satan's domination and kingdom be destroyed. There is certainly no room in the Scriptures for the deceptive idea that the world will get better and better and man will eventually bring in the millennium of peace and plenty! And it is now a fact that the annihilation of the human race is a possibility which is an ominous sign of the times.

The last days of the age in which we live, described by Paul in the opening verses of 2 Timothy three, are terrible indeed. They have always existed in some measure of course, but here they are world-wide and describe a time of darkest paganism and utter apostasy in the world of religion where men will turn



away their ears from the truth of God to myths (4:4). They are indeed “perilous times” (3:1). *Chalepos*, “perilous”, could be rendered “menacing”. The only other place of its occurrence in the New Testament is Matthew 8:28 describing the condition of demon-possessed men.

Romans 1:28–32 gives a similar description of the pagan world in the Apostle’s day. In the terrible list of vices in 2 Timothy three we note the recurrence of the word “love”; (1) lovers of their own selves; (2) “covetous”, literally, “lovers of money”; (3) “not loving (despisers of) those that are good”; (4) “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” or perhaps “lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God”. Here is the stark tragedy of misplaced love. When we love we touch the very centre of our being whether for good or evil. Where truth is concerned, all may be summed up in the word “love” which is perfectly expressed in the law of God (Rom. 13:10). It fulfils all Christian service (Gal. 5:13; 1 Thess. 1:3) and without it Christian labour is rendered null and void (1 Cor. 13:1–3). The believer is “rooted and grounded in love” (Eph. 3:17) and his main aim should be to get to know more of the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge (Eph. 3:19).

The tragic fact is that sin has twisted man’s capability of loving in the proper sense, with the result that we see in the passage that is now before us. Instead of loving God with all his heart, man loves himself, his pleasures, his money and anything that ministers to his own desires and thus his love is frittered away on empty transitory things that can never satisfy. It is indeed sad to read in 2 Timothy 4:10 “Demas hath forsaken me, *having loved* this present world”. The warning is given regarding this in 1 John 2:15–17 “love not the world, neither the things that are in the world . . . the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever”.

It seems impossible that after nearly two thousand years of Christianity, man could lapse into such a condition as Paul describes, but the Word of God never exaggerates. This is a true picture of the end time and believers must face up to it. These last days will have no place for Christ crucified, risen and ascended and the glorious Gospel centred in Him. All this will be unknown or denied, following the turning away from the truth of the Word of God to fables, myths and lies of the devil,

which will dominate the thinking and actions of mankind who will have rejected God and His claims.

As we look around today who can doubt that these times are already upon us? The rapid downward slide morally and nationally that we see everywhere today is evidence of this. Some Christians are hoping and believing that all this can be halted and ended by revival. But there is no place for any such revival in 2 Timothy three. Those who expect revival should remember that the work of the Holy Spirit is bound up with *the Word He has written*. There can be no possibility of revival, in individuals or on a large scale, until the Word of God is given its rightful place in heart and life. Only then has the Holy Spirit something to work on in order to exalt the living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is His supreme work to testify to the Lord Jesus and to glorify Him (John 15:26; 16:14).

But these last days are times of turning away from God's Word and rejecting its light and truth. Those of us who are truly believers in Christ can best serve Him by holding fast and faithfully holding forth the word of life (Phil. 2:15,16), and not yielding an inch from the great deposit of truth the Lord has placed in our hands. Results we must leave to Him, they are not our province, but *faithful testimony* by lip and life is what God requires from all His children however dark the days may be.

The reference to Jannes and Jambres, the magicians who withstood Moses, again throws light on the Satanic character of the opposition to the Truth. These were able, up to a point, to copy the miracles that Moses wrought and they did it by Satanic power. Satan is always the ape of God, and the Scriptures warn us of lying wonders, signs and miracles that he produces at the end of this age in order to deceive the whole world (2 Thess. 2:8-10; Rev. 13:11-15).

Those who withstand the truth of God at this time do so by the same means; they are corrupt and reprobate concerning the faith (verse 8). The word "reprobate" is the negative of the word translated "approved" in 2:15. This is the opposite of the unashamed workman. These reprobate ones worm their way into houses, seeking women of the weaker sort. "Silly women" of the Authorized Version is literally "little women", a

contemptuous term indicating feebleness of character. Such are “laden with sins”; their consciences are overwhelmed and they clutch at any solution before them. They are “swayed by various impulses” (verse 6 R.S.V.) and while they listen to other people, their minds have become so warped that they become incapable of attaining to “a knowledge of the truth”. Thus they become an easy prey to the false teachers and Satan behind them.

The Apostle now turns back in his thought to Timothy and reminds him:

“But *thou* (emphatic) didst follow my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, patience, persecutions, sufferings; what things befell me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: and out of them all the Lord delivered me” (3:10,11 R.V.).

Timothy had been closely linked with the Apostle from the earliest days of his ministry and up to this point had followed Paul in his doctrine and manner of life. How good to be able to link together teaching and conduct! It could always be said with truth that the Apostle practised what he preached. He not only called attention to his teaching, but could uphold it all by the manner of his life, thus giving power to his witness. He could say without egotism “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). His life was dominated by one great purpose, namely to make known fully and completely the truth (“the good deposit”) entrusted to him by the risen Saviour.

