

The Unfolding Purpose of God

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FOREWORD

We read that God spake "at sundry times and in divers manners unto the fathers by the prophets", and so, while Truth is One, infallible, unalterable and unchanging, yet its presentation can be, and should be, as varied as there are individual teachers, and as accommodating as there are differences among pupils and readers.

We therefore most gladly pen a few words of introduction, to commend the present witness of our brother and fellow-worker, Stuart Allen, and believe that those who may have hesitated to pass on some of our own writings, owing to the somewhat condensed style adopted in them, may find this volume to be a veritable "unfolding", leading the reader on without effort to see what is the dispensation of the Mystery, "according to the plan of the ages".

With greetings in Christ, Who is "All in All".

September 1961

CHARLES H. WELCH.

TO THE READER

This book is based largely upon articles written for the bi-monthly *Sign-Post Magazine*. This will account for a certain amount of repetition which we hope will not be out of place. We bear in mind Philippians 3:1 where the Apostle Paul says, "I am not tired of writing you the same things over and over; it means your safety" (*Charles B. Williams' Translation*).

The aim has been to write as simply as possible, so that the sincere seeker after truth may receive the maximum help. When the exposition of Paul's epistles is reached, the reader is advised to have the Authorized and Revised Versions of the Scriptures side by side; differing shades of meaning will then become apparent. It is our most earnest prayer that this volume may be used to bring many from darkness to light, from bondage to liberty, from uncertainty to full-assurance. Our one object is to point the way to and exalt the One Who alone can make this possible—the Lord Jesus Christ.

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CHAPTER I

THE UNIQUE POSITION OF THE SCRIPTURES. THEIR INSPIRATION AND INTERPRETATION. ISRAEL, AND THEIR RELATION TO THE DIVINE PURPOSE

Every profession has its textbook and the Christian profession is no exception. That textbook is the Bible. The various branches of Christendom differ radically in many respects, but all of them have to appeal ultimately to the Bible. They must come to terms with it eventually and for one very good reason. They profess to believe, practise and make known the teaching of Christ. The only place where they can discover exactly Who Christ is and what He taught is in the Bible.

Religion has produced many outstanding leaders and teachers and nearly all of them have left some writing on record which sums up their beliefs and achievements, for example, Mahommed, who wrote the Koran, which is the Bible of the Mahommedans. But the greatest Teacher that has ever walked this earth left not one word of writing behind Him! This is remarkable indeed. The only time we read of Christ writing is when a sinful woman was brought to Him and He wrote on the ground with His finger (John 8:6,8).

Consequently, without the Bible, the Book that claims to reveal Christ, we should know practically nothing of Him. History could tell us such a Person once existed, for our calendar is marked A.D.—Anno Domini—in the year of the Lord. But Who is He? And what did He teach? These questions would remain for ever unanswered apart from the Scriptures. So to the Scriptures we must go if we want to embark on the greatest of all quests, that of getting to know God, His character and His ways.

At the outset questions are sure to be asked. How can we know the Bible is trustworthy? Is it a worthy revelation of God? Can we accept it as being truth?

First of all let us notice the great claim the Bible makes for itself. 2 Timothy 3:16 states "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God*" (literally God-breathed) and one of its titles is *The*

Word of God. Thus, although coming through human channels, it makes the stupendous claim of coming from God Himself and being a revelation of His mind and His purposes. Some may feel that this is impossible and asking too much to accept and believe. But before turning away, we would ask such to consider certain facts. These facts we will endeavour to bring before the reader straight away.

(1) *Numerics.*—Underneath the Hebrew and Chaldee of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament there is hidden an extraordinary disposition of numbers which cannot be explained away on human grounds. In order to understand this we must remember that none of these languages had symbols for numbers such as we have (1, 2, 3, 4, etc.). Instead of this they made use of the letters of their alphabet so that $a=1$, $b=2$ etc. One can easily see then that a word could be looked at in two ways, either as a *word* or as a series of *numbers* which could be added up to a total. For instance, the Greek for "word" is "logos". If looked at from a numerical standpoint its value would be $l=30$, $o=70$, $g=3$, $o=70$, $s=200$: total 373. The numerical value of "logos" is therefore 373.

If we were to look at the Greek text of the first eleven verses of the New Testament (Matt. 1:1-11), we should find an elaborate scheme of sevens underlying the words, which could not have been put there by chance, or even arranged by any human cleverness on Matthew's part. These verses contain 49 words (7×7). Of these 49 words, 28 (4×7) begin with a vowel, and 21 (3×7) begin with a consonant. These 49 words have 266 letters ($7 \times 2 \times 19$); this number is itself 38 sevens, and the sum of its factors is 28 (4×7). Of these 266 letters, 140 (20×7) are vowels, and 126 (18×7) are consonants. Of these 49 words 35 (5×7) occur more than once in the passage and 14 (2×7) occur only once. Seven occur in more than one form and 42 (6×7) occur in only one form. The 49 words are divided thus: 42 (6×7) are nouns (the name of something) and seven are not nouns. Of these nouns, 35 (5×7) are names of people and seven are ordinary nouns. Of these names, 28 (4×7) are male ancestors of Christ and seven are not. Thus, an elaborate system of sevens occurs in these few short verses of the Bible. If Matthew was *not* writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, what a headache he must have had trying to arrange all these sevens!

There is also a system of elevens in the Greek and Hebrew

texts of the Scriptures and so wonderful is this that the chance of these figures occurring by accident rather than design (that is by the inspiration of God) is 1 in a number followed by 30 *noughts*, a billion million taken a million times! No one in his senses therefore could argue that all this happened by accident or by human cleverness. Mathematics says *it could not do so*. This marvellous system of numbers occurs *right throughout Scriptures* from Genesis to Revelation. Attempts have been made to find the same thing in human authors, specially those who lived about the same time as the writers of the Bible, but *no such system has been discovered*; it is only found in the Word of God. The smallness of our space prevents us from taking this subject any further, but readers who like figures may be stimulated to go into this aspect of things more fully.

(2) *The Unity of the Bible*.—We must remember that the Bible was not written in a few years. Actually its writing was spread over nearly 2,000 years and all sorts of people were used by God to contribute to it: high, low, rich and poor, ranging from cattle keepers, like Amos, and fishermen like Peter and John, to kings (David and Solomon). Imagine men of themselves arranging to write a book like this spread over such an immense period and allowing every sort of person to make his contribution. What a hotch potch it would be! Yet the Bible is not just an odd collection of books—it is a *unity*, every book pointing in some way to the Lord Jesus Christ and God's revealed plan through Him. Each shows some aspect of His wonderful Person and the work He came to earth to do, that is, to accomplish your salvation and mine.

(3) *The Evidence of Prophecy*.—One of the most remarkable things about the Bible is the way it pin-points future events and lifts them out with definiteness and absolute accuracy. It is one thing to speak in a *general* way about the future, leaving plenty of loop holes for events to take this turn or that, it is quite another to tie them down to the smallest detail and still be perfectly correct in one's forecast. For instance, we could prophesy and say that next summer during the months of June, July and August there will be rain somewhere in the British Isles. That would be a very safe prophecy because we have made it so general. It would be an extraordinary thing if in England, Wales or Scotland there was no rain for a long period like three months. But supposing we were to say that on August 12th next year there will be heavy rain at 10.30 a.m. in

the place where we live but nowhere else in the country, we should have made the prediction so definite, and multiplied the chances of being wrong so much, that it would be just as extraordinary if it actually came to pass.

Now the prophecies of Scripture are as definite as this, *but they are never wrong*, not one has failed or ever will fail. Let us look at the birth of Christ. Long before this happened an Old Testament prophet had forecast His birth, not in any vague way by saying it would occur somewhere in the East, but that it would take place in the little obscure village of Palestine called Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). How could he have known? It was impossible to obtain such knowledge from human sources as he wrote it *centuries before it actually occurred*, but Peter assures us that "Prophecy came not in old time by the will of *man*: but holy men of God spake as they were moved *by the Holy Ghost*" (2 Pet. 1:21). Scriptural prophecy is God the Holy Spirit writing history in advance.

Coming now to the Crucifixion, the predictions of the Word of God become more and more remarkable. The following are Old Testament prophecies together with their New Testament fulfilment.

(1) The Lord's disciples were to forsake Him.

Prophecy: Zechariah 13:7

"Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the Man that is My fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts: Smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered."

Fulfilment: Mark 14:27

"Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of Me this night: for it is written, I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered."

(2) He was to be dumb before His accusers.

Prophecy: Isaiah 53:7

"He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth."

Fulfilment: Matthew 27:12-14

"And when He was accused of the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing. Then said Pilate unto Him, Hearest thou not how many things they witness against Thee? And He answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly."

(3) He was to be wounded and bruised.

Prophecy: Isaiah 53:5

"But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed."

Fulfilment: Matthew 27:26,30

"And when he (Pilate) had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified . . . and they spit upon Him, and took the reed, and smote Him on the head."

(4) His hands and His feet were to be pierced.

Prophecy: Psalm 22:16

". . . the assembly of the wicked have inclosed Me: they pierced My hands and My feet."

Fulfilment: Luke 23:33

"And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified Him."

(5) Yet none of His bones would be broken.

Prophecy: Exodus 12:46

"In one house shall it (the passover lamb) be eaten . . . neither shall ye break a bone thereof."

Fulfilment: John 19:31-36

"The Jews therefore . . . besought Pilate that their (the malefactors') legs might be broken . . . then came the soldiers and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that He was dead already, they brake not His legs. . . . For these things were done, that the Scripture should be fulfilled. A bone of Him shall not be broken."

(6) He was to be crucified with thieves.

Prophecy: Isaiah 53:12

"He was numbered with the transgressors."

Fulfilment: Mark 15:27,28

"And with Him they crucify two thieves . . . and the Scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And He was numbered with the transgressors."

(7) He was to pray for His persecutors.

Prophecy: Isaiah 53:12

"He bare the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors."

Fulfilment: Luke 23:34

"Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

(8) The people were to ridicule Him.

Prophecy: Psalm 22:7,8

"All they that see Me laugh Me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that He would deliver Him; let Him deliver Him, seeing He delighted in Him."

Fulfilment: Matthew 27:41-43

"Likewise also the chief priests mocking Him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him."

(9) His garments were to be parted and lots cast for His vesture.

Prophecy: Psalm 22:18

"They part My garments among them, and cast lots upon My vesture."

Fulfilment: John 19:23,24

"Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also His coat . . . they said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it . . . that the Scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted My raiment among them, and for My vesture they did cast lots."

(10) The Cry from the cross.

Prophecy: Psalm 22:1

"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

Fulfilment: Matthew 27:46

"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

(11) They were to give Him gall and vinegar to drink.

Prophecy: Psalm 69:21

"They gave Me also gall for My meat; and in My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink."

Fulfilment: Matthew 27:34

"They gave Him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when He had tasted thereof, He would not drink."

(12) His body was to be pierced.

Prophecy: Zechariah 12:10

"And they (Israel) shall look on Me (Jehovah, verse 8) Whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn . . ."

Fulfilment: John 19:34-37

"But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the Scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of Him shall not be broken. And again another Scripture saith, They shall look on Him Whom they pierced."

(13) His heart was to be broken.

Prophecy: Psalm 22:14

"I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint: My heart is like wax: it is melted in the midst of My bowels."

Fulfilment: John 19:34

"But one of the soldiers . . . pierced His side, and forthwith there came out blood and water."

(14) He was to be buried in a rich man's grave.

Prophecy: Isaiah 53:9

"He made His grave with the wicked (plural) and with the rich (singular) in His death."

Fulfilment: Matthew 27:57-60

"When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathæa, named Joseph. . . . He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus . . . and when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out of the rock . . ."

Now bear in mind that all these prophecies were written some 1,000 to 500 years *before* these events occurred and that they all happened *literally*, not in any figurative way, exactly as had been stated by the Old Testament writers, and they all were *fulfilled in twenty-four hours*. Furthermore, Psalm twenty-two vividly describes death by crucifixion. This form of punishment was used centuries later by the Romans. How, then, could the writer of the Psalm have known about it? And how can the above fourteen prophecies be explained? Not by chance, for no sane mind could believe that these statements were fourteen lucky guesses that literally came true in one day! The conclusion is inevitable, that the Bible is what it claims to be, the Word of God. No wonder Peter says, "We have also a more sure *word of prophecy*; whereunto ye do well that ye *take heed*" (2 Pet. 1:19).

"These (things) have been recorded in order that you may believe that He is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, through believing, you might have life through His Name" (John 20:31, Weymouth's translation).

(4) *Its Indestructibility*.—It can be said with truth that no book has had to withstand such enmity, opposition and vehement criticism as the Word of God. It has been the target of infidels, atheists and the enemies of Christianity for nearly 2,000 years and yet it not only survives today, but is the world's best seller! There is no modern book that is printed in such quantities as the Bible; millions of copies are distributed every year by the Bible Societies of the world and somehow nothing can stop its circulation. It can be said with certainty that if an ordinary book had received a fraction of the opposition the Bible has endured, it would never have survived. Voltaire, the noted French infidel, who died in 1778, stated that in one hundred years from his time, the Bible and Christianity would be swept from existence. Little did he know that after his death the very house in which he lived would be used by the Geneva Bible Society and become a storehouse for the Scriptures whose vigour and freshness continue undiminished down to the present day! Nor can it be otherwise, for we are dealing with the "Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Pet. 1:23).

(5) *It endures translation*.—When a book is translated into another language, something is bound to be lost, for the simple reason that the words of one language have not always got exact equivalents in another. We wonder what Shakespeare

would be like in Chinese! The very thought is dreadful! Yet the Bible has been translated into *over 500 languages*, without losing any of its power and life-giving qualities. There is obviously something behind this Book that other books have not got, and that something is nothing less than the almighty power of God the Holy Spirit.

(6) *The witness of Archæology*.—One of the greatest evidences of the inspiration of the Scriptures has been furnished in the last seventy years or so by archæology. What has been brought to light by the spade is positive evidence. It can be said straight away that nothing has been unearthed which disproves one verse of Scripture. Rather the opposite; the Word has been confirmed again and again and the theories of the critics routed. It used to be stated by opponents of the Bible that Moses could not possibly have written the first five books because writing was unknown in his day. Then came the discovery of the Tel-el-Armana tablets, now to be seen in the British Museum, and these prove conclusively that writing was in use 100 years before Moses lived! This is a large subject that cannot be dealt with properly in a book of this size, but to all who are interested we recommend the works of the archæologist, Sir Charles Marston, *The Bible is True*, and *The Bible comes Alive*. Both are published by Messrs. Eyre & Spottiswoode.

(7) *The witness of Christ Himself*.—Here we come to the supreme point. What was the attitude of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Scriptures? Let us quote His own words: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, *but to fulfil*. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, *till all be fulfilled*" (Matt. 5:17,18). "*The Scripture cannot be broken*" (John 10:35). "For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed Me: *for he wrote of Me*. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe My words?" (John 5:46,47). To His opponents He said "Ye do err, *not knowing the Scriptures*" (Matt. 22:29). How up to date this is!

And after His resurrection, when He made the stupendous claim "*All power is given unto Me in heaven and earth*" (Matt. 28:18), He said to the twelve apostles: "All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms concerning Me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:44,45). These are not the words of One Who

disbelieved the Scriptures, but rather of One Who endorsed them up to the hilt. To defeat Satan in the wilderness temptation it was sufficient for Him to quote three times "It is written" (Matt. 4:4,7,10). The Lord used the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Eph. 6:17), and we may be certain that a broken or mutilated sword would have accomplished nothing with so mighty a foe.

The Lord's constant attitude to the written Word was one of reverence and complete acceptance. This is clearly seen if the reader will consult Matthew 4:4,7,10, 11:10, 19:4, 21:13,42, 22:29, 26:31,56. The Scriptures, in His estimation, are divinely authoritative. His attitude then must be ours. *We cannot call ourselves true believers in Him if we adopt any attitude to the Word other than His.* He said "Thy Word is Truth" (John 17:17) not merely that it contains truth, but *is the Truth* and the source of all spiritual light and blessing. The Lord Jesus also said "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (John 5:22). "He that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not My words, hath one that judgeth him: *the Word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him* in the last day" (John 12:48). We wonder how the reader of these words reacts to their truth? Here is an interview and a judgment in the future that no one can escape who rejects Christ. In view of their absolute certainty, do we feel quite happy? If not, we should think well on these words of the Lord: "He that *heareth My Word, and believeth* on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and *shall not come into condemnation*; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24).

Surely one of these points would be sufficient to lift this Book above all books, but the testimony of the seven put together is overwhelming to any reasonable mind. We can approach it therefore with the certainty that it is what it claims to be, the very Word of God, and thus we have something eternally secure upon which to rest our faith. In it we find nothing less than a revelation of the mind and will of God concerning His creation and the human race.

At this point we feel it would be wise to give some guiding principles regarding the interpretation of Scripture. We have seen that all the Bible is God-breathed and is a revelation of His thoughts and His Truth to men. To reveal these He has used human language, but the problem for us is how to keep what is human and fallible from the translation and inter-

pretation we place on this language. If this is not done, then the Word of God cannot speak with *authority* as God meant it to do, and it can give us no sure ground for our faith.

"Thus saith the Lord" is the way the Old Testament prophets spoke and this is the way the Bible as the revelation of God is intended to speak to us. Authority we must have; some place this in the human intellect, but this at the best is fallible, and therefore can never give us the certain basis that we need. Such criticize the Scriptures, forgetting that the Word of God is the supreme Critic, alive (quick) and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, a *critic* (literally) of the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Heb. 4:12). It is God's province to judge us, not ours to judge Him. His Word sits in judgment on us; it is not our province to sit in judgment on His Word. Such subjectivism, at its root, is nothing more than the parent sin of pride and rebellion: the refusal to subjugate the human mind and reason to God, thus turning it into an idol, which is in itself the very spirit of antichrist.

The Apostle Paul does not hesitate to refer to the Old Testament as the *Holy Scriptures* (2 Tim. 3:15), and if this is true of the Old Testament, it must be true of the New Testament also, for the two are indissolubly linked together. So we find that the Apostle Peter includes the epistles of Paul with *the other Scriptures* (2 Pet. 3:16). Paul himself asserts that his letter to the church at Corinth was "the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37) and "words which the Holy Ghost teacheth" (1 Cor. 2:13), and the Thessalonian church is commended because, what they received through his ministry, they treated as the "Word of God" and not the word of man (1 Thess. 2:13). The Christians at Ephesus had been taught by Christ (Eph. 4:21). It is extremely unlikely that any of them had come under the Lord's ministry in Palestine in the days of His earthly life. This can only mean that they had received the teaching given through Paul as the *Word of Christ*. As later expressed in 1 Timothy 6:3, it was "wholesome words, even *the words of our Lord Jesus Christ*".

Both the Old and New Testaments are God's writings; they are sacred and must therefore be treated with the utmost reverence and respect, for otherwise how can we hope to receive understanding and blessing from them? Our aim then is to handle the Word of God carefully and wisely so that, as far as it is possible, the human element with its fallibility is excluded in its interpretation. If this is not done, the Bible can be made to

mean anything, and truth cannot possibly be realized. As a preparation, two things are necessary.

(1) The determination to *search* the Scriptures. God's Word contains inexhaustible spiritual wealth, but His jewels are not scattered on the surface; we must be prepared to *dig* for them. God has little use for lazy Christians who are prepared to receive everything secondhand, without any effort on their part. Just as a person cannot do proper gardening without tools such as a spade or fork, so the believer cannot properly dig into the Scriptures without the aid of a good concordance. This is a real necessity, and we recommend Young's *Analytical Concordance* for this purpose.

(2) There must be prayer for, and dependence upon the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. Man's intellect, unaided by God, cannot understand and assimilate Divine Truth. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God . . . neither can he get to know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). Human cleverness or education by itself cannot discover it. While we greatly value Christian scholarship, scholars as such have no monopoly of the Holy Spirit; in fact scholarship, unless kept subservient to God's revealing power, can be an effective bar to its realization. Many scholars have become blinded by their own scholarship. The Truth of God is *spiritually discerned*, and God is willing to bestow this understanding on all who are humble and child-like enough to receive and sincerely seek for it. Christ said "I thank Thee, O Father . . . because Thou hast hid these things from the *wise* and *prudent*, and hast *revealed them unto babes*" (Matt. 11:25). It is only in the spirit of lowliness and humility that we can receive enlightenment from God. We must also be ready to *unlearn* as well as to learn. It is often difficult to cast wrong ideas from the mind, especially when they have become ingrained through faulty teaching and upbringing. But this is essential if truth is to enter and take possession of our thinking.

Carefully note the following:

(1) Take the Bible *literally* and in its *simple meaning*, unless it directly contradicts other Scriptures or is opposed to known and proven facts. In this case possibly a figure of speech is being used. We will say something about figures of speech later on. Just as a human writer presumably means what he sets down in writing, so God must mean what He says and have a meaning

for everything He says, otherwise His Word can never speak with authority to the human mind.

(2) Remember that every text has a *context*, something goes before it and something comes after it. To take a text from its context is dangerous and can nullify its meaning. Much error has resulted from this practice.

(3) Aim to discover the meaning of the original text, that is the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. If one has not the knowledge to do this, then obtain several good translations and compare them, such as the Revised Version, Rotherham, Weymouth, etc. By this means various shades of meaning will become apparent.

(4) Try to find what the passage in question meant to the *original readers*. While the Word of God is a Unity, yet each of its books was *sent* by God to a section of His people at a particular time when they needed a particular aspect of truth, and while this may be amplified in course of time if it has a prophetic significance, *it will never conflict with its original meaning*. All the books of the Bible are very much like letters; they have their names and addresses on the envelope at the beginning. The book of Isaiah was written concerning *Judah and Jerusalem* (Isa. 1:1), and therefore its message is *primarily* to Israel. The epistle of James is addressed to the "twelve tribes scattered abroad", i.e. the Hebrew Christians of the Dispersion (1:1).

Note how the word "send" is used in the Acts of the Apostles. Peter speaks of "the word which *God sent* unto the children of Israel", referring to the early ministry in this book (Acts 10:36). Later on, Paul says, "Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation *sent*" (Acts 13:26). The Divine purpose at this point was widening, the salvation of God being sent to the Jew first and then to the Gentile. Genesis 12:3 is in view. At the end of the Acts, Israel by their rejection of the Divine offer of mercy and forgiveness recorded in Acts 3:19-26, go into their present spiritual blindness and darkness, and the Apostle then declared "The salvation of God is *sent* unto the Gentiles (i.e. apart from Israel the nation), and that they will hear it" (Acts 28:28).

We do well to note to whom God addresses His Word. There is a type of believer who imagines that every page of the Bible is addressed *to* him and is *about* him. Such often complain of being robbed of truth when the error of this idea is pointed out.

They need to remember that the eighth commandment, "Thou shalt not steal", can be broken in more than one way. Such spiritual selfishness must be avoided if light and blessing is desired. All is indeed written *for* our learning and profit, but not all the Scripture is specifically addressed *to* us as Gentiles, or members of the Church, the Body of Christ.

(5) The Bible is not only the Word of God. It is made up of the *Words* of God. The Apostle Paul does not hesitate to speak of "Words . . . which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Cor. 2:13), and the Lord Jesus not only said "I have given them Thy *Word*" (John 17:14), but also "I have given unto them the *Words* which Thou gavest Me" (17:8). This means that Scripture should be compared with Scripture. The Bible is its own commentary, and difficulty in one passage may be solved by comparison with other passages. There is no need to go outside the Word of God to solve spiritual problems. Note also the way the Holy Spirit uses words He has caused to be written. This is most important and here a concordance is a necessity. We can be sure that "words which the Holy Ghost teacheth" are used with exactness and will bear the closest examination we can put upon them. One of the delights of the seeker after Truth is to discover the perfection of God's Words. They are indeed "pure words" (Psa. 12:6).

(6) Carefully note the time periods of the Bible. Some portions of Divine revelation are only true for a certain period, for example, the Old Testament sacrifices foreshadowing the One Perfect Sacrifice on Calvary's Cross. Others are true for all time, e.g. sin, and its only remedy, God's salvation in Christ Jesus. We must learn to distinguish these two different kinds of truth. One is basic—permanent truth; the other is limited for a certain period during which it is administered and is called dispensational truth. A dispensation in the Scriptures is the administration of some particular truth of God, and the word should not be used as though it was in itself just a period of time and therefore equivalent to an age. The time element only enters into it inasmuch as such truth has a beginning and an end. The sincere Bible student should carefully and prayerfully weigh over the portion of Scripture being studied in the light of the foregoing statements. Much error and confusion is caused by the inability to distinguish between truth that is *basic and permanent* and truth that is *dispensational*.

(7) Figures of speech are words used out of their ordinary

sense to attract attention and emphasize. They are warm and vivid ways of presenting literal facts and we use them in speech and writing unconsciously day in and day out. They are used in God's Word too, and when we come across them we must seek to discover the *literal fact underlying the figure* and not take the figure itself literally. If we say "the ground is dry in drought" we make a plain statement of fact. If we say "the ground is *thirsty* in drought" we are using figurative language, for the ground cannot actually feel or experience thirst. But we have not detracted from the plain statement of fact that the ground is dry. Rather, we have made the literal fact of dryness more vivid by saying the ground is *thirsty*. So while in Scripture figures of speech are used, this does not alter what we have stated under (1) concerning taking the Bible literally wherever possible.

(8) Symbols are used largely in the prophetic books of the Bible, such as Daniel and the Book of the Revelation. Very often the Holy Spirit explains the symbol that is used, and when this is so we are wise if we do not seek to *re-interpret God's interpretation*. If we do, error is sure to creep in. For instance, the stars which the Apostle John saw in the Risen Lord's right hand are symbols, and He explains them as representing the *angels* of the seven churches (Rev. 1:20). This should be sufficient for the humble seeker after truth. In some cases the true meaning of a symbol can only be arrived at by comparing Scripture with Scripture.

(9) Parables. Concentrate on the central point and do not seek to find spiritual significance in every detail. In the Parable of the prodigal son it would be a mistake to try and find the spiritual equivalent of the ring placed on the prodigal's finger or what the fatted calf represents. When this kind of thing is done, fanciful and far-fetched expositions result which can only lead away from truth and not to it.

(10) Be accurate in reading a passage of Scripture and careful not to read into it what is not there. How easy it is to read into God's Word what we want to find there and to miss what is there all the time!

(11) Distinguish between *interpretation* and *application* of the Word of God. Interpretation deals first of all with those to whom the passage of Scripture is addressed as we have pointed out under (4). When this has been settled, and not till then, are we in a position to apply the passage to ourselves or others and

only then if this is consistent with Truth revealed for this present age of Grace. The primary interpretation of Isaiah's prophecy from first to last is to *Judah and Jerusalem* as the opening verse declares. When we read the wonderful fifty-third chapter which deals with the suffering Saviour bearing sin and the shame and death of the Cross, it is still *Israel* that is *primarily* in view. After we have realized this, then we can also say "He was wounded for *our* transgressions, He was bruised for *our* iniquities" (Isa. 53:5). We are then in a true position to apply this wondrous passage of Scripture to ourselves.