Timothy knew well Paul’s faith, his persuasion, his long-suffering and patience which enabled him to endure extremes of testing when others would have given up; his love which ever manifested itself in pouring himself out for others, a practical example of the wonderful exposition of divine love he gave in 1 Corinthians thirteen.

Paul’s mind travels back to the beginning of his ministry at Antioch and the first great missionary journey he undertook when justification by faith was first preached (Acts 13:38,39); then to Iconium and the assault made on him there (Acts 14:1–5) and lastly Lystra, where he was stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:6–20).

However, we cannot but feel that in the mind of the Apostle the terrible experience at Lystra was softened by the fact that this was the place that gave him his beloved son in the faith. Timothy was a native of Lystra (Acts 16:1,2). Lest these great tests should overwhelm Timothy, Paul adds, “but out of them all the Lord delivered me”, clearly showing that he dealt with an almighty God Who was able to rescue in all circumstances, however intense the trial. He continues, “Yea, and all that would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (verse 12). Weymouth renders this verse “everyone who is determined to live a godly life”, for we have more than the plain future tense here. Never did the Apostle paint the Christian pathway in rosy hues. In Acts 14:22 he warned the disciples that “we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God”. Christ Himself had said “Remember the word that I said unto you, the servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you . . .” (John 15:20), and faithfulness to Him will surely entail misunderstanding, persecution and perhaps loneliness, for we follow One Who is still “despised and rejected of men”.

Timothy is now warned of a rapid increase in evil (verse 13) and truth having been cast away, deception is bound to take its place. World-wide deception is the hallmark of the end of this age (Matt. 24:4,5,24; 2 Thess. 2:9,10; Rev. 13:11–15), and its only antidote is the Word of truth, which protects completely from Satan’s lie. Timothy must learn to stand firm whatever the cost, and realize the tremendous importance of the holy Scriptures as the foundation and equipment of the man of God for all demands that are made on him:

“But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (3:14–17 A.V.).

Timothy’s effectiveness as a teacher was bound up with faithfulness to the Word of God, which had been brought before him from the earliest days of infancy by a wise Christian



mother and grandmother (1:5) and then, on attaining manhood, he had come to know the distinctive truths committed by the Lord to Paul and embodied in his epistles, which were already getting recognition as part of the holy Scriptures as the Apostle Peter makes clear (2 Pet. 3:15,16).

This section of 2 Timothy is of utmost importance, for it deals with the divine origin of the Word of God which is the basis of the Christian faith. No wonder it has been the subject of persistent attacks by the evil one and his followers. If the Bible can be entirely discredited then Christianity crumbles, for we have no historic basis for our faith, for "faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17), and we can know little or nothing about the Lord Jesus Christ Who is the centre and circumference of it all if the Bible has no authority.

Satan always seeks to undermine what God has said and to sow doubt in the minds of those who read it. This commenced in Eden with the insidious question, "hath God said?", and has continued all down the centuries. Doubt in the Bible leads to doubt regarding Christ. Doubt is really unbelief and unbelief is the one sin that cuts a person off from God (Heb. 11:6; 1 John 5:10-12). It is therefore in Satan's interest to keep man in a perpetual state of unbelief. In contrast, the holy Scriptures, the written Word of God, reveals the living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who can meet every problem and need of man. He has given Himself and therefore given His all for him and because of this is utterly worthy of man's faith and confidence.

As Timothy had known the holy Scriptures from his earliest days and evidently believed them, there was no need for the sudden "right about turn" that was necessary for Christ-opposing Saul of Tarsus. In the Old Testament Scriptures Christ is portrayed by type and shadow, all being prophetic of the One Who was to be the Saviour of mankind. Old Testament believers therefore looked forward to Him by faith as we today look back with that same faith. The Apostle Paul, in order to combat the evil effect of the false teachers and degenerates, now refers Timothy to the written Word of God as the antidote.

He assures him that all of it is inspired by God and fully sufficient to equip the man of God for all his needs. This most

important passage needs careful attention, for it is dealing with one of the fundamentals of the Christian faith. First of all, we must be careful with the word “inspired” and not import into it modern ideas. Men can look at a work of art or listen to a symphony written by one of the great composers and call these “inspired”, that is to say, they are of superb quality. But Paul does not use the word “inspiration” in this way. The word *theopneustos*, is very rare, being found only three times in secular literature up to this period. It means “God-breathed”, literally, and puts the Scriptures in a class by themselves as does the adjective “holy” in the previous verse. The “holy letters”, *hiera grammata*, and the God-breathed “scripture” (*graphe*) are one and the same, and of all the millions of books written by men, not one can truthfully be said to have the imprimatur of Deity on it and so be described as “holy”, which is God’s prerogative alone.

Much controversy has raged concerning the proper translation of the opening words of verse sixteen. The Revised Version reads “Every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable” etc. and puts in the margin as an alternative, “Every Scripture is inspired of God, and profitable”. The modernist, and all who reject the plenary inspiration of Scripture, find that by pulling verse sixteen of the Revised Version out of its context, they have a basis for teaching that only the *inspired parts* of the Bible are profitable, assuming this context allows that some parts are *not* inspired. But to be fair to the Revisers, we have seen that the “sacred writings” of the previous verse describe the *whole* of the written Word, so that their translation of the next verse asserts that *every one* of these sacred writings is inspired. It would be impossible to teach in one verse that the sacred writings as a whole are “holy”, but at the same time (in the following verse), only *some of them* are inspired.