Above all avoid *spiritualizing*. This is not the same as making a legitimate application of Scripture such as we have just done. Spiritualizing avoids the primary interpretation and the literal meaning of a passage, and instead fastens upon it so called spiritual ideas which are really nothing more than the personal opinion of the person concerned or the denomination or school to which he or she belongs. This is the surest way of introducing fallible human ideas into God's pure Word of Truth, and as those who indulge in this practice seldom agree among themselves, the result is confusion and division among the people of God.

(12) The final aim of studying the written Word is to come into touch by faith with the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, and *this is the most important point of all*. The whole Bible points to Him, and that is why, after His Resurrection, the Lord expounded to His disciples walking to Emmaus, *the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures* (Luke 24:27,44). He had earlier said:

"Search the Scriptures . . . for they are *they which testify of Me*" (John 5:39).

"For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed Me; *for he wrote of Me*. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe My words?" (John 5:46,47).

To the ten disciples (Thomas and Judas were absent) the Risen Saviour declared:

"These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, *concerning Me*" (Luke 24:44).

To miss Him therefore in our Bible study is to *miss our way entirely*.

Now all this may seem complicated, but actually in practice

it is nothing more than a sane and reverent way of handling the Holy Scriptures and recognizing that the Word of God is primarily a Book of Redemption, meeting man's deepest needs and revealing, in some measure at least, what a gracious God intends to do with the creation He has made and those who come under His redeeming Love. In all our Bible study and searching for Divine Truth, may we be able to say with the Psalmist, "I rejoice at Thy Word, as one that findeth great spoil" (Psa. 119:162), or Jeremiah when he said "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart" (Jer. 15:16).

But someone may say, I see the importance of all this, but where am I to start when I want to read and study the Bible? Do I commence with Genesis chapter one, or somewhere in the middle of the Old Testament? Or shall I begin with the New Testament? Let us say straight away that we sympathise with the inquirer. The Bible is a long book, dealing with an amazing variety of subjects, much of which appears, on the surface, to be unconnected. Perhaps, however, we can find within its covers some principle to guide us. We have already pointed out that the Word of God is a sign post directing us always to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is of the first importance and must never be forgotten. But in and through Him, God has been pleased to reveal His plan and purpose for the earth and for the heavens, *the Bible being a record of this plan. It is a Book of Divine purpose.* In Ephesians 3:11 we read "According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord". A more literal rendering would be "According to the purpose of the ages which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord". From this we see that time (the ages) is a platform, as it were, upon which God is working out a great redemptive plan for His creation and this is centred in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus. Genesis 1:1 commences with the creation of the heaven and the earth and so we find in the Word of God this wondrous plan has a heavenly part and also an earthly part.

In 2 Timothy 1:8,9 we read, "God, Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but *according to His own purpose* and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus . . ." Here the Apostle Paul tells us how we can have a share in this mighty purpose, and there is only one way and that is by salvation. It is not much use studying God's plan for heaven and earth, if we ourselves are outside of it, and so

the reader is asked plainly and directly—is this salvation yours? Have you taken this necessary step for coming within the plan and purpose of God? If you have put your trust simply and sincerely in the Lord Jesus and taken Him to be your own personal Saviour, you can be described truthfully by Romans 8:28 “the called according to His purpose”. *You are inside the plan and eternally secure.* If you have never taken this step think seriously for a moment. God is slowly working to bring the whole of His creation back again to perfection and beauty. Everything that mars will be eradicated when this has been finally fulfilled, for God will not have one sin or one sinner to spoil His goal.

“The Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom *all things that offend, and them which do iniquity*” (Matt. 13:41).

“Every plant, which My Heavenly Father hath not planted, *shall be rooted up*” (Matt. 15:13).

“There shall in no wise enter into it (the Heavenly Jerusalem) *any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie*” (Rev. 21:27).

These are exceedingly serious statements, and they describe all who are outside of Christ and unsaved. On the other hand to know Him as Saviour means that He will wash away *all* our sins and clothe us with His own perfection, so that when we meet Him one day (and we surely shall) we shall do so as perfect creatures without the slightest possibility of condemnation (Rom. 8:1).

We will now go further and search the Scriptures in order to discover what they teach concerning the earthly part of this plan. First of all Isaiah 45:18 tells us that God created the earth in order that it might be *inhabited*, so we can be assured that the goal of creation was not the earth itself or the myriads of worlds around us, great and wonderful though they are, but MAN. Read Psalm 8:4-8 in this connexion. However, in the opening chapters of Genesis, we find a great complication entering in which is directly opposed to the will and purpose of God, and this is SIN.

“By one man *sin* entered into the world, and *death* by sin” (Rom. 5:12), and because death is universal there is no need to argue to prove that “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

Not only this, but the earth itself has become involved in this

terrible tragedy as Romans 8:21,22 asserts. The conflict we see around us in nature is only an external evidence of this fact. Consequently the original purpose in the creation of heaven and earth has been held up, as it were, by sin and death, and the bulk of the Bible therefore is taken up with the way God is going to remove these great enemies to His revealed will.

We can now understand, in some measure, the reason for the wonderful work of redemption accomplished by the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, for He came to put away sin righteously by the sacrifice of Himself on the Cross of Calvary as the Sin Bearer and to abolish death for ever. This is God's basis upon which He can bring His creation back to its original perfection and beauty, and how human beings who are sinners by nature can be made righteous and absolutely free from the taint of sin and failure and therefore have a glorious share in the new heaven and earth that will be spotless and perfect. (See 2 Pet. 3:13 and Rev. 21:1-4, 23-27.) This great salvation can be ours if we will receive the Lord Jesus by simply trusting Him to be our Saviour, or, expressing it another way, if we put our faith in Him alone. Then God will reckon His righteousness to be our own possession. If this step has not been taken, we ask the reader to turn to the following Scriptures and see how true this can be personally. These passages are 2 Corinthians 5:20,21, and Ephesians 2:8,9. As we have said before, it is not much use our reading about the Divine plan in the Bible if we are for ever outside it. This would be a tragedy of the first magnitude.

As the Word of God is studied and believed it becomes evident that the Creator concentrates first of all upon the earth and shows us how He is going to remove the effects of sin and death from His creation and bring in His glorious kingdom, so that at the last it can be said in truth "The kingdoms of *this world* are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15).

Now there are at least two ways in which God can do this. The same Almighty Voice that said "Let there be light: and there was light" (Gen. 1:3), that is, without the assistance of any creature, could obviously carry on His work indefinitely in the same way, majestic and alone. On the other hand He could use agents to carry out His will if He chose, while not being dependent in any way upon them. This is precisely what we find Him doing in His matchless condescension and grace. He is

pleased to use redeemed men and women, and young people who are wise enough to place themselves in His almighty hand and find out by prayer what His will is for them (Col. 1:9; Eph. 5:17).

Coming then to the earthly side of the plan of the ages, we find its first unfolding in the call of Abram recorded in Genesis 12:1-3. Note the words "I will" in verses two and three, ending with "and in thee (Abram) shall *all* families of the earth be blessed". Now Abram, or Abraham as he was afterwards called, is the father of Israel and that is why the Jewish nation figures so largely in the Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments. They were to be redeemed by God and then become the agents for world-wide blessing. To make this sure and true, God promises Abram a posterity or a seed that would endure, and this we find in Genesis 15:5 and many other passages.

"And He (God) brought him (Abram) forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them; and He said unto him, *So shall thy seed be*".

Not only this, but to be practical the seed must be guaranteed a home to dwell in and in the later verses we read "In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto *thy seed* have I given *this land*, from the river of Egypt (the Nile) unto the great river, the River Euphrates" (Gen. 15:18). Look at a map and see the extent of this wondrous gift. The reader will note that it is considerably larger than Palestine and perhaps will now appreciate why it is that this part of the globe has always figured prominently in human affairs, and why it looms so large today in the gigantic problems connected with the Middle East.

It is a fact of history that the Jew has never completely possessed this portion of the earth, although a foreshadowing took place during the reign of Solomon. In 1 Kings 4:21 and 2 Chronicles 9:26, we are told that his dominion was from the river (Euphrates) to the *border* of Egypt. This is not so extensive as the promise of Genesis fifteen for it does not include Egypt and the boundary of the Nile, and while Solomon, for political and commercial reasons, was able to control territory *outside* Palestine, yet the twelve tribes went no further than this stretch of land as 1 Kings 4:25 states: "Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, *from Dan even to Beer-sheba*, all the days of Solomon". Reference to a map will show that this was the extreme north and south of

Palestine only, and therefore it is certain that the Jew has never yet enjoyed as his inheritance the complete territory promised in Genesis 15:18. To suggest, as some expositors do, that the reign of Solomon for forty years fulfils this Scripture is obviously wrong and would be in the nature of an anticlimax, to say the least, after the solemn and spacious promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This period is a foreshadowing only, leaving the complete fulfilment to a future day when God will honour His word to the letter, and not in the free and easy way mentioned above.

Notice that the Scripture always connects the *land* and the *seed* together, and as the land is literal, the seed must be literal too. (Cp. Gen. 26:3,4 and 28:13,14.) As we have before emphasized, the Divine intention is finally to embrace the Gentile world as well as the Jew, consequently we shall not be surprised to find in the New Testament that the Gentile believer, as a partaker of Israel's spiritual things and their covenant blessings (Rom. 15:26,27), is counted as being part of Abraham's seed (Gal. 3:7-9, 29) and as being blessed *with* him (verse 9). This is a picture of the glorious time when *all* the families of the earth shall be blessed, and he will then be, in the fullest sense, the *heir of the world* as Romans 4:13 describes him.

Returning to the Old Testament, we find that this is a long historical record of God's preparation of the Jewish race for the part that they were to play in being His agents for world blessing. What a long time it seemed to take, but this fact only emphasizes Israel's sin and their slowness to learn God's ways. You may think that the Jews were, on the whole, a bad nation. The period covered by their kings and prophets was a black one indeed, almost unrelieved failure and departure from God. Why then did not God cast them off? Because He cannot break His promises, and is a God of wonderful patience and long-suffering. The New Testament also stresses this, for Peter writes in his second epistle (3:9), "The Lord is *longsuffering* to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." It may be, dear reader, that this Divine forbearance has been waiting a long time for *your response* to the redeeming love shown on Calvary's cross. Have you yet placed your faith in Christ alone as your Saviour and Sin-bearer? If not, do not trifle with the longsuffering of God, for the Scriptures make it clear that this wondrous patience will have an end one day, and that perhaps sooner than you think.

“*Now* is the accepted time, behold, *now* is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2), and the word *now* means this very day you are reading these lines, not tomorrow or the future which you cannot know or count on with certainty. Do not forget that the Saviour said, “Him that *cometh to Me* I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37).

He promises to receive you just as you are, so what is there to stop your coming to Him in simple faith now?

CHAPTER II

THE EARTHLY MINISTRY OF CHRIST—TO WHOM? THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

In our previous chapter we saw that the Old Testament records the preparation of Israel to be the channel of blessing to the world according to the promise of God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. Then, in the fulness of time, God sent the One Who was to be their Saviour and King. It is amazing, in view of the clear statements of Scripture, that there can be any doubt in the mind as to *why* Christ came to this earth and to *whom* He came. Let us see some of these passages.

The wise men asked "Where is He that is born *King of the Jews?*" (Matt. 2:2), and of Bethlehem it was prophesied "... out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule *My people Israel*" (Matt. 2:6).

The angel that visited Mary before the Lord's birth had said:

"The Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and *He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever*; and of His kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:32,33).

He came therefore to Israel, for the Word asserts "He came unto His own (things), and His Own (Israel) received Him not (John 1:11), and as far as His earthly ministry was concerned, He limited Himself to that nation, for He Himself said:

"I am not sent *but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel*"
(Matt. 15:24).

Paul does not hesitate to state in Romans 9:3-5:

"... my kinsmen according to the flesh (Israel) ... of whom *as concerning the flesh Christ came* ..."

Not only did Christ restrict His ministry to that favoured people, but He limited the twelve disciples likewise, for He commanded:

"Go not into the way of the Gentiles ... but go rather to the *lost sheep of the house of Israel*" (Matt. 10:5,6).

When we come to Romans 15:8,9 we read:

"Now I say that Jesus Christ was a *minister of the circumcision* (Israel) for the truth of God, to *confirm the promises made unto the fathers*: and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy."

And so we are back again at the centre of God's plan for the earth revealed in Genesis 12:1-3, namely, that the Jewish race should be the means of blessing to the whole Gentile world. The Spirit-inspired prophecy of Zacharias in Luke 1:67-79 should also be read in this connexion. To Israel the Lord came as Prophet (Matt. 12:41), Priest (12:6) and King (12:42), but instead of being ready to carry out their Divine destiny, they rejected Him in these three Divine capacities, hardened as they were by unbelief and sin. When He rode into Jerusalem on the colt, Zechariah 9:9 was fulfilled, "Behold, thy *King* cometh unto thee" (Israel) (Matt. 21:5), but the reply of the nation was "We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14). They put their Saviour and King to death on the cross of Calvary, and the title they placed above, although done in mockery, was nevertheless true, "This is Jesus the King of the Jews" (Matt. 27:37).

In view of the clear statements of God's Word as to the purpose of Christ's first coming, we are not left in doubt. He came in God's appointed time to Israel as the great King-Priest, to redeem them from their sins and make them that which God had intended all along they should be, namely the agents for world wide blessing, so that His kingdom might extend to the whole earth. How comes it then that some declare that He came to found the Church? Such an idea cannot be discovered in the Gospels. The Church has an eternally secure place in the purpose of God, but, as yet, it was unrevealed, being a Divine secret, hid in the mind of God Himself (Eph. 3:3,6-9). We must choose whom we are to believe in this matter, God or man. Need we say that it is much more safe and satisfying to believe God and to place our faith in His Word which lives and abides for ever (1 Pet. 1:23). But some may refer to Matthew 16:18 and the statement of the Lord "Thou art Peter, and upon this Rock I will build My church." Much could be said concerning this passage, but only one thing need be stressed now, and that is the tense of the word "build". It is *future*, I *will* build, the Lord said, not I am *now* building My church. He gives no indication as to when, in the future, He would carry out this promise and the disciples had no means of knowing whether it would be in the near future or centuries later. Because we know the facts as history, we must not be foolish enough to read this subsequent revelation into the time covered by the earthly ministry of the Lord. In other words, we must not

read the future into the past. It still stands true, in spite of wrong interpretations of Matthew 16:18, that the testimony of the Lord Himself and the general witness of the New Testament asserts that He came to *Israel the nation* to confirm and bring into being the Divine promise of Genesis 12:1-3.

The earthly channel, however, was choked with unbelief and hardness of heart, and as Peter put it in Acts 2:23, they, by wicked hands, crucified their Messiah and King. Although God in His wondrous wisdom overruled their action, so that on the cross of Calvary He paid the penalty for sin, namely death, and bore away the sins of Israel and all His redeemed people, this did not lessen Israel's wickedness and guilt in murdering Him.

Was this the end of the Divine plan to bless the world through the Jewish race as promised to Abraham? Had sin and Satan triumphed? We dare not guess, but go to the book that continues the story after the crucifixion, namely the Acts of the Apostles.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

When Israel sent their Saviour and King to the Cross, it was obviously a crisis for them of the first magnitude. How could the promise of Genesis 12:1-3 be fulfilled without them? Would God reveal some other way of carrying out the promise that He had made to Abraham by choosing another channel of blessing to the world other than Israel? Or would He postpone this phase of His purpose and reveal something entirely new? These questions are answered in the book that follows the Crucifixion, historically, the Acts of the Apostles.

First of all we note that Luke, who is the writer of this book, makes a reference to his former treatise or gospel (Acts 1:1), and in the Gospel of Luke 24:33-36 we are told of the appearance of the Lord Jesus to the eleven disciples after His resurrection. He then opens their understanding that they might *understand* the Scriptures (45). Luke informs us in Acts 1:3 that for forty days the Lord instructed the apostles in things pertaining to the *kingdom of God*. For a period of six weeks they were favoured to hear the Living Word expound the Written Word! Because of these two things (1) a Divine understanding of the Word and (2) arising from what the Lord had taught them for forty days; "When they *therefore* were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt Thou *at this time restore again the*

Kingdom to Israel!" (Acts 1:6). At the very outset it looks as though these men are led, under Divine teaching, to see that earthly kingdom purposes and Israel's central place therein are still dominant in the revealed will of God.

Please note that to *restore*, is not to commence something new but to bring in *something that existed before*. It is a *continuation* of the same plan that we have seen to be revealed in the Old Testament. The Lord did not rebuke them for asking such a question, for it was the natural outcome of the teaching He had just given them as the word "therefore" indicates. All He said was, in effect, that He could not tell them the *time* when this restoration to Israel would take place (Acts 1:7), and our subsequent studies will make clear why He could not reveal this time element.

The next thing we find in the record is the concern of the eleven to fill the gap left by the apostacy of Judas. The number twelve must be made up. This can be well understood if *kingdom* purposes are still continuing, for in that kingdom when set up, the Lord had made a promise that the twelve apostles should sit on *twelve* thrones judging the *twelve* tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28). Note *twelve* thrones not eleven. Who was qualified to fill such a position? The condition is stated in 1:21,22:

"Wherefore of these men which have companied with us *all the time* that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, *beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that He was taken up from us*, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of His Resurrection."

This agrees with the words of Christ in John 15:27:

"Ye also shall *bear witness* because ye have been with *Me from the beginning*."

The thought here is the capacity to bear personal testimony, from being an eye-witness, to the life and works of the Lord Jesus from the commencement of His public ministry right through to the Resurrection.

Two men fulfilled these conditions, Joseph, surnamed Justus and Matthias (Acts 1:23), and the apostles wisely looked to the Lord to indicate which man was His choice. Matthias was chosen, and the reader should notice that on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit and His Divine Power *rested on Matthias equally with the eleven*, indicating that no mistake had been made in this matter. Matthias was God's choice and the

number 12 (Israel's number) had been restored. Those who talk of "apostolic mistakes" here are really accusing the Holy Spirit of making a mistake and enduing the wrong man.

Then follows Pentecost, and to understand this momentous happening we must remember that this was the fulfilment of the Feast of Jehovah given to Israel in Leviticus twenty-three. First there was Passover and Unleavened Bread, 5-8 (Calvary), then Firstfruits, 9-14 (Resurrection), followed by Pentecost, 15-21 (Restoration). It was also the beginning of fulfilment of O.T. prophecy. Peter asserts in explanation of the happenings of that day:

"This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" (2:16).

In endeavouring to understand the meaning of the Day of Pentecost we shall be wise therefore if we heed these Divine clues and do not go wider than the scope of Joel's prophecy. A study of this book, under the illumination of the Holy Spirit, will do more to give us a correct appreciation of what Pentecost means in the outworking of the purpose of God than all the tradition of men. There, the quotation from this book occurs in a setting of *restoration*. God says:

"I will *restore* to you (Israel) the years that the locust hath eaten" (Joel 2:25).

Verses twenty-six and twenty-seven end up with:

"Ye shall . . . praise the name of the Lord your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you . . . ye shall know that *I am in the midst of Israel*, and that I am the Lord your God, and none else: and My people shall *never be ashamed*."

Then *immediately follow* the words which the Apostle Peter quoted as being fulfilled in Acts 2:16.

This book then reveals the *restoration* and rich blessing of Israel after judgment for her sins and God's punishment of her Gentile oppressors. No wonder the disciples asked the Lord, "Wilt Thou at this time *restore again the Kingdom to Israel?*" (1:6).

We now open the book at chapter three with its record of the healing of the lame man by Peter at the gate of the Temple. That more was intended by God than just the healing of this man is evident by Peter's inspired words. What the Lord had done for the cripple, He was able to do for Israel, tragically lame, spiritually, as they were in their rejection of Christ as Saviour and King. Peter addresses the people of Israel (12-16)

and with great plainness of speech accuses them of killing the Prince of Life and brings home to them the enormity of their crime. Then he says:

“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and *He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you*: Whom the heavens must receive until the time of *restoration* (R.V.) of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets” (19-21).

The importance of verses nineteen to twenty-six can scarcely be sufficiently emphasized, and we ask the reader to weigh them over very carefully. The dying Saviour had prayed for the nation, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Surely, in Acts 3:19-26, we have the answer to that prayer. Israel, who had crucified Him, are called to repent and be converted, when the Lord Jesus would be sent back to them and the time of *restoration* spoken of so fully in the Old Testament (concerning which the disciples asked in Acts 1:6) would *then* set in. Their question “Wilt Thou *at this time restore again* the kingdom to Israel?”, seen in this light, has point and relevance and was the natural outcome of the forty days’ instruction they had received from the risen Saviour. Note, however, the conditions. First *repentance*; this was the clarion call of the forerunner of the King and His Kingdom, namely John the Baptist (Matt. 3:1,2). It was the insistent note of the Messiah when He commenced His public ministry to His earthly people (Matt. 4:17). The word “converted” in Acts 3:19 means to *turn* and this was the continual Old Testament command to Israel for restoration to Divine favour when they had sinned and backslidden.

“When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, *if thou turn to the Lord thy God . . . He will not forsake thee*” (Deut. 4:30,31).

“When the heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against Thee; yet if they pray toward this place, and confess Thy Name, and *turn from their sin*, when Thou dost afflict them; then hear Thou from heaven, and forgive the sin of Thy servants . . .” (2 Chron. 6:26,27).

“Remember, I beseech Thee, the Word that Thou commandedst Thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: *But if ye turn unto Me . . . though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence . . .*” (Neh. 1:8,9).

"The Lord hath been sore displeased with your fathers . . .
Thus saith the Lord of Hosts; *Turn ye unto Me*, saith the Lord of
Hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts"
(Zech. 1:2,3).

In each case the Greek translation of the Old Testament uses Peter's word translated "be converted" for the word "turn". Peter goes on to remind his hearers that, as the chosen race, they were the children of the prophets (Acts 3:25), and he adds:

"and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, *And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.*"

Once again we are back to our key text in Genesis twelve, the Holy Spirit showing plainly that God's plan for the blessing of the earth through Israel was still in mind, if only the chosen channel would repent and turn to Him. We are therefore on safe ground in stating that the events that happened after the Crucifixion are not the commencement of some entirely *new* phase of God's plan, but a continuation of something *old*, namely the revelation given in the Old Testament and the first three Gospels concerning the place of Israel in the mind and will of God as a channel of blessing to the whole earth. This being so, we can understand why the Jew was put *first* during the Acts both for blessing and judgment (Rom. 2:9,10). Thus Peter ends his discourse in Acts 3:26 by saying:

"Unto you *first* (i.e. Israel) God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you,"

and the Apostle Paul, in his speech recorded in chapter thirteen, stresses the same truth. He said:

"It was necessary that the Word of God should *first* have been spoken to you" (Jews, verse 46).

Why necessary unless Genesis 12:1-3 was still in mind? We can now understand why Paul always went to the Jew first during the Acts period (see 14:1, 17:1,10, 18:1-4,19).

We must now pass on to other features. The opening chapters of the book make much of the Resurrection of Christ and this is absolutely fundamental to the whole Christian faith. It is the basis of the gospel of God's grace (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Romans 10:9 asserts "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that *God hath raised Him from the dead*, thou shalt be saved". We do not serve a dead Christ, or a mere figure of history, but a *living Saviour* (Heb. 7:25), and

here we may well pause and ask whether we know in our *experience* that He is alive?

In chapter two of the Acts, Peter gives us an additional reason for the Resurrection. He tells his fellow countrymen on the Day of Pentecost that Christ had been *raised to sit on David's throne*, and we are taken back to God's covenant stated in Psalm 89:3, 28-37:

"I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy *throne* to all generations. . . . My covenant will *I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of My lips*. . . . His seed shall endure for ever, and *his throne* as the sun before Me"

and also to the words of the angel in Luke 1:32,33:

"He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him *the throne of His father David*: And He shall reign over *the house of Jacob* for ever . . ."

Paul likewise states that Christ had been raised to give the "sure mercies of David" (Isa. 55:3; Acts 13:33,34). Thus Israel was reminded that, as heir to the throne of David, Christ was still their King. As such, He had come to them in the flesh. "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee" (Matt. 21:1-5), and here again we have a direct link with the earthly ministry of the Lord to that people. Moreover, in Acts, chapter five, Peter states:

"Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, *for to give repentance to Israel*, and forgiveness of sins." (31.)

It is this great feature of the Acts that has been so sadly overlooked by expositors. The hope and promise of 3:19-26 runs throughout this book as a golden thread and is one of the keys to its understanding.

Passing on to chapter ten, we find the Divine purpose widening to include the Gentile. We cannot help noticing Peter's reluctance to go to the Gentile Cornelius and he obviously needed assurance from God before he took such a step. There are some who would not hesitate to describe his attitude as narrow and bigoted, but we do well to remember that separation from the Gentile nations and their ways was strictly in accordance with O.T. requirements. When Peter said he had never eaten anything common or unclean, he was referring, not to ordinary cleanliness, but to the defilement that would ensue

if he overstepped the commands of the law of God which kept Israel separate from the nations. This Spirit-filled man obviously knew nothing of a company where Jew and Gentile were redeemed and on a perfect equality in every way. Neither did the mother church at Jerusalem, for they pulled Peter up for his action in going to a Gentile and called for an explanation from him. They contended with him and said "Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them" (11:2,3). The Apostle, therefore, had to go over the matter again with the result that the Jews at Jerusalem were convinced that this was of the Lord's will and they recognized for the first time that the Gentiles were now being brought into God's purpose (see 11:18). The next verse however stresses that the Word was preached to none but the Jews only.

We must not make the mistake of thinking that, because the gospel at this point is reaching out to the Gentile, the Jew as a nation is set aside. We have already seen that, when the Apostle Paul commences his ministry *outside* the land of promise (Palestine) i.e. in Asia Minor, he takes great care always to go to the Jew *first*. We ought to ask ourselves, what was the reason for Gentile admission to blessing during the Acts? We would remind the reader that the key text of Genesis 12:1-3 has told us that Gentile blessing was always in the mind of God and that He had never kept this phase of His purpose a secret. The churches of Jewish and Gentile believers that were formed at this time were surely tiny pictures of what God could do for the whole earth through Israel if only they would heed the Divine command and repent! These assemblies were like a first-fruits, a promise of the great harvest to come and were so described by James (1:18). Paul does not hesitate to quote Genesis 12:1-3 in Galatians 3:8,9, describing the blessing of the Gentile believer, and in his speech at Antioch, he stated that, in turning to the Gentile, he was following the word of the O.T.

"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*" (Acts 13:46,47).

This is a reference to Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6. In the latter, it is difficult to determine whether Christ is referred to or Israel, but it is true of *both*, and this verse is used by Paul as a condemnation of the Jews who were opposing. It is important to understand that, during the Acts period, Gentile blessing was *through* Israel and Gentile believers were associated *with* Israel,

but never *apart* from them. "Rejoice, ye Gentiles, *with His people*" (Israel) Romans 15:10. Such were partakers of Israel's spiritual things (Rom. 15:27), and in the symbolism of Romans eleven, they were likened to a wild olive grafted into the true olive tree (Israel), thus sharing their covenant blessings (Rom. 11:17-32). They were reminded that the Jew was still *first*, "thou (the Gentile believer) bearest not the root, *but the root thee*" (verse 18). As long as Genesis 12:1-3 was possible of fulfilment, the Jew, as the chosen channel for Gentile blessing, *must be first*. The inclusion of the Gentile should have stirred up the Jew from his blindness and hardness of heart and "provoked him to jealousy" (Rom. 11:11, 10:19), and this gives us the second reason why the purpose of God was gathering in the Gentile during this period.

We have seen that every step taken in the Acts was according to O.T. revelation, and Paul does not hesitate to declare in Acts 26:22 that his ministry had been strictly in line with the O.T.

"Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying *none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come.*"

To the Ephesian Elders he stated that he had "kept back nothing", but declared *all* the counsel of God (Acts 20:20,26,27). When the Apostle appeared before Agrippa, he tells Agrippa that he was being judged

"for the hope of the promise made of God *unto our fathers*, unto which promise our *twelve tribes*, instantly serving God day and night, *hope to come* (Acts 26:6,7),

and when he reached Rome as a prisoner, he calls the chief Jews together

"because that for the *hope of Israel* I am bound with this chain" (Acts 28:20).

So we see that Israel, and Israel's hope, figure at the end of the Acts as they do at the beginning, and the Divine plan unfolds along the lines already revealed in the O.T. There are at least twenty quotations from the O.T. in this book either in fulfilment of what was then happening, or prophetic of what would take place in the future. Acts chapter two is not, therefore, the beginning of an entirely new purpose, but the continuing of what had already been revealed in the Old Testament books and in the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus to the people of Israel. It

was the continuation of what the Lord Jesus *began* to do and teach (Heb. 2:3).

We hope that our study in the Acts has made it clear that this book is a *continuation* of the purpose revealed in the first three Gospels; that God does not cast aside Israel at the cross; rather than this, Divine love and longsuffering give them another opportunity to repent and receive their Messiah, Saviour and King (Acts 3:19-26). This truth is seen in the parable of the fig tree in the vineyard (Luke 13:6-9). The three years that the Owner came seeking fruit is a distinct reference to the three years of the Lord's public ministry to Israel. In their unbelief and opposition they were indeed "barren", but instead of being cut down, the tree is given further respite.

"Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down" (Luke 13:8,9).

The prayer of the Saviour on the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34) is answered so that the Hands of love are still outstretched to Israel after Calvary. "All day long I have stretched forth My Hands" God says in Romans 10:21, but alas it was still to a "disobedient and gainsaying people".

To them Christ had come in the flesh, divinely attested by miracles that the Old Testament had predicted would characterize the Messiah's ministry. Peter declares in Acts 2:22:

"Jesus of Nazareth, a man *approved of God among you by miracles, and wonders and signs*, which God did by Him in the midst of you."

When John the Baptist's faith began to waver, the Lord referred to these evidential miracles to reassure him.

"Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see, the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up . . ."

(Matt. 11:2-5 and compare Isa. 35:4-6).

The miracles performed by the Lord Jesus were His Divine credentials to Israel. They were *signs*, i.e. they signified truth to Israel who alone possessed the countersign, the Old Testament Scriptures (Rom. 3:1,2). As the purpose of God concerning the Jew does not finish at the cross, but continues throughout the Acts, so do these miracles *continue right through to the last chapter*, and then they abruptly cease. This was the fulfilment of the promise given by the Lord in Mark 16:17,18:

"These *signs* shall follow them that believe; in My Name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover."

All these things were features of the Acts period, but have not been characteristic of this present age. Thus the Lord confirmed the Word with "signs following" (Mark 16:20), or as Hebrews 2:4 puts it, "God also bearing witness, both with *signs and wonders, and with divers miracles . . .*"

These signs were therefore a confirmation to those of Israel who believed (1 Cor. 1:6,7), and a Divine witness against those who believed not (1 Cor. 14:21,22). As long as the chosen people exist as a nation before God these miracles continue, but when they are set aside in unbelief at the end of the Acts of the Apostles, evidential miracles cease. This will explain why they have not been in evidence during this age of Grace in which we live. During the Acts even a handkerchief sent from the Apostle Paul was sufficient to heal miraculously (Acts 19:11,12); afterwards he has to leave Trophimus at Miletum sick (2 Tim. 4:20), and Timothy was advised to take a little wine for his often infirmities (1 Tim. 5:23). Epaphroditus was sick unto death (Phil. 2:26,27), yet the Apostle cannot heal him. Something crucial had evidently happened at Acts twenty-eight!

Just as the Jews *in the land* had received the Divine offer of forgiveness through Peter's ministry and that of the eleven apostles with him so Paul, *outside the land* in Asia Minor, had gone to the Jew first. When he reached Rome, as his custom was (Acts 17:2), he called together the chief of the Jews (Acts 28:17) and again expounded the theme of the Kingdom to them from the Old Testament Scriptures (23), explaining that he was "bound for the *hope of Israel*" (20), all of which is nonsensical if Israel, as a nation, had been cast aside by God at the Crucifixion and Israel's hope impossible of fulfilment during the Acts. The result of the conference is seen in verses twenty-four and twenty-five; still there was no unanimous response to the Truth, and then follow the terrible words from Isaiah six, quoted for the third and last time in the New Testament pronouncing upon the Jew blinded eyes, dulled ears, and a hardened heart, which state has characterized Israel ever since.

"And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy

Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted (turned, see 3:19), and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the *Gentiles*, and that *they will hear it*" (Acts 28:25-28).

A few years after this their city Jerusalem was sacked by the Romans and they themselves scattered from their land. The salvation of God is then *sent to the Gentiles* entirely apart from Israel, who, up till now, had been the chosen channel of blessing to the earth (Gen. 12:1-3).

Thus the time covered by the Acts is intimately linked with the earthly ministry of Christ to Israel and is an offer of forgiveness and restoration to that favoured people (3:19-26). Hand in hand with this goes the widening of God's plan to include the Gentile and the proclamation of the gospel of His Grace both of which had been revealed in the Old Testament (see Rom. 1:1,2). However, there is a phase of Truth that had been kept "hid in God" (Eph. 3:9) described as a *secret* (mystery) and therefore *cannot be found in the Old Testament*. Up to this point it had not been revealed and must of necessity be different from what we have already seen otherwise words have no meaning. Happy and favoured are we if we have had opened eyes given to us, the spirit of revelation (Eph. 1:17) to believe and acknowledge this wondrous unveiling of Truth beyond all the expectation and imagination of the human mind.

CHAPTER III

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST AND THE ACTS PERIOD.

THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM.

THE DIVINE PURPOSE UNFOLDED DURING THE ACTS

We saw in the previous chapter that one of the leading features of the Acts of the Apostles was the Divine offer of forgiveness and restoration to the nation of Israel (3:19-26). These words should be carefully pondered until their truth sinks into the heart and mind. Two features must now be emphasized. In verses nineteen to twenty-one of the Revised Version, we read the Divine command given through Peter's lips to the "men of Israel".

"Repent ye therefore and turn again (be converted) . . . that *He may send the Christ* Who hath been *appointed for you*, even Jesus: Whom the heavens must receive until the times of *restoration* (cp. 1:6) of all things, whereof God spake by the mouth of His holy prophets."

From these verses two things must be clear, (1) that the Jewish nation still takes a vital part in the setting up of the kingdom of God on earth, which kingdom and restoration had been graphically described by "His holy prophets" in the Old Testament and concerning which the disciples had inquired in chapter 1:6; in other words our key text of Genesis 12:1-3 is still in the forefront; (2) that if they will repent and turn to God, their terrible sin of crucifying their Redeemer and King would be forgiven and *He would then be sent back to them*.

The importance of this promise is tremendous. It means that there was the possibility of the Second Advent of Christ there and then. This possibility hinged upon the response of Israel. No one living at that time knew whether the nation would repent or not. We know now as a fact of history that the Jew did not repent and therefore Christ did not return. However, we must not make the mistake of reading subsequent happenings into previous events. This is a very common error among Christians. We can now understand why the Lord Jesus did not

answer the disciples' question in Acts 1:6, "Lord, wilt Thou *at this time* restore again the kingdom to Israel?" The Lord's answer is usually interpreted as meaning "no"—but a careful reading of His words shows this to be wrong. What He actually said was "It is not for you to know *the times*" (verse 7), for God was too wise to reveal to the Jew beforehand that he would *not* respond to the Divine offer of forgiveness and restoration and so excuse his unbelief.

If the Second Advent was a possibility during the Acts, we shall expect the epistles written during this period to reflect this truth. Let us see. 1 Thessalonians 1:9,10 records that the Thessalonian saints were "*waiting* for His Son from heaven" and Paul does not hesitate to include himself among those who are "*alive and remain* unto the coming of the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:15-17). The second epistle was written to the same Christians to correct false impressions concerning the Lord's Second Coming, but it was still described as "their gathering together unto Him" (2 Thess. 2:1), and details are given concerning the man of sin and the end-time apostasy. Those believers who were suffering trial and oppression were taught that they would obtain "rest" from this, not at death, but at the *revelation* of Christ from heaven (1:7).

Coming to 1 Corinthians we have in 1:6,7 "so that ye come behind in no gift; *waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*". In 7:29 "... *the time is short*: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none". Why? 1 Corinthians 16:22 "*Maranatha*"; *the Lord cometh* (margin), yet after the Acts period the apostle urges widows to marry (1 Tim. 5:14). To the Roman believers Paul wrote "the God of peace shall *bruise Satan under your feet shortly*" (16:20). "The night is far spent, *the day is at hand*" (13:12). In Hebrews 10:37 "For yet a *little while*, and He that shall come *will come and will not tarry*". To these references we must add the testimony of Peter, James, John and Jude. "The end of all things is *at hand*" (1 Pet. 4:7); "The coming of the Lord *draweth nigh* . . . the Judge *standeth before the door*" (James 5:7-9); "*The Lord cometh* with ten thousands of His saints" (Jude 14); "It is the *last time* . . . (literally the last hour) *even now* are there many antichrists whereby we *know that it is the last time (hour)*" (1 John 2:18).

There is, therefore, abundant Scriptural testimony to the reality of the promise in Acts 3:19-26 to send back Jesus Christ, and the reason He did not return then was not that believers

were indifferent and unready, or that they made a mistake in expecting His early return, *but that Israel did not obey God's command to repent and turn to Him*, and so have been laid aside temporarily in unbelief. We say temporarily, advisedly, for Scripture assures us that the "gifts and calling of God are *without repentance*", i.e. change of mind on His part (Rom. 11:29). He has assured us that *He will not alter His promise to David, His seed and His throne* (Psa. 89:34-36). "God hath *not* cast away His people which He foreknew" (Rom. 11:2) and so one day "*all Israel* shall be saved" (11:26) when their Deliverer—the Lord Jesus, returns and turns away their ungodliness according to the covenant that He made with Abraham and David (Rom. 11:27 and cp. Jer. 31:31-37, especially note verses 36 and 37 with its challenge to Creation, thus giving the nation of Israel eternal security).

The Jew has passed nearly 2,000 years in spiritual darkness, but this is drawing to a close, and the return of Christ to the earth, which was a possibility through the Acts but afterwards postponed, will yet take place in power and great glory (Matt. 24:26-30).

Meanwhile, what has happened during the time between Israel's laying aside and being taken up again by God? Is there a blank in the purposes of God? Such a thing is impossible. If we have grasped the true import of the purpose revealed in the Acts and seen the failure of Israel at the end of it, and then turn to Paul's epistles written *after* this time, we shall find a revelation of truth that exactly fits in with this age which is predominantly *Gentile*. We shall discover too, a revelation of a different phase of God's purpose, this time relating to the *heavens* and not the earth; the making known of a secret kept hidden in Himself while His plan through Israel was being worked out. Here we shall find overflowing riches of grace and glory to us Gentiles, who by nature are "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise" (Eph. 2:11-13).

Before we can leave the Acts of the Apostles there is another aspect of truth that must be touched upon. We trust it has been made clear that from Genesis twelve onwards we have the revelation of God's plan to bless the whole earth through the Lord Jesus Christ and His earthly people Israel. In fact, this earthly phase of the Divine purpose takes up the greater part of the Bible. During this span of time, however, God revealed

something greater and higher for the response of faith. Genesis 13:14-17 and 15:18 define the extent of the earthly inheritance of Abraham and his seed, which was to be secured for them in and through Christ. But Hebrews eleven gives us additional information concerning which the O.T. is silent. "By faith Abraham . . . sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country . . . *for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God*" (8-10). And not only Abraham, but multitudes of his seed who lived and died in faith emulated his example and of them it is said "they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: *for He hath prepared for them a city*" (16). This city is referred to and named in 12:22 "Ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, *the heavenly Jerusalem.*"

The book of the Revelation describes this city in detail with all its glory and gorgeous colouring (21:10-27). There is a feature which we do well to notice. Though an *heavenly* city, yet it *does not remain in heaven*. Three times in this Book we are reminded of this fact by the Holy Spirit:

"Him that overcometh . . . I will write upon him . . . the name of the city of My God, which is new Jerusalem, *which cometh down out of heaven from my God.*"

"And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, *coming down from God out of heaven.*"

"And he . . . shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, *descending out of heaven from God*" (Rev. 3:12; 21:2,10).

These verses describe the heavenly Jerusalem as *descending from heaven to the new earth*, so that finally its goal is an *earthly* one. Here then is a sphere of blessing for the redeemed which is of necessity different from the land given to Abraham. No believer can surely doubt, as he reads the stupendous words of Revelation twenty-one, that this sphere is higher and more wonderful than the piece of land promised to Abraham, and this is confirmed by Hebrews 11:16—"Now they desire a BETTER country, that is, an heavenly". God Himself describes this as being *better*, and to Abraham therefore He must have revealed this higher sphere of glory. Being strong in faith, Abraham responded by believing all that God had shown him. Is *our* faith like this? Are we anxious to discover and accept by faith the *best* things of Divine revelation in the Word of God? Or do we hang back and remain content with just being saved

by grace? The epistle to the Hebrews says "let us *go on* to full growth" (perfection 6:1) and not *draw back* to perdition (10:39), and God's people have always been divided into two classes. There are those believers who grow in grace and knowledge of the truth and whose faith reaches out to the best and highest that God has revealed in His Word. These go on in faithfulness regardless of any suffering or loss that this course of action entails. For them at the end there is not only the free gift of eternal life, *but a reward*, described as a *prize or crown*, whose wonder is beyond conception (Phil. 3:13,14; 2 Tim. 4:7,8).

The other class of believers, though saved, do not grow spiritually. They are more attracted by the world and all it offers. It is the NOW they want; the hereafter with its rewards is unreal and means little to them. Such are described in 1 Corinthians chapter three. They are on the One Foundation—Christ—but are building upon Him with the shoddy materials of the flesh and the world and in the day when every man's work shall be tested by the fire of the righteous judgment of God, they suffer loss of reward, even though they themselves are saved (15). On the other hand those believers who have progressed and whose work "abides", receive a reward (14). Let us distinguish these two different though parallel lines of truth. Salvation is a free gift by grace and received by faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8,9). It is not by works and cannot be earned by merit. It is eternally secure in the Lord Jesus. In contrast to this, reward for service *is* earned by the believer. It is dependent on his Christian witness and walk and practical response to the claims of truth. Such reward can be lost by unfaithfulness or sowing to the flesh (Col. 2:18, 3:24,25; Rev. 3:11; 1 Cor. 3:14,15). The believer cannot *work for* his salvation, but he learns by grace to *work it out* in practice to the Lord's glory (Phil. 2:12,13) with the future day of testing in view. Any amount of Bible difficulties and false teaching today is caused by confusing these two differing aspects of truth or by emphasizing one at the expense of the other.

The believers described in Hebrews eleven belong to the latter category. They not only believed God for salvation, but all His revelation afterwards and were willing to go to the extremes of suffering to obtain that *better* country and city, the heavenly Jerusalem and the *better* resurrection attached to it (35) (See verses 32-40). Like Moses, they had respect unto the *recompense of the reward* (26).

So we see that this higher sphere of blessing is for the faithful from Abel's time onwards, through Abraham's seed, and down to the time of the Acts of the Apostles. It was brought before the saved of the Pentecostal period and held out to them as a *reward* as well as to believers of the Old Testament days. Their hope, as we have seen, was Israel's hope, the kingdom of heaven established on the earth; their prize the *better country*, the Jerusalem which is to come down from heaven to the new earth at the goal of the ages.

CHAPTER IV

PAUL'S PRISON LETTERS FOLLOWING THE ACTS PERIOD

We are now in a position to see a consistent line of teaching from Genesis twelve onwards. After the world disorganization and failure of the nations recorded in Genesis chapter eleven, we have one man, Abraham, and his seed picked out by God to be a channel of blessing to the whole earth. They were to be a priestly kingdom (Exod. 19:3-6), holy intermediaries between God and the nations, dispensing His laws and His truth. Although they forfeited all this under the first covenant of law, yet it is guaranteed to them under the New Covenant which is age-abiding and one of grace (Jer. 31:31-37, 32:37-42, 33:25,26; Isa. 59:20,21, 60:1-5, 11-16, 19-22, 61:5-11, 62:1-5). The Old Testament is the long historical record of their Divine preparation to fulfil this role. In the fulness of time, God sent His Son and He came to be their Saviour and King—the great King-Priest. “Behold, thy King cometh unto thee” was fulfilled (Zech. 9:9; Matt. 21:4,5), but they put Him to death on the cross of Calvary. In His infinite patience and mercy God calls the nation, through Peter’s lips, to repent and turn to Him (Acts 3:19-26) when He would send back their Messiah to them. Note again how our key text of Genesis 12:1-3 is quoted (verses 25,26) showing that it was still capable of fulfilment and was not made to Christ personally apart from the nation of Israel. Rather than this, Christ and Israel, as the seed of Abraham, are linked as *one* in the Divine purpose and in this way the great promise for world blessing was to be carried out. And so it was necessary for this nation to have the message *first* (Acts 3:26, 13:46).

Then the purpose widens and the Gentiles are brought in and saved, the assemblies thus formed being first fruits or small fore-shadowings of the great time when *all* the world shall be blessed through Israel. The admission of the Gentile was also to stir up the Jews, still obdurate in unbelief, and provoke them to jealousy (Rom. 10:19-21, 11:11), thus seeking to wake them up from their blindness and unbelief. Peter and the eleven take the

message to the Jews in the land of Palestine. Paul takes the message to the Jews living *outside* the land, turning to the Gentile in each place where the message was rejected by the earthly people of God. He, as well as Peter, reminds them of the truth of our key text (Gen. 12:1-3) by 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*" (Acts 13:46,47; Isa. 49:6. See p. 37).

As the history of the Acts unfolds we see no indication of Israel responding to the Divine offer of mercy and forgiveness. On the contrary they treated God's servants spitefully and slew them (Matt. 22:5,6). Stephen is murdered. Peter and Paul are imprisoned and so the melancholy story goes on to the last chapter. Although Israel's hope is still referred to (Acts 26:6,7, 28:20), Paul is commissioned to pronounce spiritual blindness, deafness and hardness of heart on this sinful nation and so at last they go out into the darkness that has been their condition all through this age in which we live. From Genesis twelve to Acts twenty-eight the Jew has been in the forefront of God's purposes; now he is laid aside temporarily in unbelief. *This means that God must have some new method of dealing with mankind*, otherwise the Devil would have triumphed and His plans would have been frustrated. Either He has appointed a fresh channel through which to bless all the families of the earth or He has revealed another aspect of the purpose of the ages through Christ. Only the Word of God can settle this for us. At the beginning of the Acts the word was sent to Israel alone, because of their prior place. Then as the Gentile was brought in to share Israel's blessings we read:

"Children of the stock of Abraham, and *whosoever among you feareth God*, to you is the word of this salvation sent" (13:26).

At the end of this book we have:

"Be it known therefore unto you (Israel), that the salvation of God is sent *unto the Gentiles*, and that they will hear it" (28:28),

that is, to the Gentile independently now of the Jewish nation.

This age is predominantly a Gentile one, so can we find any Scriptures written *after* the Acts (recording Israel's setting aside) which are addressed specifically to Gentiles without being associated with Israel nationally? Can we find a N.T. writer

who is commissioned by the Ascended Christ to minister to Gentiles alone? The answer is "yes", and that man is the Apostle Paul. After the Acts period Paul wrote seven more epistles. They are Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Titus, Philemon, 1 and 2 Timothy.

In Ephesians 3:1 we read "I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ *for you Gentiles*" and, verse eight, "that I should preach *among the Gentiles* the unsearchable riches of Christ." Colossians 1:27, "To whom God would (wills to) make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery (secret) *among the Gentiles*"; 1 Timothy 2:7, "I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle . . . *a teacher of the Gentiles*"; 2 Timothy 1:11, "I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a *teacher of the Gentiles*"; 2 Timothy 4:17, "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." The words "Jew" and "Israel" are conspicuously absent from Paul's prison ministry.

Here then is what we are seeking, a mouthpiece for the Ascended Christ with a message for us who are Gentiles by birth, showing exactly where we stand in God's plan if we are saved by His grace and believe what He has written. No other N.T. writer makes this claim. Paul pre-eminently is the Apostle of the Gentiles; it is in the epistles mentioned above that we have the highest aspects of truth revealed for this Gentile age, the wonderful superstructure resting upon the Death, Resurrection and Ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is to Paul's prison ministry after the Acts we must turn if we want to understand the truth that is peculiar to this age. It is not the *foundation* that has changed, for the Lord Jesus Christ is the "same yesterday, and today and for ever" (Heb. 13:8). The basic truths concerning sin, salvation by grace, sanctification and allied foundation doctrines never change, and the earlier Scriptures that deal with these great themes obviously are still true today. What has happened is that the *Divine superstructure* has changed, or to put it another way, consequent on Israel's failure, God has revealed *another phase of His plan*, this time touching the highest heavens and not the earth. This revelation rests as securely on the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ as the earthly plan revealed in the Old Testament and the earlier New Testament writings, which we have been considering in the previous chapters. He alone is the Centre

and Circumference of all the purpose of the ages, relating to the universe. We wish to stress this lest we shall be accused of limiting our Bible to the seven epistles of Paul written after Acts twenty-eight. We need *all* Scripture for our instruction (2 Tim. 3:16), but we leave to God the right to reveal different aspects of truth in His Word at the time when His infinite wisdom decrees. We shall honour Him by recognizing this fact; we shall dishonour Him and confuse ourselves and others if we fail to do so.

We are now in a position to approach the writings of the Apostle Paul with the consciousness that through them we have the message of the exalted Christ to us and "for us Gentiles". As we search the seven post-Acts epistles, we shall look in vain for the repeated references to the Jew—to Israel nationally, and to Abraham as found in the earlier writings. The word "Jew" only occurs once and then negatively (Col. 3:11); Israel twice, once negatively and the other looking back to Paul's unconverted days (Eph. 2:12; Phil. 3:5). References to Abraham are nil. We are dealing with a new calling which has no connexion with the nation of Israel or to the promises made to the fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. On the other hand, we shall certainly discover aspects of truth that are unique and not found elsewhere in the range of Scripture, which is what one would expect if dealing with a new phase of revelation.

(1) *Time period*—"Before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). The church of this calling was chosen in Christ before the beginning of time and the overthrow of the world. 2 Timothy 1:9 and Titus 1:2 literally read "*before* age times". No other company of the redeemed are associated with such a period. The expression is only used elsewhere of Christ Himself (John 17:24; 1 Pet. 1:20). Other companies of believers are said to belong to that aspect of the kingdom which has been prepared by God *since* the foundation of the world (Matt. 25:34). "Before" an event, and "since" an event cannot refer to the same time if words mean anything at all. This church has the greatest "look back" into the past.

(2) *The title*.—"The church, which is His Body, *the fulness* of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:23). Here is a title, gigantic in conception. In Christ Himself dwells all the *fulness* of the God-head bodily (Col. 2:9) and each member of this company is *filled to the full* (complete) in Him (10). Christ is the *fulness* of God. This church is the *fulness* of Christ and each individual

member is *filled to the full* in Him. What a trilogy of truth! and how we need the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit to grasp to any degree the reality lying behind these words. Such language is above anything given to Israel, wonderful though their blessings were.

(3) *Status*.—Ephesians 3:6 gives the relationship of each redeemed member of this company. In the original Greek there is a three-fold emphasis on equality which is lost in the Authorized Version. Literally it reads that the Gentiles should be "*joint-heirs and a joint-body and joint-partakers of His promise in Christ.*" Here is complete equality between Jew and Gentile at last. The Jew as a nation has gone with all the privileges they had in the flesh (Rom. 9:3-5). In the flesh the Jew had the first place in God's purpose and the Gentile was an alien from the commonwealth of Israel (Eph. 2:11,12), he was an outsider (Matt. 15:24-27). This church, however, is taken out of the realm of the world and flesh and blessed in the sphere of *spirit*, in the heavenlies where Christ sits in glory. Consequently all earthly distinctions vanish. Jew and Gentile cease to exist as such and Christ is *all* (Col. 3:10,11). Although the Pentecostal Church had a perfect standing in Christ, the Gentile believer had no such equality, for he was taught that he was but a wild olive grafted in to the true olive tree (Israel) and that he did not bear the root, but the root (Israel) bore him (Rom. 11:17,18). In other words the Jew was still *first* (Rom. 1:16, 2:9,10). The Church of the Mystery has a new and unique constitution. It is a *new creation*—not an evolution (Eph. 2:14,15 where the word "make" should be translated "create"). It is a *new man* and its goal is to grow to a full grown male (A.V. perfect man Eph. 4:13). May God give us the spirit of perception (Eph. 1:17) in order that we can distinguish what He has made to differ (Phil. 1:10 margin) and so be in a position to receive by faith the things in His Word which are *more excellent*.

(4) *The sphere of blessing*.—This is described as being *in heavenly places* (Eph. 1:3). The reader will notice that the word "places" is in italics and has therefore been supplied by the translators to make sense. Some have questioned the accuracy of this and have put forward the idea that this phrase does not refer to place but to a spiritual experience in the life of the believer. When Christ has become all to the child of God in his experience, then, we are told, he is in the heavenlies. The accuracy of this statement can easily be checked by noticing

how this phrase is used in this epistle. It occurs five times (1:3,20, 2:6, 3:10, 6:12), and the next reference takes us to where Christ is stated to be raised and seated at the Father's right hand *in the heavenly places* (1:20). Now the Lord Jesus must be localized somewhere for He has a glorified body. The disciples saw Him leave the earth bodily and were assured that He would return in the same way (Acts 1:9-11). In Him, at the present time, dwells all the fulness of the Godhead *bodily* (Col. 2:9), and believers look forward to the day of glory when they shall have bodies fashioned like His glorious body (Phil. 3:21). He is presented as sitting at the right hand of God the Father (Col. 3:1), and Ephesians 1:20 assures us that the right hand of God is in the *heavenly places*. So the Authorized Version is correct.