While the translations of the Authorized Version and Revised Version are grammatically possible, we believe the Authorized Version more clearly renders what Paul is writing to Timothy, and one is glad to see that this translation is adhered to in modern versions such as the Revised Standard Version, the Berkeley Version, the New International Version and others.

Some translators treat *theopneustos*, as an adjective (Paul

omits the verb “to be”) rendering the phrase “Every God-breathed Scripture is profitable etc.”, but this makes the rest of the sentence tautological for it stands to reason that every God-breathed Scripture *must* as a consequence be useful in the fullest sense. Moreover the natural place of the adjective would be *before* the noun, not after it as here.

While the Greek *pas* can mean both “all” and “every”, constructions similar to 2 Timothy 3:16 demand the rendering “all”, otherwise we should have the following translations of Romans 7:12, 1 Corinthians 11:30, Hebrews 4:13 and 1 Timothy 4:4, “the commandment (being) holy *is also* just” (Rom. 7:12); “many (being) weak *are also* sickly” (1 Cor. 11:30); “All things (being) naked *are also* opened before the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13); “Every good creature of God *is also* not one of them to be rejected” (1 Tim. 4:4).

Such renderings are impossible and taking everything into consideration, the Authorized Version translation of 2 Timothy 3:16 “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God” is fully justified. E. K. Simpson rightly comments here:

“This enthronement of the Holy Scriptures (primarily, but not exclusively, the Old Testament) in the seat of authority is so insistent and prolific of consequences that we cannot wonder that the modern spirit of licence rises in revolt against it or labours to dilute its significance. First of all we have the declaration that the sacred *graphe*, the invariable meaning of the word, whether singular or plural, in the New Testament, re-echoing the *hiera grammata* of the previous verse, *God-breathed* in quality, has the seal of divine truth stamped upon it throughout. The imprimatur of Deity countersigns these scripts, instrumentally the work of human minds . . . yet prompted by an unseen Power. That fact sets them apart from all other writings” (*The Pastoral Epistles*, p. 151).

The word “Scripture” means “that which is written” and if all that was *written* was *God-breathed*, there was no room left for fallible human opinion in the original manuscripts. Other evidences for the full inspiration of the Bible are given in the author’s *God’s Word Written*, obtainable from *The Berean Publishing Trust*. The reader will note that we do not propound any *theory* of inspiration, for the simple reason that it is impossible. We reject any mechanical theory which amounts to

automatic dictation. The Word of God is a blending of the divine and the human, like the living Word, Christ Himself Who combines Deity with humanity. *The God-breathed Scriptures are a miracle*, and miracles by their very nature, are not explainable. Those who believe that the Lord Jesus miraculously fed the 5,000 and raised Lazarus from the dead should have no difficulty in accepting the plenary inspiration of the Word of God as asserted in 2 Timothy 3:16. Either God is almighty and is able to do this or He is not. The modernists, and alas many of them are Christian leaders and teachers, deny the infallibility of the sacred Scriptures, and therefore they have no sure ground for their faith, for if the Bible is only inspired in parts, who is to decide without any doubt which are these parts and which are not? They are forcibly thrown back on fallible human opinion where there is no agreement. The Apostle Paul taught that the Word of God is the “sword of the Spirit” (Eph. 6:17), the one offensive weapon permitted to the believer, sufficient to overcome all the attacks of Satan, and we have the divine example of the Saviour’s use of it three times in the wilderness so effectively that the devil retired defeated (Matt. 4:1–11).

The modernist has a broken sword in his partly inspired Bible, one that is utterly useless to foil the great deceiver of mankind. The most impressive fact to all who sincerely trust in the Saviour and who seek to follow Him faithfully is *His attitude to the Scriptures*. This was always one of complete reverence and acceptance. Not once did He suggest that any part of the Old Testament was untrue. On the contrary He declared “Thy Word is Truth” (John 17:17) and stated that it cannot be broken, and every jot and tittle must be fulfilled (John 10:35; Matt. 5:17,18). He pointed to the truth of the Pentateuch as a necessary prelude to belief in Himself (John 5:46,47), and accused His enemies of being in error because of their ignorance of the Scriptures (Mark 12:24).

Surely no one has the right to name the name of Christ and call himself a *Christian*, who does not accept *all* that the Saviour taught. E. K. Simpson was quite right when he stated that the modern spirit of licence rises in revolt against a fully inspired Bible, for once this is accepted, then one’s own thoughts and ideas *must be subjected to its divine teaching*, and this obedience



is something that the pride of man will not allow. He must be able to bring in his own opinions and have the last word in his beliefs, or it would be better to describe them as *his unbeliefs*.