The Lord Jesus has been exalted to the highest pinnacle of glory, and the phrase "in the heavenly places" is only another way of describing this supreme sphere. Elsewhere this is described as being "far above all heavens" (4:10). Now Ephesians 1:3 assures us that the members of this most favoured company of the redeemed have been blessed with every blessing that is spiritual *in this same sphere*. And if this was not tremendous enough, 2:6,7 goes further and asserts that such are not only raised but *seated together where He is in the same heavenly places*. Chapter 1:20 gives us a *seated Christ* in this highest of all spheres and 2:6 a *seated church there also in Him*. It is impossible to get higher than the glorified Christ and so we come to the CLIMAX OF DIVINE REVELATION IN THE WORD OF GOD, so far as the redeemed are concerned. This revelation is so overwhelming that it leaves the human mind completely staggered. No wonder Paul prayed that the Ephesian believers might know something of God's exceeding great resurrection power; that they might be strengthened with might by His Spirit (3:16). In and of ourselves we are utterly inadequate to fully grasp anything so tremendous as this. It is no wonder that Christians stumble at such teaching and many frankly do not accept and believe it. If the reader thinks this is exaggerated let him try to pass this truth on to other believers and note their attitude. He will probably be pulled up with a jolt! But this must not affect our reception of, or our witness to God's truth. Let us humbly bow in His holy presence with utter thankfulness and realize that the least we can do is to *believe what He has said*. Anything less than this makes Him a liar and shows the basest ingratitude.

The phrase "in the heavenlies" occurs only in Ephesians and so is another feature that is peculiar to this calling. The word "heavenly" occurs frequently throughout the New Testament, but we must learn to distinguish what is heavenly *in character* and what is not only heavenly in character but *in sphere of blessing* as well. For instance the Hebrew believers of Asia Minor were described as having "tasted of the *heavenly* gift" (Heb. 6:4). The gift was heavenly in character, but they certainly did not taste it *in heaven* or *in the heavenlies* where Christ sitteth. This epistle reveals a seated Priest at the right hand of the Majesty on high (1:3, 8:1), but we shall search in vain to discover a seated church there with Him.

We can say that the blessings of Ephesians 1:3 and 2:5,6 are unique. They are part of the tremendous revelation of the Lord Jesus given through Paul to us Gentiles who believe in Him. Why is it then that so few believers today have any real heart-felt appreciation of these things? Blindness, tradition, spiritual laziness and the confusing of the differing purposes of God revealed in His Word all contribute to this sad state of affairs.

Even the Ephesian saints must have found this new teaching a challenge to their faith for early in the first chapter the Apostle Paul prays that *they might have the veil removed from their eyes*, and be given divine understanding to receive these exceeding riches of truth (1:17,18). The "spirit of revelation" in verse seventeen is literally the spirit of *unveiling*. The fact is that so many read the Scriptures with veiled eyes and its words remain just words and nothing more.

If we have been led to receive the spiritual wealth of Ephesians, what shall be our response but to live in such a way that will bring glory to His Name, and seek to witness and pass on these unsearchable riches to others so that they may share in our supreme joy.

CHAPTER V

THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

Chapter One

We have previously noted in the Scriptures (1) God's purpose for Israel to be a channel of blessing to the whole world as linked with the Kinsman Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ; (2) Their preparation in the Old Testament and earthly ministry of the Lord to them; (3) Their failure in crucifying their Saviour and King and after the further offer of mercy extended to them throughout the Acts; (4) Their laying aside in unbelief and hardness of heart as a nation at the end of the Acts, thus fulfilling Isaiah 6:9,10 (Matt. 13:13-15; Acts 28:25-27); (5) The revelation of a purpose God had hitherto kept completely hidden from previous generations (Eph. 3:3-6,8,9; Col. 1:26), predominantly Gentile and revealed through the Apostle of the Gentiles, Paul, in his Roman prison; (6) The foundation truths that bind this calling to all other callings of the redeemed, i.e. redemption and sanctification by the precious blood of Christ; (7) The unique truths which are *peculiar* to this new calling of the Church which is the fulness of Him that filleth all in all, but, nevertheless, securely based upon the foundation of Christ crucified, risen and ascended to the Father's right hand in the heavenly places.

As we grow in grace and in spiritual perception we shall see that, just as Israel was to be used in carrying out God's plan for the earth, so this church is linked with God's plan for the heavens. The confusion that exists today in Christendom is largely because these two differing purposes are muddled and misunderstood. The first epistle, after Acts twenty-eight, that reveals this heavenly calling is the Epistle to the Ephesians, and from it we shall attempt to lift out some of the main features which stand out like precious jewels to all who have eyes to see and hearts to believe. In chapter one, verses three to fourteen form a section divided by the phrase "the praise of His glory" in verses six, twelve and fourteen. Verses three to six commence 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 thirteen and fourteen the *Holy Spirit* of promise is brought before us, giving the *earnest* of our inheritance here and now. This, then, is the outline of this wonderful section in which the Triune God is engaged to bless us beyond all our conception.

Let us look at verses three to six a little more closely. We are assured that our God and Father has blessed us with *every blessing that is spiritual* and that these are *in heavenly places*, which further on is identified with the *right hand of God*. When God blessed Israel He gave them *earthly* blessings because they had an *earthly* inheritance. In Deuteronomy 28:2-6 they are given blessings of the field, cattle, basket and store, but these would be of little use to us whose destiny is heavenly places where Christ is seated! Consequently our Heavenly Father suits the blessing to the sphere where it will be enjoyed. We have spiritual blessings because our eternal home is a spiritual sphere, far beyond the limitation 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. How vast must this be! We have no adequate conception with the limitations of our small finite minds. But at the very beginning of Ephesians we are met with staggering realities. We can only thankfully believe and receive the truth that God has written.

Where will these blessings be enjoyed? They are in "heavenly places" and in our past studies we have seen that this phrase describes the highest pinnacle of glory where Christ has been exalted. They are secure in Him there, and there alone will they be enjoyed by this company of the redeemed when their hope is realized.

Next we have three important truths in verse four. First of all the Father's choice, "according as He (the Father) hath chosen us"; then the Father's object, "that we should be holy and without blemish", and, thirdly, the Father's motive, "in love". The word "chosen" is the word "elected". We face election early in this epistle. Election in Scripture comes after God's foreknowledge which deals with His wondrous capacity of knowing all things before they come to pass (Rom. 8:29; 1 Pet. 1:2). God chooses or elects the part that all the redeemed shall play in the great plan of the ages, leading back to a sinless and perfectly restored creation in heaven and earth. Instead of looking on this doctrine as something to argue and disagree

about, let us see in it our divine security in Christ and that we shall one day fulfil just the role He intends in the heavenly places far above all. We have been elected in Christ "before the foundation of the world". As we have previously shown, this is a unique phrase applied only to the saved of this calling. Other callings have blessings prepared "*since* the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). However many millions of years back this takes us, whatever the span of time, Ephesians 1:4 teaches us that before even this we were foreknown and chosen by our Heavenly Father to this destiny in the glory of heaven's holiest of all. We cannot fully grasp these tremendous realities, but let us rejoice in their truth and in their wonder. God forbid that in any of us there should be an evil heart of unbelief. May we go in to possess our possessions.

Now follows the Father's object "that we should be holy and without blame 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 blame" for we are born into this world as sinners, lost, 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 such a thing is absolutely impossible. "There shall in no wise enter into it *any thing that defileth*" (Rev. 21:27) is written of the new creation of heaven and earth in which *dwelleth righteousness* (2 Pet. 3:13).

In view of the Father's object, our present sinful condition calls aloud for the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ which we have brought before us further on in this chapter of Ephesians. This is mentioned again in 5:25-27 where the words "holy and without blame" 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 glorious company shall stand "before Him", or literally, "before His face" without spot or wrinkle or any such thing (5:27). Or as Colossians 1:22 expresses it, "to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight"; "in His sight" and "before Him" being the same word in the original. What a

perfect standing is described here to be able to endure the all-searching eye of a thrice holy God, yet nothing less than this is the destiny of this Church, because the Father has willed it. And what is the Divine motive behind it all? Certainly nothing of merit in ourselves, but His matchless Divine love, a love that Ephesians 3:19 declares to be "surpassing" or that "passeth knowledge". It is an ocean without bounds that leaves us wondering with amazement however far we plumb its depths. May we go on to know more of it in our experience day by day.

We pass on in chapter one to verse five where we have three more distinct steps mentioned. (1) The Father's predestination—*us*; (2) The Father's object—*adoption*, and (3) The Father's motive—"the good pleasure of His *will*". We have referred to God'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 a glorious position described as "the adoption of children". To understand this we must cast from our minds the modern ideas of adoption. No adopted child today however much love and care is lavished upon it can be a real child of the parents. But by redemption and grace we are most certainly real children of God. "Beloved, now are we the sons (children) of God" (1 John 3:2 and see John 1:12) and not only this, but in the most favoured position of the *firstborn son*, for as Sir William Ramsay has shown, the Greek word *huiiothesia*, translated adoption, was the legal term in N.T. times, appointing the heir to the inheritance—the position of the firstborn—and in this way it would be understood by the Ephesian believers. This church has the *firstborn's* position and inheritance in the heavenlies where Christ sitteth—for so the Father has predestinated. What tremendous glory this involves we can have little conception of here and now. We only see now "as in a glass darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12), but in resurrection likeness to the Ascended Christ, the reality of all this will be infinitely beyond our present dreams. Principalities and powers and all heaven's nobility will then yield place to this church of glory, for ever linked and seated with the One Who is above them all, and every name that is named (Eph. 1:21). This predestination of the Father is truly "through Jesus Christ" (1:5) and the motive behind it all is the Father's "good pleasure".

Super-abounding love and good pleasure are the only reasons given for choosing and willing that we should have such a tremendous place in God's plan for the highest heavens, but

they are all sufficient and we can rest securely in them by faith, being filled with joy unspeakable as we contemplate what the future holds for us in Christ. No wonder praise follows! "To the praise of the glory of His grace" (verse 6) as it also does in verses twelve and fourteen. Eternity will never exhaust this anthem of praise to the God Who has wrought so wonderfully for us.

Praise at the revelation of the Father's will as revealed in chapter 1:3-6, ends with the glorious fact that He has made us accepted in the Beloved One, the Lord Jesus Christ. The word translated "made us accepted" contains the word for "grace". The Father has "graced" us with all the graces of the Beloved One. Clothed with God's righteousness and all the acceptableness of Christ no wonder it can be stated that we shall be "holy and without blemish" (verse 4) before Him. But such a perfect condition cannot be attained apart from the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ—for there is the ugly fact of our sin to be reckoned with and how it can be righteously put away. Consequently verse seven reads on "In Whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace". Sin brings bondage, uncleanness and death which the redemptive work of the Saviour on the Cross of Calvary has cancelled for every one who trusts completely in Him. The word which is rendered "forgiveness" has already occurred twice in Luke 4:18, where it is rendered "to preach *deliverance* to the captives" and to "*set at liberty* them that are bruised", deliverance and liberty for those who are held captive by sin. Here is a jubilee indeed! "If the Son sets you free, you will be *really* free" (John 8:36, Moffatt). Free from sin and self and free to serve Him as He wills, such is the glorious redemption work of the Lord Jesus, which comes to us "through His blood".

The precious blood of Christ is not prominent, alas, in modern theology, but it is nevertheless fundamental to the truth of salvation. Scripture asserts that the "life of the flesh is in the blood" (Lev. 17:11) and at Calvary the Lord poured out His blood and laid down His life, paying the penalty of sin, which is death (Rom. 6:23). He was "made . . . sin for us, Who knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21)—dying in the stead of all those who put their faith in Him. Thus, without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Heb. 9:22). This sacrificial death is the great basis upon which the redeemed of all callings rest, whether they are

blessed on earth or in the heavenlies. And it is all according to the "riches of His grace". The prison ministry of the Apostle Paul is full of references to riches and we commence with riches of *grace*. Grace occurs 150 times in the New Testament. Peter uses the word ten times, John six times, but Paul ninety-five times! Paul is pre-eminently the Apostle of grace—God's favour to the undeserving! Grace has saved us (Eph. 2:5,8), to every member of this church grace is given to serve acceptably (4:7) during this dispensation of grace (3:2), and we look forward by faith to experiencing the "exceeding riches of His grace" in the ages to come (2:7). No wonder verse eight of chapter one reads "the riches of His grace wherein He hath *abounded* toward us". This word rendered "abound" is used of rivers *overflowing*, and like this, grace has been poured out towards us in Christ Jesus. Grace is no mere trickle but, since Calvary, is like an overflowing torrent—the riches of which leave us "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). God has revealed His infinite wisdom and prudence in making known to us something that belongs to His *secret* will. The word mystery in the N.T. does not mean that which is puzzling or mysterious but what is *secret*. Till secrets are disclosed they are unknowable. When declared, they can be apprehended and understood in some measure at least. This is the characteristic of God's secrets. When He hides, who can find? When He reveals and opens the eyes of our understanding we can know. In the context with which we are dealing, 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 in this event *God had provided a Saviour*, for that would have only countenanced his sin. Redemption was kept by the wisdom of God in His *secret* will. Nevertheless Christ was foreordained as the slain Lamb 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.

Again God's good pleasure is brought before us in making this glorious fact known and then it looks on to the distant future when, according to His plan (verse 9), in the dispensation of the *fulness* of times, He (the Father) might gather together in one all things in heaven and earth in Christ. In one mighty

sweep we are carried forward to the goal of the ages. The words "that He might gather together in one" are literally that He might "head up again" all things (*ta panta*, the all things) in Christ. It is God's purpose that the whole of His restored creation from the highest heavens to the lowest earth shall stand in the Headship and power of the Lord Jesus. Then the fulness of the seasons will have arrived. This is the Divine 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. Here is the mighty goal to which God is working and in the calling of this church we have a miniature picture of this glorious consummation, for *now* Christ is *Head* and we are the *fulness* of Him that filleth all in all (verses 22,23).

After bringing before us the mighty work of redemption by the precious blood of Christ in Ephesians 1:7-10, we are taught that this not only assures deliverance from the power and stain of sin, but gives us an *inheritance*: "in Whom (Christ) we have obtained an inheritance" (verse 11). All the redeemed of God are assured of an inheritance *somewhere* in the restored universe when a new heaven and earth come into being. "If children, then *heirs; heirs of God*" (Rom. 8:17) is gloriously true of all who have come into family relationship to God through Christ. Redeemed and restored Israel will have their inheritance upon the *earth* as their O.T. prophets vividly portray. Some will find their inheritance in the *Heavenly Jerusalem* which finally leaves the heavens and descends to the New Earth (Rev. 3:12, 21:2,10).

The inheritance of Ephesians is not connected with either of these spheres. It is in the *heavenlies where Christ is enthroned and seated at the Father's right hand*. The glory of this inheritance cannot be measured in earthly terms or anything material. It is entirely beyond our present experience or understanding. Its wonder is so tremendous that God has not made any attempt to describe it, for had He done so, it would mean practically nothing to us. We can be assured, however, that this future glory is the highest and best that God has to give. We do well to keep this permanently in mind. The enemy may dangle his tinsel before our eyes in order to turn our gaze away from this goal—but wise are we if we do not allow him to side-track or ensnare.

Verse eleven also brings before us again God's predestinating purpose or plan, which has been alluded to in verses four, five and nine. Ephesians truly reveals God's plan for the heavenlies

just as the O.T. reveals His plan for the earth. How assuring to realize these can never miscarry! "He works all things after the counsel of *His own will*" (11). All around us we see the wreckage that man's sin and failure has brought. Trouble, uncertainty and distress are everywhere, but His Plan goes forward silently and with absolute certainty. Nothing can frustrate it—for Christ's redeeming power lies behind it all. These glorious facts bring us to the theme of praise again: "that we should be to the praise of His glory, who first trusted in Christ" (12). God will have all the praise at the conclusion of the ages, for to Him alone it is due. We are said to be among those who "first trusted". The word "trust" is sometimes rendered "hope" and should be so here. We "first hoped" in Christ, "first" being either a mark of time or dignity. Both are true in this calling. This hope, when fulfilled, will place each member of the Church of the Mystery in the glory where Christ is now seated. By faith we are there now (Eph. 2:6). Then faith will be lost in sight and we shall be "manifested *with Him in glory*" where He is (Col. 3:4). This is truly a blessed hope and beyond all the expectations of the human mind (Titus 2:13). The joy of its anticipation should be with us each day, animating heart and mind and urging us to practical service while the day of opportunity lasts.

In the verses that follow we quote from the R.V., which gives the tenses of the verbs more accurately than the A.V. "In Whom, ye also, having heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation,—in Whom, having also believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (13). The A.V. rendering places the sealing some time *after* both hearing and believing the gospel, whereas the R.V. correctly connects this with the moment of believing and salvation. There is no justification in these verses for what is sometimes called the "second blessing"—a special experience subsequent to salvation.

We now enter the third phase of the revealed plan for the heavenlies. The Father has set this forth in His will (3-6); the Son has redeemed us to make that will gloriously possible (7-12); and now the Holy Spirit's work in *sealing* and giving us an *earnest* of the inheritance, is brought before us (13 and 14). The first aspect is that of *sealing*. This brings before us the figure of a legal document. This document is not valid until the seals have been properly affixed. Then it is, as we sometimes say, "signed, sealed and settled", *the transaction is completed*, and it is this fact we are now taught. In 4:30 (R.V.) we are urged not

to grieve the Holy Spirit of God in Whom *we were sealed unto the day of redemption*. Here is another rock of assurance under the believer's feet. This phase of the Holy Spirit's work is God's guarantee that every chosen one in this church will reach the goal in the heavenly places that He has willed. 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 and disappointment here and now, and perhaps Divine disapproval later on, but *God's seal cannot be broken*. We were sealed unto the *day of redemption*—and that day will surely be attained. Not only were we sealed at the moment of salvation, but the Holy Spirit is described as an *earnest* of our inheritance. The inheritance in all its fulness in the heavenlies is now secure in Christ (11) and will be entered in experience in resurrection glory. Till then we have the pilgrim pathway to tread leading towards Home, and it is during *this time* that we can enjoy the *earnest* or *foretaste* of this inheritance as revealed by the Spirit.

The word rendered "earnest" is interesting. In Genesis 38:17, 18,20 it is used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the O.T., to render the word "pledge". In a slightly different form it meant an engagement ring—a pledge of marriage—and was used by the Phoenicians to signify the first instalment of a payment which would be made in full later one. Just as God gave Israel a "first instalment" as it were of the good land of Canaan 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 here and now glimpses of the coming glory, and these are a Divine pledge that God's will and plan cannot be frustrated. *The goal must be reached*. Now we have the *firstfruits* of the Spirit (Rom. 8:23). Then it will be the *reality* where Christ is—exalted to the Majesty on high.

We have now reached a point in this epistle where the Apostle Paul pauses in his teaching. We have had presented to us a view of the Father's will and choice, the Son's work of redemption, and the Holy Spirit's sealing and giving the earnest or foretaste of the glories to come in the heavenly places. And now Paul begins to pray for the Ephesian saints that the doctrine may become real and experimental to each one. The position that prayer occupies in the life and walk of the believer is so important that we must stop 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 "abour 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.

We now come back to Ephesians to examine the Apostle Paul's prayer as recorded in 1:15-23. Earlier on in the chapter he had revealed wondrous teaching concerning the new calling of the Church—the Fulness of Him that filleth all in all—as it related to the Father's will, the Son's redemptive work and the Spirit's present witness. Now he goes no further but commences

to pray, as if to say that this supreme truth must be assimilated and made experimental in each heart before further doctrine could be unfolded. He first of all asserts that his prayer for the Ephesian saints was continuous, I "cease not to give thanks for you making mention of you in my prayers" are his words. He also said the same of the believers at Rome and Colossæ (Rom. 1:9; Col. 1:9) and to Timothy as well (2 Tim. 1:3). Intercession for others must be "without ceasing" otherwise it will be of little value. This will cost time and patient continuance, but results will follow to the Lord's glory. Paul's prayer is divided by two main phrases: verse seventeen "... The Father of glory, *may give . . .*", verse eighteen "... that ye *may know . . .*". The order is most important. The Father must *give* before it is possible for any one of us to *know* the Truth. In each case three things follow. "The Father of glory, *may give unto you* (1) the spirit of wisdom and revelation; (2) in the knowledge of Him; (3) the eyes of your understanding having been enlightened; *that ye may know* (1) what is the hope of His calling, and (2) what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and (3) what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe."

If we are ever to realize in any measure the truth presented in Ephesians we shall first of all need *wisdom*. In James 1:5 we have the encouraging promise that this will be given liberally to all who lack it, and so the seeker after the treasures given through Paul's prison ministry must start here. These cannot be apprehended or reached by human cleverness or education and this is emphasized by the next word that the Apostle uses, namely, *revelation*. This is the word that gives the title to the last book in the Bible—the Revelation. It literally means *unveiling*, to remove the veil from the eyes. Why is it some Christians do not apprehend the riches of grace and glory contained in God's Word? It may be because there is a *veil over their eyes*. They read the *words* of Scripture but miss the *truth* that lies behind them. We have a cunning enemy who seeks to veil truth from the human heart (2 Cor. 4:3,4). Many do not see the truth of the great secret made known (Eph. 3 and Col. 1), and this may be the reason. *We must have opened eyes and the veil removed*; in other words the spirit of revelation. Like the Psalmist, we should continually pray for "opened eyes" to behold "wondrous things" in God's Word (Psa. 119:18).

The Apostle goes on to link this wisdom and revelation with the knowledge of Christ (verse 17). To get to *know* Christ was

his great ambition (Phil. 3:10), and his keen desire was for the Ephesian believers to do likewise. Not merely to know *about* Him, but to come to a deeper and experimental knowledge of Him—our Head in glory. The word “knowledge” is sometimes translated “acknowledge” (1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Tim. 2:25; Titus 1:1). This is going somewhat deeper than knowledge itself for it touches the practical outworking of truth. The practical “acknowledgment” of Christ and His claims should surely follow the “knowledge of Him” and for both of these Paul prays. He goes on, “having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may *know* what is the *hope* of His calling” (Eph. 1:18 R.V.). Calling and hope are linked together in Scripture and one is the fulfilment of the other. God’s gracious plan calls the redeemed to a certain position in the coming glory, and hope when realized 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. A heavenly calling will have a heavenly hope. Such is the one concerning which the Apostle prays. This church has no permanent ties with the earth; it is linked with its Ascended Head in the glory of heaven’s holiest of all. When its last member is gathered in by grace, it will be taken and joined with Him *there*. Then will its marvellous hope be realized. No wonder this is called a “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13). Each day we can live, looking for its fulfilment (12) and using Paul’s prayer, we can have a greater and clearer conception of it, getting to know “what is the hope of His calling” (Eph. 1:18) and the “one hope of our calling” (Eph. 4:4) which is centred in the highly exalted One in the heavenly places at the right hand of the Father.

Paul has prayed that the Ephesian believers might know what is the hope of His calling, the realization of which will unite them and each redeemed member with the Lord Jesus, their Head, in glory. He goes on, “and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (Eph. 1:18). God’s earthly people, Israel, were chosen to be His inheritance. They were delivered from the bondage of Egypt for this purpose (Deut. 4:20). Fancy the Almighty limitless God stooping down to find His inheritance in frail human beings! Yet such is His matchless condescension. Redeemed Israel will yet be His inheritance on the earth, and in the same way the church which is His Body will be His inheritance *in the heavenlies where Christ is seated*. God decreed to Aaron that he should have no earthly inheri-

tance, "I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel" (Num. 18:20). Aaron had something more wonderful than any Israelite with his portion in the land, *an inheritance in God Himself*. We are like this; no earthly inheritance is ours. The Lord finds His inheritance in us and we find ours in Him at the Father's right hand.

The words "in the saints" occur in Hebrews 9:8, but are translated "the holiest of all", referring to the most holy place in the Tabernacle behind the veil which contained the ark, mercy seat and cherubim of glory (9:5). The Greek can read either as holy people (saints) or holy things (holiest of all). The two divisions of the earthly tabernacle were but figures of the real ones in heaven itself (8:5; 9:24) which Christ entered when He ascended "far above all". Consequently, Ephesians 1:18 could read "that ye may know what . . . is the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the holiest of all"—the innermost shrine of heaven. This wording is so tremendous that it baffles written explanation. We can only get to know more of its truth as we appreciate what the Lord's Ascension means and His seating at the Father's right hand, the majesty on high (1:3). One thing we can be assured of is the glorious fact that our Heavenly Father has made us sufficient to be partakers of this "inheritance of the holiest of all in the light" (Col. 1:12). Contrast 1 Timothy 6:14-16 and realize afresh what the Father's purpose and the Son's redeeming work has accomplished for us.

The third thing that the Apostle prays for is that the Ephesian believers might know what is the "surpassing greatness of His power to usward who believe" and this is explained as being the mighty power that raised Christ from the grave, took Him to glory and seated Him at the Father's right hand in the heavenly places, above every heavenly being and every name that is named. Again we are confronted with something that is colossal. We are living in an age of *power*. The unredeemed human mind is discovering the tremendous power that the Creator has locked up in matter and it is afraid of its discoveries—for it is coming to realize that humanity is not fit for such knowledge. Hence the growing fear all over the world. But tremendous though atomic power is, it is not great enough for one thing. *It cannot give life to a dead body; it cannot conquer death*. But the power to which Paul referred *can* and *did* in the Lord's case when He was raised from the dead. And it is *this power* that the Apostle prays that we might get to know. It is to

“usward”, it is for all our needs as we walk the pilgrim way and seek to serve our Saviour faithfully. What problem or difficulty is there then that cannot be solved with its almighty aid? But we must go further and note it is to “usward *who believe*” (Eph. 1:19). 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 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. So simple faith appropriates this tremendous force and relies upon 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 to be sufficient for the problems, of every day. We shall then be able to say with the Apostle, “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 force they can become a “plain”.

We can, therefore, go forward in confidence, realizing afresh that, if Christ and His 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.

Chapter one of the epistle to the Ephesians ends with the glorious fact of the ascended Christ Jesus enthroned 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 (Phil. 2:9), 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), and every knee in heaven, earth and under the earth, shall bow to Him and confess that He is Jehovah, the 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. Anticipating somewhat, we find that in Ephesians 2:4-7 God’s plan is for this Church to be associated

with Him *there*, for its members have been made alive, raised and seated with Him by Divine reckoning where He is now in the heavenly places. This is tremendous to grasp. No wonder the last verse links it with the surpassing riches of His grace, and we do well to remember that to no other calling of the redeemed is such a mighty promise made.

CHAPTER VI

THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

Chapters Two and Three

Chapter two starts with a reference to the past (verse 2) and this is repeated in verse eleven. Twice the Apostle takes us back to the time before we were saved, with its unbelief and ignorance. Some truths can only be adequately set forth by contrast. The supreme exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Church which is His Body is like an exceedingly precious jewel that shines all the more resplendently when set against the darkness of sin and death. And so Paul reminds us of what we once were by nature, sinners, walking according to the course of this world, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and the mind and under the domination of the "ruler of the authority of the air" (Satan, verse 2). In other words, we were children of wrath even as others who know not God and His way of salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. This contrast throws a vivid light on the condition of the unsaved. All such are being "energized" by Satan—although unknown and unfelt by them. They imagine that they are doing what *they* want, but verse two reveals that they are doing what the *Deceiver* wants. And we would remind our readers that the Satan of Scripture is not the horned and hoofed monster of Christendom, urging men and women to gross acts of wickedness. He is the "angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14) who is quite willing for all to go on even in respectability and refinement of outlook, providing they do not come *into living contact with the Saviour of sinners*. It is possible that this attitude correctly describes the reader of these lines. Where are you placing your faith? In good living, church going and service for others? Or perhaps in living just as it appeals to you? Or is your hope and trust in Christ and Him alone? Only He can break this domination and "in-working" of the prince of the power of the air in the lives of the unsaved. And He waits to be appropriated as Saviour and Deliverer in this age of grace and opportunity which appears to be so fast running to its close. There is no other way of escape (John 14:6). Ephesians 2:1-3 bids us look back and see the condition we were in "by nature",

helpless and hopeless. Then the great reversal (verses 4-7) bursts in with its mighty upward sweep to the heavenly places where Christ is now seated. God Himself, animated by His rich mercy and exceeding great love and grace, makes us alive, raises us up together and seats us together in the glory of heaven's holiest of all in Christ Jesus. No greater wonder or contrast can be imagined. Unless God had revealed this to be the truth, it would be blasphemy for the human mind to entertain it. *But it is true*, and what God's saved children need today is deliverance from blinded eyes and a heart of unbelief which fails to take God at His Word.

The Apostle now takes another glance back into the past (verses 11-13), this time from a different angle. Instead of stressing our condition under Satan's domination, he reminds the Ephesian believers and ourselves that "in time past" *we were outside God's appointed channel of blessing—the nation of Israel*. In these studies we have ever endeavoured to make clear that God chose Israel to be a means of blessing to the whole world (Gen. 12:1-3). They were to be a "kingdom of priests" and so dispense His light and truth to the nations. To them Christ came in the flesh (Rom. 15:8; Matt. 15:24; John 1:11). To them alone God gave the covenants and the promises and the service of God (Rom. 9:3-5). The Gentile believers could partake of Israel's blessings as a nation only as a "wild olive" grafted into the "true" (Rom. 11:17). They could be blessed on earth *with Israel and through Israel*—but never *apart from Israel*.

Ephesians 2:11,12 reveals how great was our dispensational distance as unsaved Gentiles. We were the uncircumcision, out of covenant relation with God (Gen. 17:9-14). We had no Messiah (Christ) as Israel had (Rom. 9:5). We were aliens from Israel's commonwealth and strangers from the covenants of promise; hopeless and Godless in the world which lieth in the Evil One (1 John 5:19). What a terrible condition when we add to this the state in Ephesians 2:1-3. Again the great reversal: "But now in Christ Jesus you who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (13). So near that we are identified with Christ in death, burial, resurrection, and being seated in the heavenlies and the closeness of this union is illustrated by the figure of Head and Body (Eph. 1:22,23). During this age Israel has ceased to be a nation (until recently), being scattered in judgment over the face of the earth. There has been no covenant people for us, as Gentiles, to be

grafted into. God has revealed a new purpose connected with heaven itself—a secret which He now wishes to make known to His children (Col. 1:27), and the epistles of Ephesians and Colossians are dispensing it. Have we eyes to see and hearts to believe? Can we sing with truth “So near, so very near to God, nearer I cannot be, for in the Person of His Son, I am as near as He?”

Having considered the position of the Gentiles by nature from two angles, the Apostle goes on to show that in the Body of Christ all that would separate the Jewish and Gentile believer has been cancelled by the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus. Ephesians 2:14 states that He is our peace and has made both “one” and abolished the middle wall of partition between us (Jew and Gentile). This “wall of partition” is described as being connected with “commandments in decrees” (literally). The word “ordinances” has nothing to do with ritual or the Lord’s Supper. What are these commandments or decrees that separated the saved Jew from the saved Gentile? To understand this we must go back to the book of the Acts.

When God’s purpose began to widen according to Genesis 12:1-3 and Gentiles were gathered in, special problems began to arise. Particularly was this so regarding the position of the law of Moses and the Gentile believer. The saved Jew had no problem over this. He was taught that while the Law had been set aside as regards salvation, yet it could still be a standard for his Christian life, for if he was walking according to God’s will, which of the commandments could he break? He had “Moses” preached and read in the Synagogue every Sabbath day (Acts 15:21). But the Gentile was a convert from paganism and heathen darkness; how far was the law of Moses to apply to him? The question became more acute as some from Judæa had gone so far as to teach that salvation was impossible apart from circumcision after the Mosaic law (Acts 15:1). This forced Paul and Barnabas to take the matter to the mother Church at Jerusalem and Acts fifteen is a record of what took place. This chapter makes it clear that in their final decision they were specially guided by God, so that human opinion was ruled out. “It seemed good *to the Holy Ghost*, and to us” (15:28). Their decision was this; that the Gentile believer should not be asked to observe the whole law, but only four necessary points enumerated in the twenty-ninth verse. These four commandments were taken by Paul and Timothy to the assemblies they

visited, and in Acts 16:4 they are called "decrees", using the same word as in Ephesians 2:15.

The result of this was that there were two standards of conduct relating to the Law in the churches of the Acts period, the Jewish and the Gentile, the Jewish being necessarily higher than the Gentile with only four "necessary things" to observe. While they were both "*one* in Christ Jesus" as regards their *standing* as believers *in Christ*, yet in *practice* they had two standards which could never make for unity.

But Ephesians 2:14-17 teaches that in this new calling of the Church of the Mystery all such distinctions have been abolished. They were like "a middle wall of partition" that separated, and Christ Himself has broken this down, so that there can be a practical peace between each member of the Body whether Jew or Gentile, for there is now only *one* standard of Christian walk as is laid down in Ephesians four to six.

The next great truth that the Apostle emphasizes is *access to the Father* (18). This is an unspeakable privilege and one that Christians are apt to take for granted. If we go back to the Old Testament we shall find that God condescended to dwell with His people Israel in the Tabernacle of which the Holiest of all was filled with His Divine Presence (Exod. 25:8). Yet Israelites as a whole were born, lived and died *without having once had access to this most holy Place*. The tribe of Levi came nearer and served in the outer court of the holy place of the Tabernacle, but *never* did they enter beyond the Veil into the Holy of Holies where God dwelt. Aaron the High Priest, as a type of Christ Himself, did so, but then only *once a year* on the day of Atonement (Lev. 16). So we see that free access to God's presence was practically unknown during the time covered by the Old Testament.

A thrice holy God surrounded Himself with type and shadow that barred access to Himself. What a glorious reversal we see in this heavenly calling! For "through Him (the Lord Jesus) we both (Jew and Gentile) *have access* by one Spirit unto the Father" (Eph. 2:18). All restrictions are gone and now we are encouraged to come *boldly* to the Throne of Grace (Heb. 4:16, 10:19,20) and with *confidence* because of the faith of Christ (Eph. 3:11,12) and all He has been made to us in redemption. In past studies we have seen that prayer gives us this great privilege of coming by faith into God's Presence. May this glorious experience never cheapen in our estimation. On the other hand

may we realize more and more the wondrous position of the Lord Jesus as the *One Mediator* (1 Tim. 2:5), the only way to God, and through Him continually draw near in fellowship, prayer and praise.

As chapter two of Ephesians draws to its close there is a great emphasis upon the thought of God *dwelling* in this church of glory. First of all we are assured that we are no longer outsiders (strangers and foreigners) but fellow citizens with the saints; or it could be translated "fellow citizens of the Holiest of all", and we have seen something of what this tremendous statement means when we considered chapter one (verse 18) where the Apostle prayed that the Ephesian saints might know what were the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the Holiest of all, and also Colossians 1:12 where the Father has made us sufficient to be partakers of the Holiest of all in the light.

Then Paul directs our thoughts to the One foundation, Christ Jesus, on which the Divine building rests. What eternal security is here! And then the silent building-up process by the Holy Spirit, each saved member being likened to a living stone. Gradually the building grows as each member is saved and enlightenment given and "fitly framed together" with the other members and put into his Divine place with the one object that, when completed, this building may be a "*dwelling place* (habitation) *for God*" (22). What a goal, a house for God in the highest glory! It will be the *permanent home* of God, for He is now fashioning this Church to become "a holy Temple in the Lord" (21). Ephesians 2:22 continues "In Whom ye also are builded together *for an habitation (dwelling place) of God* through the Spirit".

The Creation (Isa. 40:22), the Tabernacle in the wilderness (Exod. 25:8) and the Temple were only anticipations of this glorious dwelling place for God, and just as the Temple was entered into by God and filled with His glory when completed, so the Body of Christ, when the last member has been gathered in, will merge into the holy Temple, and, in a richer sense, become "the Fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:23).

This Church will have found its permanent home in the heavenly Holiest of all with the Lord Jesus Christ where He is now enthroned and He will have found His home in this Church of glory, now transformed into a holy Temple for His dwelling place.

We are again dealing with the "surpassing" things of Paul's

Prison Epistles, that seem too good to be true, and for the present are beyond our complete understanding. But God cannot lie and does not exaggerate.

The consideration of the exceedingly precious truth of the closing verses of Ephesians chapter two caused the Apostle Paul to pray. This can be seen by noting the opening words of chapter three: "For this cause". For what cause? nothing less than the building up of this church to be a Temple and dwelling place for God in the highest glory of heaven's Holiest of all (2:19-22). After verse one the Apostle digresses to explain his own position as the "prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles" and then resumes his intention in verse fourteen "for this cause I bow my knees unto the Father". So again we are reminded of the importance of prayer. Should not the contemplation of Truth always lead us to our knees?

When Paul describes himself as the "prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles" he was giving himself a unique title. He *could* have regarded himself as the prisoner of Rome, but, knowing he was completely in the Lord's will in being where he was, he could rise above the trials of the situation he found himself in and call himself the "prisoner of Christ Jesus", the Lord's prisoner (2 Tim. 1:8). How comforting it must have been for the man of God to see the Lord's hand overruling all pertaining to him. And so it should be for us, however dark the pathway, if we know He has led us there!

But not only this, he insists he was a prisoner "for you Gentiles". Again and again he refers to his Gentile ministry (1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 4:17) realizing he was the mouthpiece of the Ascended Christ to us who are Gentiles. In this he was separate from the Twelve with their ministry to the Circumcision (Israel).

In Paul's writings we have truth for the times, a revelation given by God "in its own season" (or due times) which is *now* (Titus 1:3; 1 Tim. 2:6,7). If we want the highest and best that God has revealed, this is where we shall find it.

Ephesians 3:2 goes on "If so be ye have heard of the dispensation of that grace of God which was given me to you ward" (R.V.). The Revised Version margin points out that the word dispensation could be rendered "stewardship". It is important to avoid using this word dispensation as though it means a period of time. It is a "stewardship" or, being put in trust with some phase of God's Truth and its practical administration.

Of this Paul was very conscious, realizing the revelation of

Truth brings responsibility to God. And this is true for every one of us who believe God's Word.

If our eyes have been opened to see the glories revealed through Paul's Prison Ministry, then God has given us a "dispensation" or sacred stewardship for which one day we shall be asked to give account to Him. Will it be as faithful or unfaithful stewards we shall stand before Him? That depends on whether we have diligently and faithfully sought to witness and pass on to others what has been committed to us. Paul asserted that his aim was to "*make all see what is the dispensation (stewardship) of the Mystery* (3:9 R.V.) and he exhorted Timothy to commit or pass on the truth he had received to other faithful men (2 Tim. 2:2). How can we expect a knowledge of the Truth to spread if we who believe it remain silent? May God deliver us from such an unworthy attitude. One of our greatest longings should be that others should share the glorious things that God has revealed to us.

Note then that 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 Mystery (3:9 R.V.).

Ephesians 3:3 expands the stewardship of grace given to Paul into the revelation of the Mystery which he was given by Christ Himself. At his conversion the Lord had stated that he was to be a witness of those things he had been shown, and also of a revelation he would receive in the future, "those things in the which *I will appear* unto thee" (Acts 26:16). The Lord had kept His word, and now the Apostle by inspiration writes what he had received. He calls it a "mystery". In our modern English this means something puzzling or mysterious, but as we have before pointed out, the original Greek word means a *secret*, something which cannot be known until it is revealed, but when it has been disclosed, it can be received and understood.

In verse four Paul refers to another secret, the mystery (secret) of *Christ*. Thus we have two that we must not confuse, a secret concerning Christ the Head and a secret to do with the Church, His Body.

The secret of Christ he had "written before in few words" (verse 3). There is no need to go outside this epistle to find this. At the close of chapter one we have the revelation of the surpassing glories of the Resurrection and Ascension. This secret has to do with Christ's exaltation "far above all" the human

mind can conceive. It was a greater degree than had ever been revealed before.

The unique place that Christ has in the plan of the ages started in a small way in Genesis as the Seed of the woman and then, like a mighty river, gradually widens as by type and shadow He is set forth in the O.T. till it comes to a tremendous climax in the revelation given through Paul the prisoner of the Lord.

Truly he could say that it was not made known in other ages, as (or to the degree) that it has been *now* revealed to his holy apostles and prophets, others sharing with him in this knowledge. However, the Ephesians could test Paul's own knowledge of this in what he had just written and doubtless they would recognize that he eclipsed them all.

The secret of Christ occupies the last part of verse three and goes on to the end of verse five. (The A.V. is manifestly wrong in putting the second bracket after verse four seeing that it is joined to verse five by the word "which").

In the sixth verse the Apostle returns to the secret concerning the *Church* and begins to unfold its Truth. In Colossians 1:24-26 he again refers to the special stewardship of God given *to him* which he describes as the Secret (mystery) hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints. In this revelation Paul stood alone. It is significant that no other N.T. writer uses this word mystery in connexion with the saved of this age or claims to make known this special stewardship.

Let us note the terms used. Being a *secret* (mystery A.V. Eph. 3:3), it was "hid from past ages (time) and generations" (people) Colossians 1:25,26. It was a stewardship (dispensation) which had been "hid in God" (verse 9). We do well to get a clear understanding of the implication of these words. God had kept this phase of His purpose a *secret*. He had hidden it in past time and from all previous generations of people. He had completely hidden it "in Himself". But now He had revealed it to the Apostle Paul to make known to His saints, and this faithful servant of Christ was at this time endeavouring to make "all see what is the stewardship of the Secret" (Eph. 3:9). This being so, it is complete unbelief to say it can be found in the Old Testament or in any Scripture previous to the point where Christ made it known to Paul.

It cannot refer to salvation or the proclaiming of the gospel, for this was never a secret, but had been "promised afore by

His prophets in the Holy Scriptures", i.e. the Old Testament (Rom. 1:2). It cannot refer to the fact that the Gentiles were to be blessed with Israel, for this had been made known as the will of God in Genesis 12:1-3 and many other passages. No one knew the Old Testament better than Paul and at least we can give him credit for knowing these facts when he wrote the epistle to the Ephesians.

Yet again and again the Mystery is brushed aside by Christian expositors and preachers as being nothing more than the gathering in of Gentiles for salvation and blessing in the Christian Church. No wonder that the supreme truth of the present age is largely unknown among the people of God today. We can only keep on sounding out the unique glories of this high calling and pray that many of God's children will be stirred to search the Prison Epistles of Paul and discover them as we have done.

Ephesians 3:6 goes on to describe the characteristics of the Mystery. In this verse there is a threefold emphasis on perfect equality between Jew and Gentile in this calling doctrinally and dispensationally. We quote from the Revised Version which shows this more clearly than the Authorized. "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" (6,7). As sinners, Jew and Gentile were on the same level and needed the same Saviour and the same salvation. But we must remember that the Jew as a nation was in covenant relationship with God which went back to unconditional promises God had made to their fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Rom. 9:3-5). This gave them superiority over the Gentiles; and as long as they were the covenant people before God, it must be "to the Jew first". When at last all Israel shall be saved (Rom. 11:25-27) and this covenant position is fulfilled, Israel will be "a Kingdom of Priests" and the first nation upon earth as Isaiah sixty and sixty-one clearly testify. There cannot be perfect equality between Jew and Gentile while this covenant relationship between the Jew as a nation and God is in operation. The Gentile is then described as an outsider and an alien (Eph. 2:12). The best that can happen is for the Gentile believer to be likened to a "wild olive tree" grafted into the true (Israel) and to partake of the "root and fatness of the Olive tree" (Rom. 11:17,18). But such were reminded that it was the "root" that bore them, not vice versa (18) and that they would be "cut off" if they did not continue in goodness.

This was the dispensational position of the Gentile believers in the church of the Acts period. The threefold equality of Ephesians 3:6 could not have been used of them with truth. Not until the covenant people Israel had passed off the scene at the end of Acts and with them, their covenant privileges, could the new revelation be given of a hitherto hidden calling, in which Jew and Gentile are blessed outside the realm of the earth and the flesh (Israel's sphere), in the realm of spirit at the Father's right hand in the heavenly places far above all (Eph. 2:4-6). THERE is absolute equality in every way. THERE they are sharers together of the *inheritance* of the Holiest of all in the light (Col. 1:12; Eph. 1:11), they are *fellow heirs*. THERE they are equal members together of Christ's Body, and thus *fellow members of the Body* (literally a Joint-Body), and they share equally in the promise treasured up in Christ and made known through Paul's prison ministry, *fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus* through the good news whereof he was made a minister (3:6).

This holy calling is connected with a unique time period as far as the redeemed are concerned. "God, Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus *before the age times*" (2 Tim. 1:9). This is very parallel with our election in Christ "*before the foundation of the world*" (Eph. 1:4). As we have seen this time period is only used elsewhere of Christ Himself (John 17:24; 1 Pet. 1:20). All other companies of the redeemed are connected with the time period "*since the foundation of the world*" (Matt. 25:34). "Before" an event must be different from "since" an event. God's elective purpose for the Body of Christ goes back into past eternity and is connected with His plan for the heavens.

The Mystery (Secret) is a secret no longer. Colossians 1:27 assures us that *God wishes to make it known* among the Gentiles with its riches of glory beyond the dreams of the human mind. *God wants* to reveal what He had previously kept completely hidden. How many of His children want to know and understand? Alas, it would appear that many do not!

We have now considered the revelation of the two great Secrets revealed in Ephesians three, namely, the Secret of Christ the Head (verse 4), and the Secret concerning the Church which is His Body (verses 3,6,7). All truth brings responsibility to make it known to others and no one realized this more than the

Apostle Paul. With regard to the gospel of God's grace which had been entrusted to him, he said "woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:16). Now, with the added responsibility of the stewardship of the Mystery, he states his aim in Ephesians 3:9:

"To make all men see what is the dispensation (R.V.) of the Mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God."

No wonder this faithful servant of the Lord could say:

"I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you, *all* the counsel of God" (Acts 20:26,27).

If only God's people today would exhibit such a spirit and seek to spread the Truth that has been so graciously revealed to them and so *acknowledge* in a practical way the teaching of the Lord, how many more might be rejoicing in the unsearchable riches of Christ!

The Apostle goes on to declare that the making known of God's Secret concerning the Church which is His Body was in line with the great plan of the ages made in Christ and that even now the nobility of Heaven, principalities and powers, are learning through this Church God's manifold wisdom. The importance then of this revealed Secret can scarcely be overestimated. If these great heavenly beings are learning through its revelation, how much more should we be also! Not only is the plan of the ages centred in Christ Jesus, but verse twelve goes on to teach us that in Him we have "boldness and access with confidence". What language of encouragement to sinners saved by grace! And how frequently we ought to avail ourselves of this glorious access into the presence of God by prayer! The basis on which such wondrous privilege rests is the "faith of Him" (Eph. 3:12). The word faith is often synonymous with *faithfulness*. It is the utter faithfulness and unchangeability of Christ and His redemptive work which is the rock foundation upon which these truths rest; nothing in what *we* are or what *we* do, but everything in what *He* is and what *He* has accomplished for us. All that is revealed through the Apostle Paul, the Lord's prisoner. What his tribulations meant to him we can never know, but he does not complain, rather he exults in them, knowing they were in the Lord's will for him, so that he could be the prisoner of Christ Jesus *for us Gentiles* (3:1), and he desires that the Ephesian saints should not faint either, as they contemplated his sufferings (13).

Verse fourteen with its words "for this cause" brings us back to verse one. The Apostle has digressed in verses two to thirteen to explain and reveal the two great Secrets we have been considering; now he returns to his theme. The glorious close of chapter two, verses eighteen to twenty-two, bringing before us the goal of this Church to be a holy Temple and dwelling place for God in heaven's Holiest of all, so overwhelms him that he is led at once to prayer. "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (3:14). So likewise the contemplation of these wonders should bring us to the same experience. If we do not pray over these glorious truths, how can we ever expect to enter into them experimentally and know them for ourselves?

This second prayer of Ephesians has points of correspondence with the first in chapter 1:16-23. Both of them commence with the Father *giving something*. In chapter one it is the "spirit of wisdom and revelation (unveiling) so that understanding may follow", in chapter three it is that "He would give you, according to the riches of His glory," to be strengthened with might (16), so that the indwelling of Christ may follow, the experience preparatory to being filled up to, or unto all the fulness of God.

The two prayers stress a resulting *knowledge*; chapter one "that ye may know what is the *hope* . . . what the riches of the glory of His *inheritance* . . . and what is the *exceeding greatness* of His *power* to us-ward who believe" (18,19). In chapter three it is to know the *surpassing love of Christ* (3:19). Both prayers refer to something *exceeding*; *power* in 1:19 and the *love of Christ* in 3:19 which "passeth" or exceeds knowledge. The power in chapter one is *resurrection* power. In chapter three this same mighty force is stated to "*work in us*" (20). The goal of the first prayer is the revelation of the Head, the Lord Jesus seated far above all and the Church which is His Body, His *fulness* (1:22,23). In the second prayer the Apostle prays that the Ephesian saints might be filled unto, or with a view to, the *fulness* of God.

In these two passages we reach the highest level of praying in the New Testament on the part of the believer. They are models to each one of us, not to use slavishly in vain repetition, but with a measure of Divine understanding. Without such praying an experimental knowledge of this high calling of God in Christ Jesus will elude us. Let us ponder over them more. Prayer along these lines will widen the bounds of our spiritual experience and

cause us to grow in grace and knowledge. While we do this our calling will become clearer and more vital to us as the days come and go. Only in this way can we begin to "walk worthy" and be able to give a "reason for the hope that is in us". Such praying is like exploring spiritually the wonders of our heavenly inheritance, and as these begin to enlighten and grip the mind, the reflection is bound to be felt in our practical response day by day. Let us think again of the immensity of this stewardship of the Mystery and its riches of grace and glory and then of our own smallness, feebleness and frailty. Perhaps this will draw out from our hearts the *spirit* of these wonderful prayers of Ephesians and we shall go on to know more and more of their truth in reality.

Let us now consider the prayer of Ephesians 3:14-21 more closely. Verse sixteen is not an end in itself, but a preparation for a mighty experience. Paul prays that the Ephesian believers might be given power and strength by God the Father in the inner man; this means that the new nature might be made strong by the operation of the Holy Spirit and it is "according to the riches of His glory". What a measure! We have had the "riches of the glory of His inheritance in the Holiest of all" (1:18), and there is the gracious promise that all our needs will be supplied "according to His riches *in* glory" (Phil. 4:19). These phrases are like vast oceans whose depth we cannot fully plumb, but at least they convey to our minds something of the immensity of the way God is working for the members of His Body. This mighty preparation is made so that "Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (Eph. 3:17).

The goal of chapter two was the building of the Church to be a "*dwelling place* for God in spirit" (2:21,22). That blessed time can be anticipated by the believer who has had his heart and mind strengthened, so that the Lord Jesus takes up His abode in him and he becomes, as it were, a miniature temple for Him here and now.

The wonder of this has often been dimmed by popular theology. Sinners are exhorted to "give their hearts" to Christ. Sunday school children are taught to sing "Come into my heart Lord Jesus, there is room in my heart for Thee". The right thing is meant but the wrong expression used. The indwelling Christ is not a subject for *beginners* in the Christian pathway. Its realization is a tremendous experience for the *saint* who is "growing up into Christ in all things" (Eph. 4:15) and even then

he needs the mighty preparation and strengthening of the Spirit we are now considering.

If we knew that someone of royal birth intended to share our home permanently there would certainly be preparation for such a visitor. How much more when the Lord and Creator of all things is willing to stoop and take up His residence in our hearts! If He does so, then something else follows: *He is surely going to have first place and take control of all we have and are.* It is well that we realize what all this entails so that we do not use this prayer lightly. He comes in as *Lord* as well as Saviour and if we are not ready to give Him this place, this glorious experience will not be ours.

The Apostle goes on "in love having been rooted and grounded that you may be mighty enough to apprehend with all the saints . . . and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge". Inexhaustible Love begins and ends this section of the prayer. It forms the *ground* and the *root* of our spiritual life and stretches out in a limitless expanse in front of us. This "grounding" and "rooting in love" has been accomplished and forms the basis for two things; we are to "apprehend", and we are to go on "to know".

The apprehending takes in "the breadth and length and depth and height", a spiritual fourth dimension which in its fulness is beyond us, just as the love of Christ which follows surpasses knowing. However, this should not deter us from seeking to know it *in our measure*. The epistle to the Philippians speaks of the peace of God that exceeds understanding but that does not prevent our enjoyment of it. So here, we are to go on to grasp these wonders and to grow in our realization of them even though it can be said that in this life we only know "in part" (1 Cor. 13:12). If it be true that we have the Lord Jesus dwelling in us by faith, then surely the Holy Spirit, the Revealer of Truth, will strengthen us and open the eyes of our understanding to appreciate in ever increasing measure the overwhelming Love of this Heavenly Guest.

This leads to the last phase of this prayer "that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (19). The Revised Version rightly corrects this and renders it "that ye may be filled *unto* all the fulness of God". Only Christ Himself can be filled *with all the fulness of God*, "for in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9).

We are likened to "vessels" in Scripture and are of various

capacities. Some are small vessels and some are large, but whatever the size we can be filled up to the brim with God's fulness and so anticipate the goal of the "dispensation of the fulness" (Eph. 1:10) and also of the glorious fact that the Lord Jesus "ascended up far above all heavens, that He might *fill all things*" (4:10).

In view of the wonder and immensity of all this truth, the Apostle concludes with this glorious doxology:

"Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us (1:19), unto Him be the glory in the church by Christ Jesus unto all the generations of the age of the ages. Amen." (3:20,21).

CHAPTER VII

THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

Chapters Four to Six

We have now traversed three glorious chapters of Divine Teaching in this epistle ending with the prayer of chapter 3:14-21, vast in its implications for each member of the Body of Christ. If our Bible were no larger than this, we should have more than we could possibly plumb in our lifetime. The Apostle now commences to stress the responsibility that such spiritual wealth brings upon us. It is impossible to receive truth without becoming responsible to God. Consequently in chapter 4:1 we read:

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk *worthy of the vocation* (calling) wherewith ye are called.”

The word “worthy” 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 behind 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 daily life in such a way that it may be compared with the glorious heavenly calling revealed in chapters one to three.

This, when properly understood, will occupy all our thought and attention. We shall not have any 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* above all things out of sheer gratitude for all the exceeding riches that God’s love 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). If we do not feel like this then there is something radically wrong with our attitude to the Truth. What a sad commentary it is on the hardness of the human heart, that Ephesians one to

three can be read and even studied without there being any thought of faithful response on the part of the reader!