We would point out, in order to avoid misunderstanding, that the word “God-breathed” as Paul used the term, referred to *something already in existence*, namely the Old Testament Scriptures and the New Testament as far as it had been written. This was God’s Word written as far as he was concerned and this was what he was commending to Timothy. It should be the same to us also who profess to follow him even as he followed Christ. It cannot refer to *future translations*, some of which were not made for over 1,000 years later, nor does it mean that all that is contained in the Bible is inspired. We have the words of Satan in the prologue to the book of Job. Often we read of the sayings and doings of those who were the enemies of God. Neither of these could be “inspired”, but the *account* of them is, and therefore is true.

Regarding translations, we should be thankful for faithful scholars, men of God like E. W. Bullinger, Charles H. Welch, F. F. Bruce and others who have laboured to give us accurate translations in our own language. The scholars who gave us our Authorized Version recognized the *originals* to be the Word of God, and as Hebrew and Greek scholars, made their translation from the Greek and Hebrew manuscripts, having regard also to the versions already made, especially Tyndale’s, which greatly influenced them. Professor J. Isaacs states “nine tenths of the Authorized New Testament is still Tyndale, and the best is still his”.\*

There is no need therefore for anyone who has no access to the original languages to be in any doubt as to what God has written. Some are perturbed because God did not see fit to preserve the original documents. But it was His *wisdom* that over-ruled this. Just imagine what the Roman Church would have made of them as idols for worship together with the many so-called relics and other superstitions that this church holds! We are reminded of the reformatory acts of King Hezekiah which included the destruction of the brazen serpent Moses

\* *The Bible in its Ancient and English Versions* ed. H. W. Robinson, p. 160 and see *The English Bible* by F. F. Bruce.

had made. This, in Hezekiah's day, had become an object of worship (2 Kings 18:4) thus producing idolators among the people of God.

If the Lord has not seen fit to preserve the original manuscripts, He certainly watched over the texts from which our translations are made. And here we should be thankful for the archaeological discoveries which, under the Lord's guiding hand, have so wonderfully confirmed the truth of God's Word. Sir Frederick Kenyon, generally recognized as being the greatest textual authority of this century states:

"We must be content to know that the general authenticity of the New Testament text has been remarkably supported by the modern discoveries, which have so greatly reduced the interval between the original autographs and our earliest extant manuscripts, and that the difference of readings, interesting as they are, do not affect the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith".\*

What is the alternative to plenary inspiration of the Bible? Either fallible human opinion or an equally fallible church. The Roman Catholic rests upon a church that claims to be infallible and therefore the infallible interpreter of the holy Scriptures. This claim every true Protestant rejects; for Rome has never been able to substantiate such a claim and is getting more unsure of herself in this respect.

Some profess to honour the living Word, Christ Himself, but reject the full inspiration of the written Word which alone reveals Him. This is illogical, for if the Word of God is not true in every particular, how much certain knowledge could we have of Christ today? All one could be sure of is what history records, namely that a man called Jesus Christ walked this earth nearly 2,000 years ago and somehow stamped his name on our calendar. Who he really was, or what He did or said, are questions of which we could know practically nothing with certainty without the New Testament record, for He Himself left nothing in writing.

\* *Our Bible and the Ancient Monuments*, p. 179. This book, together with *The Books and the Parchments* by F. F. Bruce are "musts" for anyone who desires an accurate and up to date knowledge of the Hebrew and Greek texts and their preservation. Another helpful volume is *A General Introduction to the Bible* by Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, published by The Moody Press.

There is no doubt that the Bible stands or falls as a whole on its claim to be the Word of God and we are shut up to it for all that can be known of our Saviour, His redeeming love and God's great purpose revealed in and through Him. If 2 Timothy 3:16 is not true, we can never say with certainty, "Thus saith the Lord" as the prophets of old did, but are thrown back on fallible human opinion and are forced to replace assurance and peace with doubt and uncertainty. Moreover both Paul and Peter must have been deceived men; for Peter, together with Paul, insists on the divine origin of the Scriptures (2 Pet. 1:21 R.V.). This view is regarded as old fashioned and unintelligent today, but it matters not, for what was good enough for Christ should be good enough for us. We can unhesitatingly pin our faith to the "Word of God that liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Pet. 1:23).

Having stated that all God's Word written is by its very nature "holy" and "God-breathed" and therefore unique, the Apostle Paul now stresses to Timothy its great purpose, to equip the believer fully for all the will of the Lord in life and testimony. It is:

"profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction (discipline, margin) which is in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16,17 R.V.).

Teaching (doctrine) occupies a very important place in the Pastoral Epistles where it occurs 15 times, 8 occurrences in 1 Timothy, 3 in 2 Timothy and 4 in the epistle to Titus. The ability to teach and pass on the Truth to others has been already emphasized in 2 Timothy 2:2. In chapter three we have the one great subject matter for the teacher, namely the inspired Word of God. One of Paul's last injunctions to Timothy is to "proclaim (preach) the Word" (4:2), and this is not only a piece of advice to preachers or ministers of religion, but a command to all who would loyally witness to the Saviour.