Now we are not left to devise a worthy walk. The way is all mapped out for us in chapters three to six and if we have been *rooted* in the doctrine of the first three chapters we shall surely bear *the fruit* in some measure of the second half of this epistle. How are we to walk worthy of this high calling of God in Christ Jesus? Verse two supplies the answer "with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love". The word lowliness refers to an attitude of *mind* and we do well to remember that we walk with our *minds* and not primarily with our limbs or anything external. The word 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*. He himself constantly put into practice what he enjoined others to do.

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. The opposite is pride, the thing that was inherent in the sin of Satan and is a feature of the perilous times of the last days (2 Tim. 3:2).

"An high look, and a proud heart . . . is sin" (Prov. 21:4).
 "Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord" (Prov. 16:5). "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 one 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" (Gal. 2:20) in all we seek to do for Him.

Lowliness of mind is followed by meekness in Ephesians 4:2. This word is used only by Paul and occurs nine times. It is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23) and is seen in all its perfection in the Person of Christ. The Apostle could beseech the Corinthian church by the "meekness and gentleness of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:1). Neither of these Christian graces is popular today.

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 will have "no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3). Their boasting will be in Christ Jesus alone (verse 3).

The world misinterprets meekness as *weakness*. Nothing could be further from the truth. Moses was very meek, above all the 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 the Lord. Let us remember we follow One who said "I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11:29).

Humility and meekness is followed by *longsuffering*. This word literally means to be long before being angry, to endure or to wait patiently. Like meekness, it is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). Its opposite, impatience, has been the cause of much spoiling of Christian witness. The discipline of waiting and enduring what is unpleasant is not easily learned. We shall be helped if we remember how patient and longsuffering our Heavenly Father has been with each of us. When we realize this, we shall seek to exhibit longsuffering in all our dealings with others and avoid taking offence even when we are hurt, misrepresented or misunderstood.

The Apostle continues with the words "forbearing one another in love". To forbear means to bear with, to put up with. Not all members of the Body are likeable. Some will have the tendency to rub us up the wrong way, but grace will teach and enable us to bear with such in love. What volumes could be written concerning the Scriptural revelation of love as opposed to its conception in an unbelieving world that is outside of Christ! Love, as taught in the word of God, is not just a feeling or an emotion, but an *attitude of mind that is consistently carried into practice towards others*. Loving thoughts are not of much use; they must be translated into *action* if we are going to measure up in any degree to the demands of Ephesians chapter four.

Verse three goes on to say "endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace". To endeavour means to be diligent; to keep has the thought of keeping an eye upon and watching over or taking care of anything. So we can translate "being diligent to watch over the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace". Note well that we are not asked to *create* a unity; that

has already been done by the Holy Spirit Who unites every true member of the Body of Christ. We are, however, enjoined to *guard this with diligent watchfulness*. We can *break* this unity in witness but we cannot *make* it.

Now unity is strength and the Devil well knows this and one of his chief aims is to shatter this unity and divide those redeemed ones who constitute the church which is His Body (Eph. 1:22,23). If only believers realized this more, they would not indulge in differences and mis-understandings, so giving him the opportunity to do his disruptive work.

Another thing we have to guard against is mistaking outward conformity with the inward Unity of the Spirit. In Christendom around us a movement is arising to endeavour to unite all the existing sects. This is impossible unless they are willing to give up beliefs which they consider fundamental, so wide is the variation between them all. At the best it can only be a false thing for even if it were achieved, it would be no true representation of the unity that chapter four of Ephesians is speaking about. We rejoice to realize that in Christ, God has done the uniting between each member and our duty now is to watch over this with great care and see that we do not allow the Adversary to drive a wedge between us and the other members of His Body. The bond of peace has been made and this takes us back to Ephesians 2:14-16. This is not bringing before us the "peace *with* God" that Romans 5:1 talks about which comes from being justified by faith in Christ Jesus. Nor is it the wondrous "peace *of* God" that is mentioned in Philippians four. It is rather the peace that has been made *between each member* of this Church.

He has "broken down the middle wall of partition between us, having annulled in His Flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments in decrees, in order that He might create in Himself one new man so making peace" (Eph. 2:14,15). Everything that would divide members of the Body, God has abolished, and woe to us if we, by our own making, bring in anything that is foreign to this unity or the practice of the Truth as revealed in Ephesian chapters four to six.

Members of this unique company may be isolated and scattered, but it is glorious to realize that this wonderful Unity annihilates distance and all circumstances that are adverse. We can praise Him now for the Divine tie that binds us together and ask Him to give us grace and strength together with

real humbleness and meekness, and so guard this precious Unity which is part of the working out of His plan for the heavenlies.

The unity of the Spirit in Ephesians 4:3 which we have been considering, is expanded in the following verses in a sevenfold way.

“There is one Body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (4-6).

Each item is prefixed by the word “one”, stressing its importance, and as we are now in the practical section of this epistle, it must have a bearing upon our walk and witness. Let us consider each item separately and seek to understand, for we cannot keep or guard that which we do not know or comprehend.

ONE BODY. Ephesians chapter two has already referred to this: “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” (Eph. 2:14-16). This Body is described as a “joint-Body” in chapter 3:6 and this forms one of the features of the Mystery (Secret) which had been kept hidden in God (3:9).

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). The Apostle uses the *whole* of the human body to illustrate his teaching concerning the relationship of believers at that time and the exercise of the miraculous gifts that had been given by One Spirit.

Some believers were likened to the comely parts of the body (1 Cor. 12:24); some to the uncomely parts and those which are less honourable (verse 23). Others are figured by the feet and even the head (verse 21). Thus we have not yet reached the revelation of the Mystery that was to come later in Ephesians, for the Head there is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ (1:22,23), and as for uncomely parts, there are none. The Body of Ephesians is not an ordinary body but a “joint-body”, that is a company of believers where each one has a perfect equality in every way doctrinally and dispensationally and the figure could not be used with truth of the Pentecostal Church. This is the first item we are asked to “keep” in the Unity of the Spirit, and it must be obvious that we cannot do so if we confuse the Joint-

Body with other phases of God's revealed purpose, or seek to identify it with any one or all of the many varying denominations or groups that form modern Christendom. God has His own redeemed ones in this heavenly calling irrespective of what their human label may be.

ONE SPIRIT. This is referred to in Ephesians 2:18 "for through Him (the Lord Jesus) we both (Jew and Gentile believers) have access *by one Spirit* unto the Father."

We have sought to show previously how the word Spirit is used in Ephesians. It not only refers to the Holy Spirit, but to the realm which is beyond flesh and blood and things earthly. So we are blessed with every blessing that is *spiritual* (1:3), as contrasted with that which is earthly and temporal. Likewise, the goal of this Church is to be a dwelling place of God *in spirit*, using the same words as in verse eighteen of chapter two, that is, its goal will not be an earthly one, but will be realized in the spiritual and heavenly places where Christ is now ascended to the Father's Right Hand. This "one Spirit" is part of the Unity of the Spirit whereby each member of the Joint-Body has access to the Father and again this is a precious truth to be realized and guarded.

ONE HOPE OF YOUR CALLING. Hope and calling are inseparably joined together in Scripture. The calling and destiny of Israel is an earthly one and will be realized when the Deliverer returns to Zion and puts the New Covenant into operation (Jer. 31:31; Rom. 11:26-29). Consequently the "hope of Israel" (Acts 28:20, 26:6,7) which is the goal of God's purpose for the redeemed and restored nation, must be earthly too.

The calling of the Church of the Mystery is entirely dissociated 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 (Eph. 2:4-6, 1:19-21).

Its members are therefore asked to direct their thinking away from the things of earth to this most exalted sphere where the Lord Jesus is now enthroned in the highest Glory (Col. 3:1-4). Obviously then its hope cannot be an earthly one, for such a hope would be entirely out of harmony with its heavenly placing by God. Consequently its members are warned against minding earthly things (Phil. 3:19,20).

Hope is the *fulfilment of the plan of God* for the company of His people under consideration. Consequently we wait to be

manifested with Him in the glory where He now is (Col. 3:4). This is the "one hope of your calling", yet another feature of the Unity of the Spirit which we are exhorted to keep as a treasure. We can only do this as we are strengthened by Him, and learn to rightly divide between the earthly and heavenly purposes of God in Christ Jesus as they are revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

ONE LORD. Each item is prefixed by the word "one" and right in the centre we have the phrase "one Lord". This is His rightful place, for without Him, the unity falls to pieces and the whole plan of God would collapse.

He is the centre and circumference of it all and we can never overstress this tremendous Truth.

In the O.T. 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 in Ephesians this is unreservedly applied to the Lord Jesus Christ and is another of the many Scriptural evidences of His Deity. From this it is clear that we cannot keep the Unity of the Spirit faithfully unless we accord Him His rightful place as "One Lord", the One who controls and directs His children in all things.

ONE FAITH. Sometimes the words faith and truth are interchangeable, thus we read of the "mystery of the faith" (1 Tim. 3:9), and of some who had "denied the faith" (5:8) in contrast with Paul who could say at the close of his life that he had "kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7). (See also the usage of the word in Acts 6:7, 16:5 and Gal. 1:23.) The "one faith" is that glorious deposit of truth revealed by the Ascended Christ to the Apostle Paul, the minister of God to us Gentiles. This we must be ever diligent to guard.

ONE BAPTISM. The first thing to realize is that baptism 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 connection with the Tabernacle, 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 the word "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*.

"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 . . . 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 ministry of John the Baptist.*

"John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness (remission) of sins" (Mark 1:4). He likewise baptized the Lord Jesus, and the reason is given in John 1:31 and 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" (verse 31).

This is the Divine explanation for the Lord's baptism, very different from many put forward today. We are often told that He was baptized in water as an example for the believer to follow. But He was also circumcized; He kept the sabbath day (the seventh day), 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 one with the believing remnant of *Israel*, and the Lord's baptism was for His manifestation to John personally and to the *same people*.

(2) *The baptism of the Holy Ghost 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" (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 today this fiery baptism of the Holy Spirit.

(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 a previous chapter.

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

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

So far then we have (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 and John the Baptist personally. (3) The Spirit baptism of power and evidential miraculous gifts (the powers and judgment of the age to come, Heb. 6:4,5), and (4) the death baptism of Calvary. Both (2) and (3) were in evidence during the period covered by the Acts of the Apostles. Now we ought to ask ourselves *to which of these does the one baptism of Ephesians refer?* Faithfulness demands that we do not make *one* into *two*, any more than with other items of this Unity and speak of two Lords, or two faiths, or two Spirits.

But there is yet another to consider and one of the utmost importance. In 1 Corinthians 10:1-5 the Apostle Paul 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 the 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 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 is the *first recorded baptism* in point of time in the Bible, the meaning of which has been largely disregarded by the professing church. We find a similar experience at the end of the wilderness wanderings when they were about to enter the promised land under Joshua. God miraculously cut off the waters 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. If it was, Paul could never have stated "Christ sent me NOT to baptize, BUT to preach the gospel" (1 Cor. 1:17). What is this inward reality? For water baptism is but a type or picture of spiritual truth. This inward reality is *identification*. When Israel were baptized unto Moses without water, *they became identified with him and all he stood for* in law and Divine ceremonial. This approaches nearest to the truth of the one baptism of Ephesians.

Since there is but *one* baptism here, we have to choose between the type and the antitype, the shadow and the reality. We cannot have both and be true to Ephesians 4:5. This reality is expressed by the word "with". Every member of Christ's Body has died *with* Him, been buried *with* Him, been quickened *with* Him, been raised *with* Him, and is now seated *with* Him (Rom. 6:3-5; Eph. 2:4-6) and looks forward to being manifested *with* Him (Col. 3:4). This has been accomplished by the Spirit of God, and all such have been truly baptized by the Spirit and united with Christ whether they have been immersed in water or not. This is the *essential baptism* that really matters and without it immersion or sprinkling is valueless. This great theme of identification is further treated in chapter seventeen (p. 238).

If anyone cites Colossians 2:12, then let them regard the context which repudiates literal circumcision (a circumcision

made without hands), and goes on to set aside all types and shadows whether relating to food or drink, holy days, new moons, or even the sabbath day:

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

To intrude a type (water baptism) into a context that sweeps all types aside because now we have the glorious reality of identification with the Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, is to go backward not forward and is missing the whole point of the passage. Who wants shadows when they have the reality? (See also chapter nine (p. 148) where the exposition of Colossians two is reached.) The one baptism of Ephesians four must be this essential one and is another item of this seven-fold Unity of the Spirit which we are solemnly enjoined to keep or guard. At the same time we do not wish to judge others who regard water baptism as important or even necessary to a Christian witness, but we cannot admit this into the Unity of Ephesians four and be loyal to the truth there expressed.

ONE GOD AND FATHER. The Apostle expands this by saying “Who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”

In chapter 3:14,15, God is declared to be the Father of every family in heaven and earth, and just as the Lord Jesus Christ in this Headship of the Church and heavenly principalities and powers (Col. 2:10) sets forth the goal of the ages when manifestly He shall be Head of all things in heaven and earth, so here, the Fatherhood of God in relation to the Church which is His Body and the heavenly beings foreshadows the end when God shall be “all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28). The Church of the Mystery sets forth in miniature the fulfilment of the purpose of the ages.

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

This sevenfold Unity of the Spirit ends with the words “one God and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” (Eph. 4:6). There is a stress here upon the Church which is His Body *as a whole*. But we are not lost individually in this company of the redeemed for verse seven goes on to say

"but unto *every one of us* is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ". Here *each member* is in view with his or her appointed place and responsibility in the Body.

In the physical body every member plays its part and works harmoniously together, so promoting the health and well being of the person concerned. So too in the spiritual Body, every redeemed member has a place allotted by the Father and a measure, according to the gift of Christ, to work out in service and witness. Whether this measure is large or small matters not. What *does* matter is that each one works out in faithful and loving response just what the Father appoints and makes known as His will. For this, we are not left to serve in our own strength. "To each one of us has been given grace" (verse 7) and we are taught here that God's grace not only saves but *equips for service*. Paul could say:

"His grace which was bestowed on me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, *but the grace of God which was with me*" (1 Cor. 15:10),

and in another context of deep trial he experienced the all sufficiency of Divine grace (2 Cor. 12:9). We do well to remember that in and of ourselves we are all unprofitable servants; only exceeding grace and favour allows us to work and witness for Him. He could do all His work without us, but His graciousness rules otherwise.

Note that there are three measures associated with the three unities of Ephesians four.

"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).

These are associated with the unity of the Spirit (4:3-6), the unity of the Faith (4:13), and the unity of the Body (4:16).

Before proceeding to expand the "gift of Christ" mentioned in verse seven, the Apostle stresses the *time* when the gift was given and brings in the supreme truth of the Ascension. "*When He ascended up on high . . . He gave gifts unto men*" (4:8,9). These gifts are not "things" but human beings, apostles and prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. In Matthew ten, we have the record of the calling of the twelve apostles by the Lord Jesus *while on earth*. This was one order of apostles, and linked by God with His plan for the earth and the establishment of His Kingdom when His will is going to be done on earth as it is in

heaven (Matt. 6:10). However, Ephesians 4:8 informs us that later on *when Christ ascended*, He gave another company of Apostles of which Paul was the chief. Prophets are also included in this gift. These were inspired and laid the foundation of the Gospel of God's grace and the Truth of the Mystery connected with the Body of Christ (2:20, 3:3,6-9). Then followed evangelists, pastors and teachers (4:11). These were uninspired, but carried on the work and witness given by the apostles and prophets.

We must pause a moment to notice the great importance of the Ascension that is brought before us in this context.

"He that descended is the same that *ascended up far above ALL HEAVENS*, that He might fill all things" (9).

How often we hear the Christian faith summed up as "Christ died, Christ risen, and Christ coming again". But the truth of His Ascension and exaltation "far above all" is missing! (Eph. 1:19-23). There could be no revelation of the Mystery without the Ascension of Christ. It would be idle to talk of being seated together in the heavenly places (2:6) unless He is there first! Note too the phrase "all heavens". Often in the Scriptures we have heaven in the singular, so from one standpoint it is one sphere. Verse ten gives us another angle. "All heavens" demands that there are at least three subdivisions and possibly more (see 2 Cor. 12:2), just as our country can be described as Great Britain from one angle, and England, Wales and Scotland from another.

Evangelists, pastors and teachers describe the service of those who have been saved and called to these respective ministries. There is no hint that one is more important than the other or that they are independent of each other. God very rarely gives all the gifts to one man and it is very seldom that one sees a servant of God who combines these three aspects of service. It is quite wrong to suppose that the one whom God has equipped to preach the gospel of His grace resulting in the salvation of sinners is more important than the man who has been equipped by Him to teach and build up those already saved.

Where this view prevails we have stagnation and lack of growth. Those who have come to a saving knowledge of Christ are left as spiritual babes taking only the milk of the Word and so unable to receive the higher glories of revelation which are likened to "strong meat" (Heb. 5:12-14; 1 Cor. 3:2). This is a

tragedy which is often seen today and one which is not to the glory of God, and it comes by over stressing one of these "gifts of Christ" at the expense of another. We need the work of the evangelist, pastor, and teacher proceeding side by side, and then we can expect results which will bring joy to our hearts and rich blessing, salvation and enlightenment to many precious souls.

In the witness of the last three, God had a threefold view: (1) for the perfecting of the saints; (2) for the work of the ministry; (3) for the edifying of the Body of Christ. Let us consider these separately.

First of all, what does the phrase, "the perfecting of the saints" mean? The word translated "perfecting" is not the usual word which denotes maturity or full growth. It has the force of "fitting" or "joining together", especially after a lapse or breakage. So we have it (Matt. 4:21) used of the disciples *mending* their nets. In Galatians 6:1 the spiritual are exhorted to *restore* in a spirit of meekness a brother overtaken in a fault. To the Corinthian church, split with carnal divisions, Paul wrote:

"That ye all speak the same thing; and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be *perfectly joined together* in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10);

and in his second epistle: "we wish, even your *perfection*" (2 Cor. 13:9); "finally, brethren, farewell. *Be perfect*" (13:11). Both these last references show that the divisions were still existing, and the Apostle is praying for unity among them.

Behind all these occurrences is the thought of failure and the need to be brought into a proper condition again. This is true in Ephesians chapter four. The covenant nation of Israel had been in the forefront of God's revelation and purpose and dominated the scene from Genesis twelve to the end of the Acts, where they are left with blinded eyes, deaf ears, and hardened hearts, rejected all down this age until the fulness of the Gentiles takes place (Rom. 11:25,26). Unless God revealed fresh light on His purposes, no one could tell what the next move would be on His part. Failure was there, the earthly channel of blessing was choked with unbelief and set aside, but now God gives further revelation to the Apostle Paul concerning truth that He had kept hidden in Himself concerning His heavenly plan for the Church (Eph. 3:3,8,9), and believers living at this time needed the instruction given through Paul the prisoner to readjust them to the new revelation and equip them for witness and service. This is brought forward in the next phrase in Ephesians 4:12,

“for the work of the ministry”. The word ministry means *service* and not just in the modern sense as used of the clergy, but service for *each member* of the Body of Christ. Hence the teaching of the Ephesians letter is eminently practical. It was not written for dreamers, but to equip each chosen member of this heavenly company with Divine truth for the present age and guidance for a *practical walk and witness* in harmony with this heavenly calling in Christ Jesus. We cannot render acceptable service unless we have been “perfected”, or equipped with the knowledge of this Truth just as the Ephesian believers were.

The Apostle goes on to say “for the building up (edifying) of the Body of Christ” (12). Paul’s ministry stresses the great importance of building up or edification. “Let all things be done unto edifying” (1 Cor. 14:26). See also Romans 14:19, 15:2; 2 Cor. 12:19. Three times in Ephesians four we have this brought forward: in the verse under consideration; in verse sixteen:

“According to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the Body unto the *edifying* of itself in love;”

and in verse twenty-nine:

“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of *edifying*.”

So much teaching today is negative and as such it is valueless for growth or building up. We need the positive truth given from the Ascended Lord Jesus, through His mouthpiece, Paul, the Apostle to us Gentiles; all must be in harmony with this or it is beside the mark. Truth belonging to a past dispensation will not do, it will only result in a confused walk, and the divided state of modern Christendom only illustrates how little the “truth for the times”, given through the Apostle Paul, is understood.

This threefold ministry we have considered leads on to a threefold goal: “till we all come (1) in the unity of the faith, and (or even) of the knowledge of the Son of God, (2) unto a perfect man, (3) unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ (Eph. 4:13). We have had the *unity of the Spirit* expanded in verses four to six and now the *unity of the faith* is brought before us. This is explained by the next phrase, “the full knowledge (or acknowledgment) of the Son of God”. Here is the goal of all spiritual knowledge and growth. Just as the One Lord was

central in the unity of the Spirit (verse 5), so He is central in the unity of the faith.

To get to know Him summed up Paul's ambition (Phil. 3:10), and this must be the quest of every member of the Body if they desire to grow, be fruitful and bring glory to His Name. We have seen that the word translated "knowledge" is sometimes rendered "acknowledge". It is full knowledge that acts powerfully on the recipient leading to *practical acknowledgment* in daily life and walk. In this highest of all callings, Christ is ALL (Col. 3:11), and it is He, as Head of the Church, in His ascended glory at the right hand of the Father, that constitutes the unity of the faith. This is all embrative, and we can go no further experimentally in this earthly life of ours. Prayer for enlightenment and practical response to truth revealed, will take us along this glorious road and will lead to the third goal: unto a full-grown (perfect) man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ, "that henceforth we be no more babes. . . ."

Such deep truth is not for infants. For them the milk of the Word is all that they are able to receive. Babyhood must be left behind and growth towards maturity experienced before the "strong meat" of Ephesian teaching can be received and understood. In chapter one verse twenty-three, the Body is described as the "*fulness of Him that filleth all in all*", and in chapter three verse nineteen Paul prays that each individual member might be "filled unto all the *fulness of God*". This is the measure of the stature of the *fulness of Christ*. It is God's will that we should all arrive here (verse 13).

The goal of our natural life is to leave infancy behind and to progress to maturity, mentally and physically. But sometimes this process is interrupted by disease resulting in stunted growth and then we have tragedy.

The same thing can and does happen with the spiritual life. The Apostle Paul had to lament that he could only speak to the Christians at Corinth as to "babes in Christ" (1 Cor. 3:1). He was unable to give them "the stronger meat" of the Word, but was forced by their immature condition to feed them with "milk". Likewise the believers addressed in the epistle to the Hebrews: "Ye are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the Word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of *full age* (i.e. mature)" (Heb. 5:12-14); and we may say that this immaturity is the condition

of many believers today. The years pass and still they can only talk baby language. They know that God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven their sins, but they have never progressed in the knowledge of the Truth beyond this.

Disease which results in stunted growth in children must cause great sorrow and heartache to parents, and how much grief must be brought to the heart of our Heavenly Father by the arrested progress and spiritual infancy of many of His children. Moreover such a condition is dangerous as the context in Ephesians four teaches. Spiritual babies are easy prey for the Devil. Such are:

"Tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (verse 14).

Underlying these words is a revelation of the mystery of iniquity. These winds of doctrine do not blow by chance; they are sent by the great Deceiver; they are part of his wiles (Eph. 6:11), and he uses men to propagate them. Conybeare and Howson translate the passage thus: "tossed to and fro, and blown round by every shifting current of teaching, tricked by the sleight of men, and led astray into the snares of the cunning." These are vivid words, conveying the utmost instability and deception, and they warn us of the peril of not growing up spiritually.

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. We say *rightly divided* word 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. Every modern sect and denomination goes to the Bible for its beliefs yet they all differ. While all Scripture is inspired of God and all of it true in the setting that God has placed it, it is not all *true for today*. Those who sought to foist circumcision and the bondage of law upon the early churches during the Acts 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 a pattern or standard of Truth for the present Gentile age and it is found in the prison letters of the Apostle of the Gentiles which are built upon the foundation given in the epistle to the Romans. We turn away from these at

our peril. If believers had realized this from the start 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" (verse 13 and 15). No wonder that the immature believer can be ensnared by such methods.

It is all part of the system of error which Scripture designates as *the lie*. At the beginning, Eve was deceived by it (1 Tim. 2:14), and this has gone on all down the centuries and will find its climax in the revelation of the man of sin, the mystery of iniquity (2 Thess. 2:7-10), hence the Lord's solemn warning against being deceived when He deals with the state of affairs at the end of this age (Matt. 24:4,5,11-24).

There is only one safe position for believers, and that is to stand covered by all the armour of God (Eph. 6:11), the truth of a rightly apportioned Word. Only by practically acknowledging its claims can we have complete security and participate in *growth* spiritually; leaving behind immaturity with all its dangers.

Verse fifteen of Ephesians four goes on to say:

"But speaking the *truth* in *love*, may *grow up* into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ."

The word translated "speaking the truth" goes deeper and can mean "to do or maintain the truth".

Mere words are not sufficient; actions which are in accord with the standard of Truth we have been considering are the necessary accompaniment to "growing up". They will always square with the enduring and greatest of all gifts, namely *love*, and their goal brings us again to the centre of all the purposes of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here is the supreme test for all we read and all we hear today. *What does it make of the Lord Jesus Christ?* Is He the centre and circumference of it? Is He ALL? (Col. 3:11). If we cannot unhesitatingly say "yes", we had better turn away, however fair it appears.

It is infinitely better to walk in the way of revealed Truth even though it is a "straight and narrow way" and may lead to loneliness, rather than going in the broad way that leads to deception.

However isolated the path, we have the assurance of His Presence with us always for He has said "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5,6), and this is all that really matters for the believer who is "going on" to full growth.

This growth is into Him Who is the Head, even Christ (Eph. 4:15), and it is in the measure of the growth of *every member* that the Body as a whole grows and is built up in love (verse 16). This Body is *fitly framed together*, using the same word as 2:21 where this church is likened to a Temple, destined to be the dwelling place of God. Each child of God who comprises this favoured company of the redeemed has his or her appointed place fixed by the Lord and is knit together by every "joint of the supply" (literally), the supply coming from the Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who alone is the Source of life, light, strength and growth of each member.

But as we have seen earlier, each member has his part to play and verse sixteen reads "according to the effectual working *in the measure of every part*, maketh increase (growth) of the Body . . ." If believers do not grow, then the Body as a whole is affected and this brings before our minds again the importance of spiritual growth and its relationship to others. In our human bodies, every part makes its contribution to the health and well being of the whole. Any injury or mal-functioning of a part of the body will surely affect the whole of the person concerned, and so it is in the Body spiritual.

Every one of us who belongs by grace to this high calling of God in Christ Jesus has a contribution to make, and we can only do this as we hold the Head (Col. 2:19) and receive from Him, direction, strength, and wisdom to carry out our appointed tasks. There are no useless members in the body physical and there should be no useless or mal-functioning members in the Body spiritual! Such are only a hindrance, and so it is essential that we take this question of growth seriously and be certain that we are "growing up into Him in all things" (verse 15), and getting to know Him better day by day.

The Apostle Paul has told us in a positive way how to walk worthy of our heavenly calling (4:1). He now instructs 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" (4:17,18 R.V.).