The great lack today, especially in our pulpits, is the ability to expound the Scriptures. Too often the Bible is used merely as a peg on which to hang the opinions of the speaker. What we greatly need today is not just fluent preaching or attractive oratory, but a clear and faithful setting forth of the message of God's Word. This gives the Holy Spirit the good ground of

truth to work on, for God has promised: “My Word . . . shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereunto I sent it” (Isa. 55:11). Timothy, to be a profitable leader for Christ, must constantly rightly divide, correctly handle and set forth the Word of God. This is the only teaching that God will recognize and bless, and it is the profound ignorance of the holy Scriptures all around us that is the cause of the landslide in spiritual and moral standards, bringing so many personal problems, besides giving the opportunity for many false cults to flourish.

The inspired Word is also profitable for *reproof*. The word means “refutation of error” and the conviction that comes from it. *Correction* is next mentioned by the Apostle. This means to “straighten out” or to set right what is wrong; and both ideas are included in the next item, “instruction in righteousness”. The Authorized Version has rendered this word “chastening” or “chastisement” in Hebrews 12:5,7,8,11. “Discipline” would be a good rendering. We all need the constant discipline and guidance of the Scriptures, otherwise we shall surely stray from the pathway of truth.

Paul links the Word of God with the infant (verse 15) and right through to spiritual adulthood, to being a “man of God”. This outstanding title was first borne by Moses, and then by Elijah, Elisha, David, Shemaiah and Igdaliah. Timothy, who was well acquainted with the Old Testament, could not fail to appreciate the importance of this title when it had been borne by so many illustrious characters.

The Apostle continues: “that the man of God may be perfect (complete R.V.). The Greek word is used of the complete equipment of a soldier for service, or of a ship for a voyage. All that is necessary for the voyage of life is found within the covers of the Book. There is no need to look anywhere else. Such divine equipment would cause Timothy to be “furnished completely unto every good work” (verse 17 R.V.) and thus he could be the loyal and fruitful servant that God desired, and this is true of all of us today who seek to walk worthy of the “high calling of God in Christ Jesus”.



## CHAPTER FOUR OF THE SECOND EPISTLE TO TIMOTHY

Chapter four opens solemnly with a charge to Timothy. We are now reading the Apostle Paul's last words of his written ministry to his son in the faith and they are rich with meaning and importance. When writing his first letter to Timothy the Apostle had used the word "charge" twice (1 Tim. 5:21; 6:11–14) in connection with church affairs. Here was his last charge:

"I charge thee in the sight of God, and of Christ Jesus, Who shall judge the quick (living) and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom; preach the Word . . ." (2 Tim. 4:1,2 R.V.).

Timothy's gaze is now directed away from himself once more to the Lord Jesus and the fact of His future assessment of his Christian service. Some would like to eliminate this from the Body of Christ, just as others would remove the word "kingdom" from this church and limit it to the people of Israel. We have dealt with this before, but would again point out that this is indeed dangerous and must be avoided by all those who desire to be commended by the Lord as faithful witnesses to His truth. Later on in the chapter, Paul describes Christ as "the righteous Judge", Who will award him the "crown of righteousness" (verse 8). All wise Christian servants will constantly keep an eye on this future assessment of service by the Lord and this will deliver them from bondage to men or man's approval. *Only His verdict* will matter in that day.

Let us not miss truth because of archaic words in our Authorized Version. "Quick" means *living*, so from this verse we can deduce there will be some members of the Body who will be alive at the Lord's manifestation. All of us should therefore "live . . . looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:12,13 R.V.), and keep this as a daily inspiration for service. This can sweeten all the trials and troubles that may beset us and enable us to hold on our way without swerving from the track of truth.

Paul does not go into details with Timothy as to *how* this

great hope will be accomplished, but he had already taught that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, so the glorious transformation of Philippians 3:20 is a necessity, and we can rest assured that it will be true of all, whether alive or asleep in Christ, at the manifesting of the Lord's glory in the heavenlies. The Apostle has already referred to the kingdom of the Son of His love in Colossians 1:13 into which the Body of Christ has been graciously placed by the Father, and at the end of 2 Timothy four he looks forward by faith to this "heavenly kingdom" (verse 18) associated with the ascended and seated Christ at the right hand of God. This must not be confused with the *earthly* phase of God's kingdom with which redeemed and restored Israel is so intimately associated. Philippians 3:20 makes clear that our homeland is not an earthly one but *exists in heaven*, and Colossians urges us to keep our minds fixed there as our certain hope and not on things on the earth (Col. 3:1).

As the darkness described in 2 Timothy descends upon us, may our testimony to the good deposit of God's truth entrusted to us shine all the brighter as "lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15). We can constantly be light-bearers for Him Who alone is the true Light of the world (John 8:12).

Paul now gives five exhortations in his last charge to Timothy. We give Moffatt's vivid translation:

"Preach (proclaim) the Word; keep at it in season and out of season, refuting, checking and exhorting men; never lose patience with them, and never give up your teaching; for the time will come when people decline to be taught sound doctrine, they will accumulate teachers to suit themselves and tickle their fancies, they will give up listening to the truth and turn to myths" (2 Tim. 4:2-4).

We have seen that we must not confine the word "preach" to the pulpit. It applies to all of God's children who should feel the responsibility that a knowledge of the truth brings. Each one of us is under an obligation to the Lord to proclaim the Word to others in wisdom as opportunity offers and this must be done at all seasons. If we fail to do this, we are not "redeeming the time" (Eph. 5:16). Our privilege is to pass on to others, not our opinions, but God's truth which He has placed in our keeping.