It is difficult for us to realize that many Gentile converts at

the time when Paul wrote this epistle were saved from the darkest paganism. The heathen mysteries and the worship in connexion with their heathen temples were associated with every kind of excess. They were in spiritual darkness indeed. Like the nations at Babel, they were vain in their imaginations and their foolish hearts were darkened (Rom. 1:21), and this but brings before us the tragic effect that sin has had upon the human mind. Man by nature is a fallen being and sin effectively prevents him from thinking properly of God or His Truth, or being able to correctly assess spiritual values. He may be expert in the realm of human affairs and educated to the last degree, but in divine things he is utterly at sea. The estimate of Christ by the unsaved mind is that of Isaiah 53:2: "He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him." God could even come to earth and walk amongst men in the Person of Christ, yet in the estimate of the majority, He was a nobody, just a carpenter's son; and things are no better today.

How well Satan and sin have done their work! and how great the need of the operation of the Holy Spirit, for it is the *mind* that God commences to deal with when He saves a person. The conviction of sin and the desperate need of a Saviour, are all His doing.

The Ephesian saints could look back on their past lives in the darkness of the Gentile world and see the tremendous change that saving grace had made. They had left behind a vain mind, a darkened understanding, and a hardened heart (see verse 18 R.V.). They once were "alienated from the life of God", that is, immortality (verse 18), but now were rejoicing in the "promise of life which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 1:1), life and incorruption that had been brought to light through the gospel ministered through Paul (2 Tim. 1:10,11).

This was indeed the Truth that they had learned. They had "heard Him and been taught in (or by) Him" (verse 21). This is an extraordinary statement, for it was extremely unlikely that any of the Ephesian saints had ever heard the Lord Jesus in the days of His flesh. Yet the Apostle asserts that they *had* heard Him, which once again brings before us the important fact that Paul himself was the channel through which the Ascended Christ was speaking and teaching His people. The word given through the Apostle Paul was *the Word of Christ*.

He was indeed in this way "speaking from heaven" (Heb.

12:25). How foolish then to set up the words that Christ spoke on earth as recorded in the Gospels, against His words in the epistles of Paul as is sometimes done. What a lack of discernment is shown in such an attitude!

The result of such heavenly teaching is seen in the verses that follow: the putting off of the old man, the old way of living and all its deceitful desires, the putting on of the new man, that new nature which is God's creation in righteousness and holiness of truth. This is the consequence of the *renewing of the mind* (verse 23), that transforming experience that Romans 12:2 talks about. So once again we are brought to the very centre of our personality and are reminded that we walk with our minds and our thinking, as the opening of the practical section of this epistle has already brought before us, beseeching us to walk with *humility of mind* (4:2), and to know in practice something of that mind of Christ that is set forth in Philippians 2:4-8.

The way we *think and plan* is of paramount importance and lies at the heart of a worthy walk. A mind that is Spirit-taught through a rightly divided Word and led by Him, will surely result in fruit which will bring glory to our Saviour and Head and blessing on all who associate with us. The rest of Ephesians is the expansion of this mind of the Spirit and, in contrast, the mind of the flesh to "put off" and avoid.

The renewing of the mind by the Holy Spirit, affects its thinking and planning. This leads to "putting off" all that pertains to the old nature which is sinful, and "putting on" the new nature which has been created by God "after Himself" in righteousness and holiness. Verse twenty-five of chapter four goes somewhat deeper than bidding us not to tell lies. "Wherefore putting off *the lie* (literally)" reminds us that all that is connected with the Satanic system called in Scripture "the lie", must be repudiated. Because we are members one of another, truth can be the only basis upon which we can have close fellowship together. So we must always *be true* as well as speak the truth to each other.

The next verse raises a difficulty; "be ye angry and sin not". The Word of God does speak of a righteous anger, but inasmuch as we are far from being completely righteous people ourselves, we need to tread very carefully here. Anger can easily pass into spite and bitterness and therefore needs to be kept on a very short rein. "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath" (verse 26); let not the day pass before all such feeling has been put away and finished with. What an exceedingly wise injunc-

tion! Quarrels between Christians could never develop if this command was constantly obeyed. It has been said with truth that the appalling amount of marital unhappiness that we see around us could not exist if husbands and wives would settle their differences *every day* and not allow them to foment and increase. Cherished anger, which usually results from self-righteousness, is "giving place to the Devil" and allowing him to have his way in our lives. In view of verse thirty-one,

"Let *all* bitterness, and *wrath*, and *anger* . . . be put away",

we should be wise if we avoided anger in *all its forms*, including the so-called righteous anger.

"Let him that stole steal no more" (verse 28). Some of the Ephesian believers had once been thieves, but now they are exhorted to work, not so much that they might accumulate for themselves, but rather that they might "have to *give to him that needeth*" (28). What blessings generosity brings on the giver! Some of God's most precious promises are addressed to *generous* believers (2 Cor. 9:6-8; Phil. 4:15-19).

We are now reminded that a worthy walk will affect our speech, and this brings the Apostle back to the great need for edification or building up in the Truth. Colossians 4:6 reminds us that our talking should always be "*with grace, seasoned with salt*". Salt is the preservative against corruption and so should our language be, one to another, always. It should likewise be *gracious*. It is useless merely to *talk* about being saved by grace. If we do not learn to *live* graciously in word and deed we are denying all that grace means. Gracious, wholesome speech edifies and ministers grace to those who hear (verse 29).

If we fail to do these things then we "grieve the Holy Spirit of God" (verse 30). There are those who deny the personality of the Holy Spirit. They assert that the Spirit represents a force rather than a Person. But such should be reminded that it is impossible to grieve a force or a power. One cannot grieve electricity or atomic power however great these forces may be. Only a moral person can be grieved or hurt, and in this case it is the Holy Spirit of promise Who has sealed us unto the day of redemption. The reader will remember that He is brought before us in chapter one, verses thirteen and fourteen where again we are told of this Divine sealing. Our full emancipation is yet future; the day of redemption awaits the time when we shall stand in resurrection glory united with our Lord and Saviour.

This is part of the Father's will and the Holy Spirit has fixed His seal on the transaction making it eternally secure, and giving us the full assurance here and now of such a glorious hope.

In view of all these blessings of grace and glory we can surely put away "all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking and malice" (31) which can only grieve Him Who has sealed us and effectively prevent our present enjoyment of these exceeding riches in Christ Jesus. Instead we can

"Be kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven us"
(verse 32).

This is grace *in practice*, and the word grace enters into the composition of the word twice rendered "forgive" in this verse. God, for Christ's sake, has graciously forgiven us. He has indeed forgiven *all trespasses* (Col. 2:13) past, present and future, by reason of the Redeemer's work on Calvary's Cross. This being so, we can afford to act in grace even toward those who misrepresent and wrong us. How different from the Lord's Prayer. There, forgiveness from God depends upon the measure of forgiveness exercised by the believer, and is enforced by the Lord's statement,

"But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, *neither will your Father forgive your trespasses*" (Matt. 6:15).

The truth of Ephesians turns this round the opposite way, stressing the completeness of our Father's forgiveness and how it should powerfully affect our attitude to those who behave uncharitably towards us. And in view of the greatness of the Father's forgiving love, how despicable it makes any cherished hatred or unforgiving spirit on our part. May we rise and respond in the practical ways indicated in the verses we have been considering. Only thus can we reflect in any measure the glory of the One Who redeemed us at such tremendous cost.

Chapter five commences with the words: "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children". The Revised Version corrects this to "Be ye therefore *imitators* of God, as beloved children". Members of the Body of Christ are asked to do nothing less than become imitators of God. It is important to note that such a statement is never made in the Scriptures to unbelievers. It is impossible for an unsaved person to imitate Christ and yet sinners are often exhorted to do so by those who do not know the Truth.

Peter, in his first epistle, wrote: "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps" (1 Pet. 2:21), but he is writing to saved people. The Lord Jesus is not the Example to the unbeliever. He is the *Saviour* and so He should be set forth to all such. But to His own children He sums up all the Christian walk should be, and so we are asked to imitate Him and to follow in His steps.

The context in Ephesians goes on to tell us just what this involves:

"Walk in love, even as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and, sacrifice to God for an odour of a sweet smell" (Eph. 5:2 R.V.).

Nothing less than the greatness of the Saviour's love is brought before us as the standard of our Christian walk. It is the insistent testimony of Scripture, that Christ's love was measured by nothing less than the *giving of Himself* for us. In doing this He gave *everything* and this must be the characteristic of our practical response to Him. Real love is constantly giving and spending itself for others. It is utterly unselfish, not being concerned with what it receives back, but what it gives out. When measured up to this, how poor is much that goes under the name of Christian love! The real thing, however, is something that is very fragrant. The Lord's sacrifice is likened to a "sweet smelling savour".

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). In the same spirit the Philippian church had evidently sent the Apostle in his Roman prison a gift which entailed real sacrifice in giving. He says:

"I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, *an odour of a sweet smell*, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God" (Phil. 4:18).

It is this sort 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.

Paul now goes on to tell us what to avoid. One would hardly have coupled "covetousness" with sins of the flesh, but not only does the Apostle do so but describes a covetous man as an idolator (verse 5). God's estimate of sin is not ours and it may

be that respectability covers up many a covetous heart. The word used in the Greek is explained by Souter in his *Lexicon* as "acquisitiveness, greediness, entire disregard of the rights of others" and is thus the very opposite of the self-denying love we have been considering.

"Foolish talking and jesting" of verse four does not refer to healthy humour, but that type of speech that has a sinister double meaning. Such language is "not convenient" or "not befitting" as the Revised Version translates it. It does not "become saints" (verse 3). The lips of Christians should constantly be filled with praise to our Heavenly Father and giving thanks to Him and this will be a real antidote to wrong thinking and doing.

"Ye *were* sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light" (verse 8). Not only are we to walk in *love*, but we are to walk in *light*. This is the light of the word of Truth. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psa. 119:105). In the next verse, instead of reading the "fruit of the Spirit", the Revised Version renders the phrase "the fruit of the light" following the best Greek Texts, and this is sharply contrasted with the unfruitful works of darkness (verse 11).

Now salvation, sanctification and the foundation doctrines of the Word of God may be likened to "root" (Col. 2:6,7). This is what God in grace does for us and in us. "Fruit" is the practical response of the Christian life and is what God is desiring from each one who has come to know Him as Saviour. John 15:1-8 is a classic passage on this point. The Divine Husbandman deals with the vine so that it not only bears fruit, but "more fruit" (verse 2) and "much fruit" (verses 5 and 8) and so brings glory to Himself.

In horticulture fruit bearing is impossible without light and sunshine. There can be no fruit or proper ripening in darkness and this is just as true in the realm of spiritual things. If we walk in the light of a rightly divided Word, fruit will be a natural consequence and this is only a figurative way of describing a worthy walk, which is linked so closely with "goodness, righteousness and truth" (verse 9). Only then are we in a position to test what is acceptable or well pleasing to the Lord (verse 10).

It is useless trying to fashion our daily walk by our own ideas or the ideas or standards of others. If we attempt to do this

it is more than likely we shall be as Cain of old, bringing to God things which do not please Him and which He cannot accept. We are not only to produce the "fruit of the light", but are likened to light itself. "Shine ye (A.V. marg.) as lights in the world; holding forth the Word of life" (Phil 2:15,16). The world is an exceedingly dark place spiritually. The confusion and distress of nations that we see all around us is the result of ignorance and turning away from the light of God's Truth. "Ye are the light of the world", the Saviour said, but He warned that the light could be obscured by the bushel and the bed (Matt. 5:14-16). The bushel is a symbol of commerce or *business* and the bed stands for *ease*.

Here are two things that each believer must watch with exceeding care lest they take too big a place in the life and obscure the light of true Christian witness. Let us walk in love as Christ loved and gave Himself for us. Let us walk in the light of His Truth and so shine that others may be attracted to Him who are now groping in darkness. Let us be willing to be real workmen for Him, finding out His will, and doing it faithfully to His glory while the day of opportunity lasts.

Verse fifteen continues: "see then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise". The word translated "circumspectly" is rendered "carefully" in the R.V. To walk thoughtlessly is dangerous and unwise. On the contrary we should walk "redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (16).

The thought behind the phrase "redeeming the time" is *buying up the opportunity* and it is the figure of the keen shopper snapping up the bargains in the market. The Revised Standard Version renders it "making the most of the time", that is taking every opportunity for witness and service, because the character of the days from a spiritual standpoint being evil, there is greater need than ever for the light of Truth to shine forth from every believer, and all this is governed by each one understanding what the will of the Lord is (17). Christ directed service is the key to all fruitful witness and this comes from seeking the Lord's will in prayer.

The chapter proceeds:

"And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."

The Gentile convert might need to be reminded of the pagan

excesses he had been saved from; consequently Paul brings before such the need to be filled with something very different from wine. The R.V. margin has "in spirit" instead of "with the Spirit". We are not to be filled in the realm of the flesh with anything that would lead to drunkenness, but rather we are to be filled with praise and thanksgiving in the realm of the new nature (spirit) by the Holy Spirit Himself, this experience finding its expression in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. There could not be a greater contrast in these two fillings.

In a similar context (Col. 3:16) we have the exhortation: "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom". This is what the Holy Spirit fills us with. It is ever His office to take of the *things of Christ* and show them unto us and to *glorify Him* (John 16:12-14). He does not speak of Himself and there is no basis in this passage from Ephesians for what has been termed the "second blessing", or some transient emotional experience connected with being filled with the Holy Spirit.

This calling forth of praise and gratitude from our hearts as expressed in song is connected with "giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (20). We may get perplexed sometimes regarding our prayer life and feel that "we know not what to pray for as we ought", but at least we can always give thanks for the innumerable mercies that we are constantly receiving from our Heavenly Father.

"Always" covers all time, and "all things" covers every experience, so we can constantly praise in the name of the Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ. While we are doing this, it should make us concerned with our relationship to other believers. Verse twenty-one continues: "be subject to one another *out of reverence for Christ*" (Revised Standard Version). Our boldness in Christ must be governed by a constant regard for others' feelings and welfare, and the motive is to be found not in believers themselves, but in the "fear of Christ" or reverence for Him. This expression is very parallel to the "fear of the Lord" in the Old Testament; in no sense a cringing fear, for such fear hath torment (1 John 4:18), but a reverential trust towards our Saviour and willingness to be governed by His commands.

The Apostle Paul now canvasses the whole of human society under three classes: husbands and wives (Eph. 5:22-23), children and parents (6:1-4), servants and masters (6:5-9), bringing before each the type of conduct that is in harmony with a worthy walk.

He starts with the home *and here we have the centre of the Christian life*. If we cannot walk in harmony with our heavenly calling in our home life, of what use is Christian witness outside? If God starts here, so should we.

First of all wives are asked to "be subject to their husbands" (22). This may seem like retrogression in civilized social relationships. Have not women obtained equality with men today? Why should they then be asked to be subject to men, even though they are their husbands? Let us say straight away that such subjection is not because men are better or more capable than women or more spiritual.

Quite often it is the reverse. No, the command is given because God has ordained a certain order in family life. The husband is the *head of the wife* (23), not in any despotic sense, but even as *Christ is Head of the Church* and he must find the pattern of his conduct in the Lord Jesus towards His Body. The implications behind this are great indeed as a glance back to the second verse will show. The relation of the husband to the wife will not then be one of domination, but of self sacrifice and consideration. The Apostle does not emphasize *rights* but *responsibilities* and it is by fulfilling such responsibilities that true happiness is to be found in the Christian home.

If the husband represents Christ as the Head, the wife sets forth the position of the Church which is His Body, just as the church is subject to the Lord, so are wives asked to take a similar position towards their own husbands (verse 24), and what woman will complain of this when husbands act with the love that Christ does towards His Body?

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

Verse thirty-three sums up:

"Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband."

Having dealt with the relationship of Christian husbands and wives, the Apostle turns to children and parents: "children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right" (6:1). The word

“obey” has the sense of “obeying orders”, quite different from the phrase of chapter 5:22, “wives *submit* yourselves”, and the reason given is the *rightness* of such conduct. Life cannot be lived in society without a measure of self discipline, and if a child does not learn this in the home, he is ill fitted indeed to launch out by himself in adulthood.

Today the relationship of children and parents has lost much of its influence and solidarity. Parents for the most part are either too busy or too lazy to enforce rightful discipline, with the consequence that a generation is rising that will not tolerate restraint. The prophetic Scriptures warn us of the lawlessness of the end of this age and we can well understand how this will come about. Juvenile delinquency can nearly always be traced back to unsatisfactory home conditions. How needful then that a Christian home is a model of what God expects it to be! When Satan attacks here, he is going to the very heart of things.

Ephesians 6:2 continues:

“Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment *with promise.*”

The promise is quoted “that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth”. This is lifted bodily from Exodus 20:12, and the Apostle gives it in full, adding “that it may be well with thee”. This shows its importance in God’s estimation in a past dispensation and also in the present one. When obeyed under the age of law, it ensured a long life. It may or may not do so under grace, but its importance and need for observance has not lessened in any way today.

Nor is the relationship of parents and children one sided. Colossians 3:21 adds:

“Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, *lest they be discouraged.*”

Discipline in the home there must be, but it is most important that it is discipline exercised in love and wisdom. A harsh or capricious attitude can easily discourage a child and so do as much damage as no discipline at all. Ephesians 6:4:

“And, fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture (discipline) and admonition of the Lord.”

If Christian parents recognize that their true guide and example is the Lord Himself, then their “discipline and instruction” as the Revised Standard Version renders it, will be fitting and right.

The Apostle now turns to *servants and masters*. The word "servant" is really "slave", for slavery was in evidence in Paul's day. The words that follow guide the conduct of each, and although slavery has now been abolished, this passage is still the embodiment of wisdom for employers and employed. It is certainly true to say that labour troubles would be non-existent today if these injunctions were faithfully carried out on *both* sides. Servants are asked to work in "singleness of heart" and to do it *as unto Christ* (5) and in verse seven, "with good will doing service *as to the Lord*, and not to men". What a difference the worst humdrum and uninteresting work could become if we realized that our Saviour personally asked us to do it! And verse eight assures us that work done well in this manner is accepted and rewarded by Him—what encouragement!

As for employers or masters, they are in no favoured position in the sight of the Lord because they are employers, for with Christ there is "no respect of persons". They are bidden to do *the same things to their employees as they would have employees do to them* (9). Here is a righteous basis on both sides and how far modern civilization falls short of this Divine standard is seen by the frequent labour troubles and unrest all over the world.

"Finally, be strong (made powerful, margin) in the Lord, and in the strength of His might" (6:10 R.V.).

Paul is now going to sum up and finish his letter, but before he does so, he must warn each believer of the spiritual warfare that is being waged around him, the conflict of the ages between God and Satan, between light and darkness. The situation would be perilous in the extreme, unless provision had been made and protection provided, but blessed be God, He has done this for us.

First of all we are reminded of the only strength that will avail in this conflict. It is the "strength of His might", none other than the mighty resurrection power of 1:19,20 which conquered death and brought Christ from the grave, and which is stated to be to usward who believe. The word rendered "be strong" occurs eight times in the N.T. and this is the number of resurrection. Wise is the Christian who has learned to have no "confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3), either his own or anyone else's.

To trust in anything less than resurrection power is to court disaster. We are puny indeed compared with Satan and his

hosts who are the "world rulers of this present darkness" (6:12 Revised Standard Version), but made powerful in the Lord and clothed from head to foot with His armour, we are completely safe and can become "more than conquerors through Him that loved us" (Rom. 8:37).

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 Old Testament days taking up of 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 and knowledge of the truth are useless indeed to accomplish anything for the Lord in this war between light and darkness.

Once again this vividly brings before us the tremendous need of spiritual growth with maturity as the goal. God is calling to-day for full grown children of His who can stand, withstand and not yield an inch in this mighty conflict.

We have seen that the last phase of Christian experience is conflict with Satan and the powers of darkness, and for this we need nothing less than the mighty resurrection power of chapter 1:19,20 to strengthen us. Not only so, but we need to be divinely protected from head to foot, and the succeeding verses tell us how the Lord has wonderfully provided armour for us, which not only protects from the fiery darts of the evil one, but will enable us to be "more than conquerors through Him that loved us" (Rom. 8:37).

"Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:11).

Elsewhere this armour is described as the "armour of righteousness" (2 Cor. 6:7), reminding us of the unrighteousness that characterizes Satan's warfare, and the "armour of light" (Rom 13:12), against the powers of darkness who are antagonizing the purposes of God. When we count the pieces in the armour which are detailed in Ephesians 6:14-17 we find they are *six* and not *seven* as we might have expected. We remember that in a special way seven is God's number, speaking of perfection and the finishing of His purposes (compare the many "sevens" in the book of the Revelation).

The answer appears to be that we are dealing with the "evil

day" and conditions that will never pertain to the glory of the future perfect creation to which God is working. The conflict of the ages is still raging between God and Satan's forces of darkness and evil. So verse twelve tells us

"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" (R.V.).

From this we see that the conflict is not a physical but a *spiritual one*. Our enemies are not fellow men, however much opposed they may be, but the leaders of the heavenly hosts of darkness under the control of Satan. In realizing this we should be appalled but for the glorious provision of God's armour to completely protect and enable us to resist attack from such mighty foes.

That they are mighty can be seen from comparing the tenth chapter of Daniel where we read of a glorious messenger from heaven (verses 5 and 6) who was successfully withstood for *three weeks* by a spiritual being called the "prince of Persia", whose opposition was only overcome by the advent of Michael the archangel (13). It would appear that Satan has his lieutenants or princes over the nations of the earth, seeking to control their affairs and thus opposing the earthly Kingdom purposes of the Lord.

It is against these mighty spiritual beings that the warfare of Ephesians six is directed. We should therefore realize that carnal weapons are utterly useless in this spiritual warfare. In this sphere atom bombs are of no more use than bows and arrows. Neither are politics. Our own strength and wisdom is less than nothing. Spiritual armour alone is of value and this God has provided. We note that five pieces of the armour are for *defence* and only one for *offence*, and that is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Eph. 6:17). The picture here is one of defenders resisting assault. We are commanded to "stand" and "withstand" (13,14) not "attack". Some Christians imagine that they are called to lead a campaign against Satan and his hosts. We believe this to be a dangerous delusion. To exceed our orders is as much disobedience as to neglect them. Our job is to stand fast and resist and not yield an inch where truth is concerned, and to do this we shall need to "take unto us the *whole* armour of God".

Let us consider the items that make up this complete pro-

tection. First of all we are given the *girdle of truth*. To meet the father of lies and deceit with anything less than the truth of God's Word is to court disaster, and it must be "truth for the times", that is the revelation of the Word that concerns this present dispensation of grace. Conditions that obtained in a past dispensation of law or a future dispensation of glory will not do. The words of the Ascended Christ given through Paul, the sent one to the Gentiles, are the standard by which all must be measured. The next piece of armour is the *breastplate of righteousness* which is an allusion to Isaiah 59:17. Salvation for the believer in Christ means being clothed with God's righteousness and a salvation which did not have righteousness as its basis would be useless in the conflict with the evil one.

Verse fifteen continues "and having shod your feet with the preparation of the *gospel of peace*" (R.V.). This goes further than the peace with God that comes from being justified by faith (Rom. 5:1). It must include the peace of Ephesians 2:14,15 that has been made by the Lord Jesus between every member of the church which is His Body, whether Jew or Gentile. Any breaking of this peace by individual members can only result in the enemy gaining the advantage. "Withal (not 'above all' A.V.) taking up the *shield of faith*, wherewith ye shall be able to quench *all* the fiery darts of the evil one" (16 R.V.). Absolute trust in the Lord's faithfulness is a shield that covers us entirely, but we do well to remember that the moment we allow unbelief to take hold of us the shield is gone and the enemy can come in like a flood.

"And take the *helmet* of salvation, and the *sword* of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" (17).

God's salvation is the perfect protection for the vital part, the head, and last of all we are introduced to the *one offensive weapon in the Christian's armour—the Word of God*, which is the only thing Satan fears. What an example we have in our Saviour, for when tempted in the wilderness, He did not oppose Satan with the power of His Godhead, but met his wiles with a threefold "*it is written*" (Matt. 4:4,7,10). He used the *Sword of the Word* and the enemy was defeated.

We are exhorted to "put on" the complete armour of God *now*, that is, we must get to know and use *in our own practical experience* each item of the armour. It may be that the fiercest aspect of the mighty conflict of the ages is yet future. How shall

we quit ourselves then if we are not getting to know and use the armour now? If we do not prove the efficacy of the armour as a present realization, we shall certainly not "withstand in the evil day" (13) that lies ahead of us. The times are perilous (2 Tim. 3:1). Our only safety is to take to ourselves *now* the *whole armour of God* (13) and "put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh" (Rom. 13:14).

Having described for us the complete armour of God which is able to keep us perfectly safe in the great conflict of the ages around us between God and Satan, the Apostle Paul continues,

"With all prayer and supplication praying at all seasons in the Spirit, and watching thereunto in all perseverance and supplication for all the saints" (Eph. 6:18 R.V.).

Prayer, contrary to popular belief, is not detailed as a part of the panoply of God, but it is an essential accompaniment of the believer in Christ who is so clad, and is a spiritual exercise of great importance. Much could be said about prayer and we have discussed it on p. 64, but at least two things should always be borne in mind: (1) prayer is not a means of changing God's will and His purposes, *but of changing us*. Its supreme purpose is to bring us into line with His will, whatever that may mean or cost. "If we ask anything *according to His will*, He heareth us" (1 John 5:14). When we want nothing so much as the will of God in our lives and can say, as the Saviour did, "not My will, but Thine, be done" (Luke 22:42), we have gone a long way in learning the true meaning of prayer. For this we must be emptied of self and selfish desires and motives. (2) Prayer is given to make us realize our weakness and inability and our utter dependence upon the Lord Jesus for everything. "Without Me, ye can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Once we have learned these two essential lessons, we shall realize that there are no special times for prayer, but that it should be exercised *always*, "at *all* seasons" (Eph. 6:18 R.V.). Paul constantly asserted that he prayed "without ceasing". Prayer was the constant and normal accompaniment of his daily life, and we can be sure that a prayerless life is an ineffectual one. Here he asks for prayer for *all the saints*. How narrow and poverty stricken our prayer life can be, very often just revolving around ourselves and our own needs! How we need our vision widened to appreciate the needs of others and to learn to intercede for them.

What a wonderful example of intercession we have in the ministry of Epaphras. He was constantly concerned about the needs of the Colossian saints and laboured fervently for them in prayers, that they might stand perfect and complete in all the will of God (Col. 4:12). Self was forgotten and the wants of others became paramount. The Apostle Paul likewise prayed continually for his converts (Eph. 1:16; Phil. 1:4), and it is not till we get to the end of the Epistle to the Ephesians does he say, "and for me, that utterance may be given unto me" (6:19).

Not only must we learn how to pray constantly and with effect, but we are exhorted "to watch thereunto with all perseverance" (18). The Saviour said, "*Watch* and pray" (Matt. 26:41). The word "watch" means to be "on the alert", and "perseverance" reminds us that answers to prayer may be delayed in God's infinite wisdom and we must not, because of this, become faint-hearted or give up, but be ready to recognize the answer whenever it comes and to praise God for it.