It is significant that the Greek *logos*, translated "word",

occurs seven times in this epistle, which marks its importance (1:13; 2:9,11,15,17; 4:2,15). Here is an expanse of spiritual knowledge which can never be fully plumbed this side of glory, but it is more than sufficient for both teacher and those taught till that day of glory dawns.

Timothy is told to reprove, exhort, and teach with all patience and not give up, specially as there will be a turning away from the truth and people will only want to hear the things that please them and tickle their fancy. What a temptation it is for the servant of God to give his hearers what they *want* rather than what they *need*, in other words to avoid the risk of displeasing them! There is many a minister today who is at the mercy of his congregation. He dare not proclaim all he knows of God's truth for fear of losing his job. Quite a lot of opposition to the witness given through Paul has this as its basis if only the critics would be honest and state the real reason.

The result is clearly given by the Apostle: "they . . . will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables" (verses 3,4 R.V.). In chapter 1:15 Paul declared that all in Asia had turned away from him. If people turn away from the human channel through which the risen Christ is speaking, there can be only one consequence, they will turn away from the truth. And that is precisely what we see all around us today. Modern Christendom has largely turned away from the revelation of Christ given through the Apostle of the Gentiles, and the result is confusion, declension and the reception of myth in the place of the "good deposit". If truth is rejected, something must take its place and that can only be error.

Much of today's opposition comes from what is described as "science", but it is anything but scientific, being merely speculation. Yet how many eagerly cling to this, rather than submit to the authority of the Word of God, which only indicates where their hearts and true inclinations lie!

The Apostle's thoughts turn back to Timothy:

"As for you, always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry" (verse 5 R.S.V.).

The Greek *su* is emphatic which the Revised Standard Version rightly indicates by translating it, "as for you". Timothy must

always be on the alert and be ready at all times to “rough it” for Christ’s sake. It is surprising to find that, with the frequent stress upon evangelizing or preaching the Gospel, the word evangelist only occurs three times in the New Testament (Acts 21:8; Eph. 4:11 and here). After the foundation ministry of apostles and prophets, before the New Testament was completed, there followed the evangelist, pastor and the teacher (Eph. 4:10,11). We are to expect no more apostles and prophets, for their work finished after laying the foundation. They are succeeded by a lower yet necessary order of ministry, namely the three referred to above.

To be an evangelist in those early days meant doing rough pioneering work that is often foreign to modern evangelization. One has only to compare the conditions in Paul’s day with ours. Thus Timothy is exhorted to *finish* the work that had been entrusted to him, no matter how difficult the conditions. This was the same message that the Apostle gave to Archippus in Colossians 4:17.

We have many discouragements and results seem very small, but let us never forget that we are in the safe keeping of One Who, having started us on the heavenly race, can bring us safely to the goal as we appropriate Him continually by faith.

The Apostle continues:

“Do the work of an evangelist, fulfil thy ministry. For I am already being offered, and the time of my departure is come” (2 Tim. 4:5,6 R.V.).

Paul had already used the words “depart” and “offered” once before in Philippians 1:23 and 2:17. The Revised Version margin of verse six points out that the word “offered” (*spendomai*) means “poured out as a drink offering”, a beautiful figure of sacrificial spending of himself in service for His Lord. We readily understand this figure when we see people giving their lives in devoted service for others. We say they are “pouring themselves out” for the benefit of other people. Thus it was with the Apostle Paul; his conception of service was to spend himself and all that he had without stint for his Saviour and Lord. This was the “mind of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5–8) Who freely gave Himself for sinners to the utmost, even to Calvary’s cross, and this attitude of mind remained with Paul right to the very end.



We might well ask ourselves, how much does our Christian service *cost* us? Are we willing to go “all out” for the One Who gave His all for us? Service that does not cost is worth very little!

Paul continues:

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give to me at that day: and not only to me, but also to all them that have loved His appearing” (verses 7,8 R.V.).

The three perfect tenses here convey a sense of finality. For the Apostle this is the end. In 1 Timothy 6:12 he had appealed to Timothy to “fight the good fight of faith” and now he states that his own fight is over. “I have finished my course (race)” he declares. When he addressed the Ephesian elders in Acts twenty, considering the afflictions that lay ahead, he said,

“But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, *so that I might finish my course with joy*, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 20:24).

This was his own aim all along, “one thing I do . . . I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13,14). He has now attained his goal and could write with truth: “I have finished (completed) the race (course)”. While he was running he had to say “not as though I had already attained” (Phil. 3:12). Now he had the assurance that at last he had breasted the tape and won the victor’s crown. We have seen that the “crown” speaks of the added reward and reigning of the overcomer and faithful servant. “If we patiently endure, we shall *also* reign with Him” (2 Tim. 2:12) and we have already pointed out the vital difference between salvation, membership of the Body of Christ by grace and living with Him, contrasted with the added prize, reward or crown. This will give the unspeakable privilege of not only living with Christ, but of sharing His throne and the administration of the universe in the glory to come, this being contingent on loyal and unselfish service for the Lord right to the end.

The Lord is the righteous Judge or Umpire, Who will justly award to each member of the Body his due. We can certainly leave all to His impartial assessment. The opinions of others

concerning our lives will not intrude there and we can safely disregard them here. One is our Master, even Christ, and all service must be rendered as to Him and not to men.

The Revised Version correctly translates the perfect tense, “*have loved* His appearing”, not “love His appearing” (A.V.). A sudden love for any phase of the Second Advent at the end of our lives will not win a crown: it must be the consistent love all along, influencing our life and witness. The New Testament speaks of various “crowns” (1) an incorruptible crown (1 Cor. 9:25); (2) a crown of life (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10); (3) a crown of rejoicing (1 Thess. 2:19); (4) a crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:4). All these give us various aspects of the added prize a believer in each calling of Scripture may obtain. With Paul it was a crown associated with *righteousness*; righteousness being at the very heart of his ministry, commencing with Galatians and Romans, “the *just* (righteous) shall live by faith”.

The concluding section of this epistle (verses 9–22) now follows, commencing with some personal requests. He urges Timothy once more to do his utmost to come to him as quickly as possible lest the difficulties of travelling should prevent him from doing so, and it was all the more urgent because of the defection of Demas. His forsaking the Apostle is attributed to his love of the present age instead of loving the Lord’s appearing. How we need to beware of the insidious pull of present things around us rather than the “things above where Christ sitteth” (Col. 3:1,2). In contrast to disloyal Demas, we find Luke, the beloved physician, faithful to Paul right to the end. The Lord was merciful in not only granting him the precious boon of a faithful friend, amidst so many who deserted him in his time of need, but one who could care for his health.

John Mark, in contrast to Demas, though once unfaithful, causing the dissension between Paul and Barnabas, is now “profitable (or useful) for the ministry” (i.e. Christian service of any kind). Timothy is to pick him up en route and bring him along. Of Crescens we know nothing, but tradition links him with the churches of Vienna and Mayence in Gaul. The despatch of Titus to Dalmatia seems to indicate that his work in Crete had finished. His new sphere was on the eastern shore of the Adriatic Sea which is now Yugoslavia.

Tychicus was one of Paul's reliable associates. He was the bearer of the epistles to both Colossians and Ephesians and it is possible that he was to relieve Timothy at Ephesus during the latter's absence while visiting Paul in Rome.

Timothy is now enjoined to bring the cloak which the Apostle had left with his host, Carpus, at Troas. This was an outer garment of heavy material that would help to ease the rigours of climate in a Roman dungeon. Paul did not attempt to pose as a martyr. There was no virtue in feeling cold needlessly, though we know from his list of sufferings for Christ, detailed in 2 Corinthians eleven, that many times he must have experienced this.

We know nothing of the books and the parchments. These were evidently documents that the Apostle valued and possibly some contained parts of Scripture. These personal requests bear strong marks of authenticity. A fabricator would be very unlikely to write in this way. Paul then warns Timothy against Alexander the coppersmith who had bitterly opposed him and his ministry. We cannot identify him for certain with the Alexander of Acts 19:33,34 or the one mentioned in 1 Timothy 1:20, as Alexander was a common name, but it is possible that he is the same person as was mentioned in 1 Timothy, otherwise Paul would have differentiated them clearly. In verse fourteen the verb "requite" is in the future tense, "the Lord *will* requite him for his deeds". There is no wish for revenge on Paul's part as suggested in the Authorized Version.

The Apostle now comes to the incidents pertaining to his trial before Nero:

"At my first defence no one took my part, but all forsook me: may it not be laid to their account. But the Lord stood by me, and strengthened me; that through me the message might be fully proclaimed, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion" (2 Tim. 4:16,17 R.V.).

It would appear that this is a reference to the preliminary investigation preceding the formal trial. So dangerous had it become to be publicly associated with such a prominent Christian leader as the Apostle Paul that no one was brave enough to come into the open as his friend and plead his cause.

All in Asia had turned from him (1:15) and Paul stood deserted and alone. Like his Saviour (for all forsook Him and fled) Who prayed for those who crucified Him, saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do", so this great man of God, left by all, as Christ was in His hour of need, could pray and say, "may it not be laid to their charge".

But Paul, severely tested though he was, could never cry, like the Lord Jesus, "My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Rather, he gladly recorded that the Lord stood by him and strengthened him to go through to the end victoriously, so that the sacred deposit of truth committed to him "might be fully known and that *all* the Gentiles might hear" (verse 17). This was evidently the last opportunity Paul had for public testimony to the truth entrusted to him primarily for the Gentiles, for he was the Apostle of the Gentiles, the channel through which the Lord made known the Gospel of His grace to all nations (Rom. 1:5) and through whom all who were to constitute the Body of Christ would be enlightened as to the Mystery (Eph. 3:1,9 R.V.).

There has been much speculation as to what the Apostle meant by being rescued from the lion's mouth (verse 17). Some have thought this is a reference to Nero, or possibly Satan, the roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8). It is most unlikely to refer to being thrown to the lions in the amphitheatre, for this was not allowable for a Roman citizen. It evidently was deliverance from some immediate and extreme danger, which enabled Paul to fully perform his Christ-directed ministry. All the opposition of Satan and the powers of darkness could not prevent this. It meant that the Apostle was immortal till his work was done, and then he could look forward with unspeakable joy to the glories of the Lord's "heavenly kingdom" (verse 18). Almost his last thought therefore was for the Lord's kingdom which embraces all the heavenly spheres as well as the earth, and we have learned, we trust, not to confuse these two linked yet distinct portions of His great redemptive purpose.

Before laying down his pen for the last time, Paul mentions believers who had been intimately associated with him and Timothy. Priscilla and Aquila, the devoted couple who had laid down their necks for him and to whom all the Gentile churches



were indebted (Rom. 16:3,4); the household of Onesiphorus, the refresher (1:16,17). Erastus remained at Corinth. There is one Erastus mentioned in Romans 16:23, described as the city treasurer, and another person of the same name in Acts 19:22. Whether either of these is to be identified with the Erastus of 2 Timothy four we cannot say for certain. Trophimus is left at Miletum ill and here again we are reminded, as also with Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25–27), of the change of dispensation and the absence of the gift of miraculous healing as an evidential miracle. It is unthinkable that Paul, if he still had the gift of healing, would not have used it on behalf of these faithful believers who were in such desperate need physically, and who meant so much to him. Acts twenty and twenty-one should be consulted for details of the association of Paul and Trophimus.

Once more Timothy is urged to make every effort to come to the Apostle before winter sets in (verse 21). Salutation is sent from Eubulus, Pudens, Linus and Claudia. We know little or nothing of these believers who were evidently well known to Timothy. According to Irenaeus, Linus was the first bishop or overseer of the church at Rome. Some have tried to identify Pudens and Claudia with two people of the same name mentioned in two poems of Martial, the wife being British. But it has been pointed out that Martial did not come to Rome until A.D. 66 and most of his epigrams belong to the next generation, so this identification is far from being established, interesting though it is.

The Apostle Paul's last words, in his own handwriting, were his characteristic ones referring to grace which guaranteed the authenticity of his epistles (2 Thess. 31:17,18), and they were his final message to his dearly-loved son in the faith:

“The Lord be with thy spirit. Grace be with you” (verse 22 R. V.).

The last pronoun is plural showing Paul also had in mind the remainder of the faithful ones of that time.

Did Timothy reach the Apostle before his execution? Did he stand faithfully after Paul's departure? We do not know for church history does not mention him, but we shall know when we all stand together in resurrection likeness to our Saviour and Head before His presence. Neither can we say

whether Paul went to his triumphal death alone or with the faithful few. Tradition tells us that he was led three miles out of the city of Rome and executed by the Roman sword, that three of the guard were converted on the way and that they too suffered martyrdom later on for the Lord Jesus.

How much Timothy would need the Lord's presence, strength and grace in the dark and dangerous times which lay ahead of him, only Paul himself knew. But he must have been assured that the One Who had caused him to triumph over all difficulties, discouragements, persecutions and bitter opposition, would be more than sufficient for this young man, so soon to take the tremendous responsibility for the truths that characterize this age of abounding grace.

What can we say concerning such an utterly faithful and devoted servant of the Lord? We can only seek by the same grace to follow loyally in his steps as he followed Christ (1 Cor. 11:1) and to thank the Lord with all our hearts for such a wonderful example to us Gentiles (Eph. 3:1,13; Col. 1:24). F. W. Farrar's words are appropriate here:

"No saint of God has ever attained the same heights in so many capacities, or received the gifts of the Spirit in so rich an out-pouring, or borne in his mortal body such evident brand marks of the Lord. In his lifetime he was no whit behind the very chiefest of the Apostles and he towers above the very greatest of the saints who have striven to follow the example of his devotion to his Lord".

And so our study of these prison letters of Paul draws to a close. A careful and prayerful consideration of the riches contained in these epistles will indicate something of their vast spiritual wealth which await our exploration by faith:

"(Christ, the Beloved One) in Whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the *riches* of His grace . . ." (Eph. 1:6,7).

"the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the *riches* of the glory of His inheritance in the saints . . ." (Eph. 1:18).

"that in the ages to come He might show the *exceeding riches* of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:7).

"that I (Paul) should preach among the Gentiles the *unsearchable riches* of Christ . . ." (Eph. 3:8).

“that He would grant you, according to the *riches of His glory*, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit . . .” (Eph. 3:16).

“But my God shall supply all your need according to *His riches in glory* by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19).

“. . . the mystery (secret) which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints: to whom God would make known what is the *riches of the glory of this mystery* (secret), which is Christ among (margin) you (Gentiles), the hope of glory” (Col. 1:26,27).

“. . . being knit together in love, and unto all *riches of the full assurance of understanding*, that they may know the mystery (secret) of God, even Christ” (Col. 2:2 R.V.).

May both reader and writer learn to “possess our possessions” by faith in what God has revealed in these prison letters of Paul and then by grace remain absolutely faithful to such a wondrous calling and inheritance whatever the cost in these darkening and testing days, remembering that our “blessed hope” cannot be far distant. May this constantly strengthen, encourage and inspire us while we are:

“awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, Who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for Himself a people of His own who are zealous for good deeds” (Titus 2:13 R.S.V.).

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