When at last Paul asks for prayer on his own behalf he says,

"That utterance may be given unto me in opening my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly as I ought to speak" (verse 19,20 R.V.).

Twice the Apostle prays for boldness. Did he know what fear was? Yes, as 1 Corinthians 2:3 testifies. This great servant of Christ went to untold lengths in his faithful witness for his Saviour, yet he was human enough to know the paralysing effect of fear and the temptation to keep silence when he ought to speak. We know this too and would do well to constantly ask that utterance and boldness may be given us that no opportunity may be missed for testimony that a right word may be spoken at the right time.

Paul's testimony here concerned making known the secret (mystery) of the good news. In the parallel passage in Colossians he uses the phrase the "secret (mystery) of Christ" (Col. 4:3). This concerns the supreme exaltation of the Saviour to the right hand of the Father such as is revealed in the first chapter of Ephesians, eclipsing anything that had been revealed before in other ages (Eph. 3:4,5). It is necessary to preach the glories of the Ascended Christ enthroned in the heavenlies before seeking to make known the Secret concerning the Joint-Body, so closely and vitally linked with Him there. This, Paul's prison ministry did, and we do well to note this order. A company of believers

seated together in the heavenlies is impossible without Christ being there first, and with heavenly wisdom the Apostle prays for boldness and utterance to make these overwhelming truths known. It is obvious that the gospel committed by the Ascended Christ to Paul the prisoner, as the human mouthpiece, goes far beyond the salvation of the sinner. It embraces the saint and what God intends to do in the heavenly places through such whom He finally constitutes as His habitation or dwelling place (Eph. 2:20-22) in heaven's Holiest of All.

As the epistle closes, the Apostle commends the service of Tychicus, "a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord" (21). He is to be the bearer of this epistle making known "how I am and what I am doing" (21 R.S.V.), but Paul's last thought is unselfishly for the Ephesian believers, "that he might comfort your hearts" (22). Verses twenty-three and twenty-four form the doxology closing with "grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity". The Revised Version rightly translates the word "sincerity" as "uncorruptness". This takes us forward to resurrection when at last incorruption shall be "put on" (1 Cor. 15:53,54) and this present life with sin, death and corruption left behind for ever. It is in resurrection and the life to come that the glorious blessings of Ephesians will finally be realized. Now we have them by *faith*; then they will be in *reality*. The last thought to which the Holy Spirit would direct our minds is to a love that springs not from earthly things, but an undying Divine love that is beyond death and the grave and for ever links us with the exalted One Who is above all beings in heaven, earth and under the earth (Phil. 2:10,11)—the One Who in *all things has the FIRST PLACE* (pre-eminence Col. 1:18).

We have but skimmed the glories of this wonderful epistle, and if we had no more than this for our Bible while travelling home to glory, we should have infinitely more than we could fully assimilate or perfectly respond to in practice by a worthy walk (Eph. 4:1). However, may grace, wisdom and strength be given to each one of us to so respond that God may be able to designate us as *faithful* saints (Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:2), and so be included in the highly favoured company of saved men and women to whom this epistle was addressed.

"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*. . . . Your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:1-3 R.V.).

CHAPTER VIII

THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Chapter One

From a comparison of this epistle with the letter to the Ephesians, it is evident that they are a pair. Much of the same ground is traversed, though in a more condensed form in Colossians. Yet we must not think that the Colossian epistle is merely a repetition of the Epistle to the Ephesians. In some aspects it combines the theme of Philippians with another aspect of the revelation of the Mystery (Secret) of Ephesians three. Philippians is the great epistle of service and presumes the truth of Ephesians to be known. The practical working out of Ephesian truth is likened to running a race with a prize in view (Phil. 3:13,14). This prize, though given by a God of all grace, is nevertheless contingent upon the believer's service and witness and can be won or lost. We must ever distinguish in the Scriptures what is given as a free gift through grace apart from works or merit, which cannot be lost, and that which is won by faithfulness and endurance on the part of the believer and can be forfeited by slackness or unfaithfulness. God's salvation and calling by grace are an example of the first; a prize or crown is an example of the second.

The Epistle to the Colossians certainly reveals the glories of the Church, the joint-Body of Ephesians. In this it is complementary to that epistle, but in its central section (2:4-23) we have the warning word "beware", and a clear setting forth of what would cause believers to be "beguiled of their REWARD" (18). Here we touch upon the theme of Philippians with its prize or reward that can be won or lost. 2 Timothy gives us parallel teaching with its emphasis on the possibility of being "ashamed" of the prison ministry of the Apostle Paul (1:8,16) and therefore of the Lord, and as a consequence, being denied the supreme privilege of reigning with the Lord in addition to living with Him (2:11,12).

The most likely date of the Colossian epistle is A.D. 61, and it appears to have been written soon after Ephesians. It would seem that the assembly there was predominantly Gentile, but

there were sufficient Jews to make possible the introduction of a heresy by the Enemy of Truth, which combined elements of Judaism with the beginnings of what was afterwards known as Gnosticism. In the conflict of the ages the propagation of the truth is always challenged and opposed in some way by Satan. We can be sure that if there is an "open door" there will soon be "many adversaries" as well (1 Cor. 16:9). We say truth advisedly, for God's enemy does not waste his time. There is much that passes for Christian work that Satan does not seek to antagonize. It is Christian only in name and in effect is really the Devil's work. But to "preach the Word" (2 Tim. 4:2), to seek to make known the Word rightly divided (2 Tim. 2:15) will certainly not go unchallenged.

So it was in Paul's day and so it has been ever since. Truth has never been on the throne in this age and will not be until the Lord's Return when Satan will be restrained so that he no longer deceives the nations (Rev. 20:2,3). This will explain why truth has been with the minority and has always to struggle for its existence. The proclamation of the "high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14), with its glories connected with the highly exalted Christ, enthroned far above all heavens (Eph. 4:10), was soon followed by the Evil one's travesty which is combated by Paul in chapter two of Colossians.

The Gnostic tendencies revealed in this chapter, spring from the idea that matter is evil. If this is so, then, it is argued, a holy God cannot come into direct contact with it. The only way out was to have spiritual beings, first emanating from God and then from one another, descending lower and lower and finally making contact with matter possible. Only in this way could God create and keep His holiness inviolate.

The next step in this false teaching was to assert that these graded spirit beings are in control of the material creation and in a position to protect man from evil influences. They were "mediators" between God and man, so supplanting and rendering null and void the work of the Lord Jesus Christ as the ONE Mediator between God and men (1 Tim. 2:5). This is ever Satan's aim, either to *add* to or *detract* from the finished work of Christ and so spoil its all-sufficiency. Consequently it was the Apostle Paul's aim, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to so exalt the Lord Jesus that this evil and insidious teaching could be seen in its true light.

Nowhere in Paul's writings are the unique glories of the

Saviour more greatly stressed or more wonderfully set forth than in the first chapter of this Epistle to the Colossians. Take the Ascended Christ out, and there is nothing left. Here He is brought forward as being the first as Creator, material and spiritual, with the ultimate goal that "*in all things* He might have the first place" (pre-eminence 1:18).

In this epistle He is ALL (3:11), and there can be no extras to Him. What we have to ask ourselves is whether we are willing to accord Him His rightful position *in our lives*. Not only is He our Saviour, but our LORD, that is, the One Who has the right to control us in every respect and every detail of our lives. "Ye are not your own . . . ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:19,20).

If He is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all, and the same evil tendency can work in our own experience as it did in the Colossian church, seeking to dethrone Him from His rightful place as First and Last. The one aim of the written Word is to reveal and glorify Him Who is the Living word—the Pre-eminent One. Let us beware of any system of teaching that seeks to *add* anything to Him whether seemingly religious or not, or to *detract* or dethrone Him in any respect from the unique position accorded Him by the Scriptures. This is Satan's one aim, for he covets the place our Saviour occupies. Rather, may we ever consecrate Christ in our hearts as LORD (1 Pet. 3:15 Weymouth).

The epistle opens with Paul's usual reference to his apostleship, the fact of his being sent and commissioned by the risen Christ, according to His will. This was the key to his life and ministry which is completely meaningless without it. Those who talk about the "Pauline conception of things", as though he was the originator of the teaching that he sought to make known, have missed this vital point and are not in a position to understand this man's glorious ministry.

The Apostle associates himself with his son in the faith, Timothy, in the salutation, as he does in 2 Corinthians, Philipians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians and Philemon and addresses his letter to the "saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colossæ" (2).

This takes us back to Ephesians 1:1, and the stress in both contexts is not just to believers as such, but to *faithful* believers. Now we know that salvation by grace, wonderful though it is in all its implications, does not automatically make the recipient

faithful. It is his *response* that does this and it is the one ingredient that the Lord requires before fullness of blessing and revelation of the Truth can be given.

"It is required in stewards, that a man be found *faithful*"
(1 Cor. 4:2).

Let us make no mistake, there is no substitute for faithfulness. Industry, zeal, usefulness in Christian service are all desirable, but they cannot take the place of absolute loyalty to the measure of understanding of the Truth that God has given us. Neither can we expect to receive further light on the Word from the Holy Spirit unless we are responding faithfully to that which we have already received.

We touch the high-water mark of revelation in Paul's prison ministry. The best that God reveals in His Word through this human channel is addressed to those who are prepared to be utterly faithful and to accept the consequences from such an attitude, even though it may mean a more limited sphere of service for the Lord, and perhaps misunderstanding and misrepresentation.

Verse two continues, "Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father" omitting the phrase "and the Lord Jesus Christ" with the best Greek texts. This is the only place where the name of the Father alone is mentioned in the introduction of one of Paul's epistles. Immediately the Apostle begins to pray and praise on account of the Colossian believers.

"We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven" (3-5 R.S.V.).

Obviously then this hope was one which had a practical effect on their lives. It strengthened their faith in the Lord Jesus and caused their love to abound to every fellow member of the Body with whom they came into contact, a wholesome influence indeed!

This hope was "laid up in *heaven*" and is the consummation of the citizenship that Philippians 3:20 reveals now *exists in heaven* and is the subject of Ephesians with its stress on heavenly places where Christ is now enthroned and a church seated together there in Him (Eph. 2:6). The realization of the hope will take each member of the Body to this heavenly sphere of glory and it will happen when the glory of the Lord Jesus is manifested

THERE (Titus 2:13). In this context we have the three graces, faith, hope and love brought together as Paul does in 1 Corinthians 13, 1 Thessalonians 1:3 and Hebrews 10:22-24.

The Revised Standard Version goes on:

“Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel which has come unto you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing—so among yourselves.”

We have before noted that the Apostle's use of the word “gospel”—good news—goes further than the salvation of the sinner. Here the goal of the believer's life with its hope is the subject of the gospel, a phase of truth not normally associated with God's good news to the sinner. All the good deposit of truth given to Paul by the Ascended Christ constitutes his “good news”.

It starts with salvation by grace, the forgiveness of all sins, and goes on to reveal the glorious constitution of the church of the Joint-Body with its equally glorious hope and destiny. Its confines are no longer limited to Israel in the flesh as they once were (Matt. 10:5,6). Israel the nation is at this point *lo-ammi*, not My people (Hos. 1:9); they are laid aside in unbelief and out of covenant relationship with God. The dispensational barrier is down and the message in all its fulness is able to go to all the then known world.

In this sense verse twenty-three is to be understood where it refers to every creature under heaven. This gospel had been conveyed to them by Epaphras, an outstanding fellow-worker with the Apostle, whose wonderful prayer ministry is referred to in chapter 4:12. He is described as “a faithful minister of Christ on our (Paul's) behalf” (1:7 R.V. margin) “who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.” He had acted as Paul's representative and had reported back to him concerning their reception of the Truth and love in the Spirit.

Bearing in mind their spiritual condition which he had learned, Paul begins to pray for them, and, as always, his prayers are full of significance. Twice he uses the word “knowledge”; firstly that they may be filled with a knowledge of His will (1:9), and secondly that they might increase in the knowledge of God (10). The word translated knowledge, as we have seen, is sometimes rendered *acknowledge*. (See 1 Cor. 14:37; Col. 2:2; Titus 1:1; 2 Tim. 2:25). The Apostle is not concerned with the mind being filled with items of knowledge. What he longed to see was spiritual growth and fruit. In other words he

desired divine knowledge translated into terms of *practice* or *acknowledgment*. This would indeed result in a walk "worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing" (10) and becoming "fruitful in every good work".

Moffat renders this passage

"That you may lead a life that is worthy of the Lord and give Him entire satisfaction. May you be fruitful and increase in the doing of all good, as you thus know God!"

Here is the practical effect of the knowledge of the Truth held in the right way. It is much more than cramming the head with facts about the Bible or Bible doctrine. The end of verse ten could be rendered "and growing (increasing) by the acknowledgment of God". This is the secret of spiritual growth without which we cannot please the Lord. *Every time we put into practice what we know of the Word of truth we grow spiritually.* May this be the continuous experience of both writer and reader and so bring joy and gladness to our Heavenly Father's heart.

We see how early in this epistle Paul prays for the Colossian saints. How concerned he was for their practical and faithful response to the Truth! (1:9,10). He continues in verse eleven "being strengthened with all power, according to the might of His glory". This is tremendous language and one cannot help feeling that it is a preparation for some superlative experience to follow. And yet when we read on we have "for all endurance and longsuffering with joy", but this is no anti-climax however much it may appear to be. Patient endurance is one of the essential ingredients of a worthy walk. How much Christian service had been spoiled by impatience and the inability to wait the Lord's time!

There is a time to every purpose under the heaven (Eccles. 3:1), and a rate of growth in grace as in nature, and this cannot be hurried. Again, it may be that we are compelled to deal with believers or unbelievers that are not even likeable let alone loveable, or to come against circumstances that are hard to bear. What do we do? Lose patience and give up, or realize the strengthening "according to the might of His glory?" What a measure this is! One that can triumph over all conditions leading us to

"Give thanks unto the Father, Who has made us sufficient (that qualified us, R.S.V.) to share in the inheritance of the saints (or of the holiest of all) in the light" (verse 12).

When dealing with the first prayer of Ephesians, we discussed

the rendering "the holiest of all" instead of "the saints", and we will not repeat here. Both renderings are doctrinally true in this verse of Colossians. The inheritance of the saints who comprise the church which is the Fulness of Him that filleth all in all (Eph. 1:23), is in the holy of holies in the highest heaven. This is the permanent dwelling place that God is now preparing for Himself (Eph. 2:20-22) and when complete, He will reside in it and fill it with His glory, just as He did with the earthly temple which was but a copy of heavenly realities (2 Chron. 7:1,2).

It will then be "His fulness" and comprise the very holy of holies in heaven. As we have before stressed, this is the highest and most wonderful sphere of blessing revealed in the whole range of Scripture. How marvellous must be the work of the Father and the Son to make sinners such as we are competent or qualified to have a share in such an exalted destiny!

We can never give thanks enough for the saving and transforming grace and the might of His resurrection which will one day give us bodies fashioned like the body of the Lord's glory (Phil. 3:20, 21) and place us in the light of the glory of His Presence in His supreme exaltation "above all heavens" (Eph. 4:10).

As the Apostle writes of this light, his mind goes back to the unsaved days of darkness. He writes,

"Who hath rescued us from the authority of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love" (13).

Two greater contrasts could not be imagined—the sphere of Satan and the world holders of this darkness, and the heavenly kingdom of Christ, the Son of His love. All humanity is born into the former. Some (how many we do not know) by electing grace and overwhelming love are rescued and translated into the latter.

The word "deliver" of the A.V. we have rendered "rescue" as it means to rescue from danger or destruction (*Souter*). The danger is real and deadly enough, but the god of this age blinds the minds of the unsaved so that they are completely unaware of it. Only when redeemed can we look back and see the danger we were in, and the direction in which we were being led and the goal at its end.

Now we can rejoice with joy unspeakable as we realize the transformation accomplished for us by the Father through the

Son's redeeming work. Love beyond our understanding is here. This is the motive that Ephesians chapters one and three stress if we ever ask ourselves why God should do this. The Lord Jesus is described as the Son of His love. Who can plumb the fulness of the love of the Father and the Son? But it is the measure of the Divine love to us. Think of the Lord's wonderful words recorded in John 17:23 ". . . that the world may know that Thou has sent Me, and *hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me*". What an emancipation the ocean of God's love in Christ has wrought for us!

Verse fourteen continues "in Whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins" (R.V.). The phrase "through His blood" is omitted in the best Greek texts, but the thought is implied. Forgiveness has already been rendered "deliverance" and "set at liberty" in Luke 4:18. This takes us back in type to the deliverance of Israel from the bondage and thralldom of Egypt. Here was a rescue indeed. God's people who had become Pharaoh's slaves, led out into liberty by the redeeming power of God and the blood of the Passover lamb, a picture of the Lamb of God and His infinitely precious blood shed on our behalf. Likewise for us the sin question has been settled for ever because "the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6), and redeemed us from its dominion and death as its fruit.

We now come to a passage in Colossians which is crucial and will be better understood when read in the light of the warning given in chapter two. Previously we have pointed out the heresy that had begun in the Colossian church, and the aim of the Deceiver to oust Christ from His rightful place as First in all things. Paul is now going to take a mighty sweep and canvass both the material and spiritual creation showing the unique place of the Lord Jesus in each.

Let us be frank and say that if the Deity and Supremacy of Christ is not true, then we have no Saviour and no Salvation, for the Word of God knows nothing of redemption from sin and death by fellow men however good they may be. God alone can be man's Saviour (Isa. 43:11, 45:21-23) and it is God in Christ that has done this mighty saving and reconciling work (2 Cor. 5:18,19). May we freely own this and, as Thomas of old, bow in His Presence and say, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). "Unto *the Son* He saith, Thy throne, *O God*, is for ever and ever" (Heb. 1:8).

Colossians 1:15-18 is the passage now before us, tremendous

in its scope and written not only to enlighten each member of the Body, but to counteract the Satanic travesty of Truth which had evidently gained a foothold in the Colossian church, seeking to dethrone the Lord Jesus from His rightful place as First in the material and spiritual creation because He is both God and Creator. A right understanding of these verses is the Divine antidote to such subtle error.

So in verse fifteen and onwards we read in the Revised Version:

“(Christ), Who is the Image of the invisible God, the First-born of all creation; for in Him were all things created . . . all things have been created through Him, and unto Him; and He is before all things. . . . 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 (or first place).*”

Now it must be confessed straight away that it is quite beyond the capacity of the writer to adequately set forth the wide sweep of Truth here presented. We will do our best and leave the reader to test, to search the revelation of the Word and to pray for enlightenment from the Holy Spirit.

To the Samaritan woman the Lord made a profound statement concerning God: “God is Spirit” (R.V. margin). Here is the great unconditioned God that we can know nothing of as such. Unless He chooses to stoop down to us in our small comprehension and limit Himself in some way, we should for ever be in darkness concerning Him. As Spirit, He is entirely beyond us, for as such He can have no shape or size or visibility; nothing tangible for our senses to grasp. He is the invisible God—“no man hath seen God at any time” (John 1:18). If finite beings such as ourselves are ever to realize anything of His great Personality, He must limit Himself in a concrete way, and thus, at a remote point in the past before creation, the Lord Jesus Christ took upon Himself some great Form of glory and became the “*Image of the invisible God*” (Col. 1:15). It was after this Image and likeness that Adam was created. “And God said, Let us make man in *our Image, after our likeness*” (Gen. 1:26), for obviously man cannot be created in the likeness of Spirit which has no shape or external dimensions.

Creation is always ascribed to Christ in the Scriptures; never to the Father or Holy Spirit (John 1:3; Col. 1:15-18); but before the Lord Jesus created He became God’s Image. Hebrews 1:3 R.V. describes Him as being the “very Image of God’s Sub-

stance". Owing to the limitations of human nature, there has always been in the mind of man the consciousness of a need to represent the invisible God in some way tangibly; hence the various forms of idolatry that characterize past and present history. But it is by no means error to approach God by means of an image, so long as we realize that Christ Jesus is THE IMAGE of God—the One Mediator between God and man, and so long as we seek to come to God by no other way. What makes idolatry in any form so sinful is that it usurps the place of the Lord Jesus as *The Image* of God.

Parallel to this great title is the next statement that Christ is the Firstborn of all creation (verse fifteen). The word "firstborn" is again used of Him in verse eighteen where He is described as the "Firstborn from the dead". Thus He is the Firstborn both in the material and the spiritual creation. We must be very careful with this word "firstborn". Those who deny the Deity of Christ do not hesitate to teach from this that He was the first created being. The little connecting word "for" (which means "because") of verse sixteen, effectively disposes of this error. He is the Firstborn of all creation "*because by Him were all things created*". As Creator He must be *first*, and that is the dominating thought in the word "firstborn" which conveys the idea of great dignity and supremacy.

He is called "First" in verse eighteen where the word is translated the "Beginning". Now the word "first", both in English and Greek, can mean first in *time* and first in *position*. Both are true of our Saviour, for He as Creator is the "Beginning (First) of the creation of God" (Rev. 3:14). He is not only the First, but the Last as well (Rev. 22:13), the Beginning and the End (the Goal) and not only this, He is everything in between! CHRIST IS ALL (Col. 3:11). The prophet Isaiah uses the same title of Christ and applies it to God as Creator.

"I am the First, I also am the Last. *Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth*" (Isa. 48:12,13).

"I am the First, and I am the Last; and beside Me there is no God" (Isa. 44:6).

Hebrews 1:10 states of Christ:

"Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast *laid the foundation of the earth*; and the heavens are the *works of Thine hands*,"

and chapter 3:4 sums this up by saying:

"He that built all things is God."

So if Christ as the Image, the Creator, the First and Last is not God in the fullest sense, words have no meaning and we might as well give up Bible study and the search for Truth.

Let us now read Colossians 1:15-17 in full. Christ is the

“Image of the invisible God, the Firstborn of all creation; because by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by Him, and for Him (unto Him the Goal): And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist (hold together).”

The Lord Jesus is not only the supreme Creator of heaven and earth and all that they contain, but by His almighty power the creation holds together without disintegration. The scientist may talk of the impersonal force of cohesion. The instructed believer knows that the burden of keeping this creation going rests upon the Son of God Who created it. Thus it will be seen that Paul is presenting the Lord in His capacity as Image, Firstborn and Creator *and as such He must be supreme*. The denial of this fundamental Truth was beginning in the Colossian church and is still prevalent today.

We have said before and we repeat that all doctrine must pass this acid test; what does it make of the Lord Jesus Christ? Is He First and Last? Is He God? Is He ALL? If He is not, then it is not according to Truth, but has its origin in the father of lies.

Praise God, there is coming a day when He will be universally recognized as such, for every knee shall bow, of things in heaven and earth and under the earth, and confess Him, as *Lord* (Phil. 2:10,11).

“For to this end Christ both died and rose and lived again, *that He might be Lord both of the dead and living*”

(Rom. 14:9 R.V.).

He is the First and Last both in the material creation and the new creation. In resurrection glory He becomes the Firstborn from the dead, the Head of the Church, which is His Body, and here again we see a picture of the goal when He shall assume *Headship of all things in heaven and earth* (Eph. 1:10) in the dispensation of the fulness of the seasons.

Verse nineteen continues (literally) “Because in Him was pleased all the fulness to dwell”. Chapter 2:9 reads, “For in Him (Christ) dwelleth *all the fulness of the Godhead bodily*”.

The word “fulness” is one of the great words of Scripture with a wealth of teaching underlying it. It occurs first of all in Matt.

9:16 as that which "fills up" a rent in a piece of cloth. We have before considered something of its meaning but will only repeat so far as to point out that Christ is the Fulness of God, the Church which is His Body is the Fulness of Christ (Eph. 1:22,23), and each redeemed member is filled to the full (complete) in Him (Col. 2:10). Here is an ocean of Truth for the believer to explore and revel in though he will never completely plumb its depth this side of glory. The Lord Jesus is filling up the schism brought in by sin, as the great plan of the ages rolls on to its triumphant conclusion. He Himself constitutes all the Fulness and is therefore not just one among many heavenly powers to be reckoned with. He is far above them all and supreme in both old and new creations.

This word "fulness" was misappropriated by the heretical Gnostic teachers later on and misused to lead away into error. It has been suggested that this had possibly already started in the Colossian church, and if so, we can well understand why the Apostle was concerned to present the Fulness in all its purity and Truth by linking it with the Lord Jesus Christ and giving Him the pre-eminent place.

We are now led on to reconciliation which touches not only earthly beings, but heavenly ones as well (1:20). The word translated "reconcile" is an intensified one, occurring only here and in Ephesians 2:16. There it relates to the Jew and Gentile members of the Body and the abolishing of the middle wall of partition which separated them and the alienation of the Gentile from all covenant relationship with God. Here in Colossians, the estrangement goes deeper and deals with an alienation "by wicked works" (verse 21).

Gentiles, who were once "far off" from the closeness to God that Israel had by covenant ties, are "made near by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13). Sinners, who by reason of their sin are even further away from God, are "reconciled by the blood of His Cross", and introduced to a glorious peace. They are "made meet" by the Father for their heavenly destiny—the inheritance of the Holiest of all in the light (Col. 1:12). This destiny will bring them into contact with heavenly beings who are holy—principalities and powers—the nobility of heaven, and demands that they shall be holy too. Verse twenty-two assures us that this will be so: "in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprougeable in His sight".

This relationship with principalities and powers is also

brought about by the Headship of Christ. There is a dual Headship of Christ in the prison ministry of Paul the Apostle. In Ephesians, He is Head of the Church which is His Body (Eph. 1:22,23). In Colossians, He is Head of all principality and power (2:10). We must be careful in our interpretation of "all things in earth and things in heaven". Some of these principalities and powers are antagonistic to the Lord, possibly ranging themselves under Satan in his fall. These have been "spoiled" and "triumphed over" by the same redemptive work on the Cross that reconciles (Col. 2:15).

We must now look a little closer at this glorious presentation. Actually the whole of Colossian teaching revolves around two presentations:

"To present you holy, and unblameable and unreprouvable" (1:22)

and to

"Present every man mature (perfect) in Christ Jesus" (28).

The second is not just a repetition of the first. This word "perfect" does not refer primarily to sinlessness but to reaching the *goal* of life, physical or spiritual, which is adulthood or maturity. The believer in Christ starts with Salvation and Life just like a new-born baby (1 Pet. 2:2). The goal is growth, until he reaches the "perfect (full-grown) man" (Eph. 4:13). The first presentation depends on the finished Work of Christ on Calvary's Cross. The second depends upon the believer's growth in grace and knowledge and acknowledgment of the Lord and His Truth. There is a prize, additional to salvation, for those who go on to this "end", and chapter two gives us warning of the things that will prevent such a goal from being reached.

The first marvellous presentation will be true of every member of the Body of Christ. They will be "blameless", literally "without blemish". The very word is used of the spotless Son of God in 1 Peter 1:19. What a goal—to be presented as holy as Christ is! They will be "unreprouvable", literally "not accused". It is a judicial word and indicates innocence of any charge of wrong doing. What a prospect for sinners who, in themselves, are guilty before God! (Rom. 3:19,23). Such is the wonder of the redeeming work of the Lord Jesus.

The next verse (Col. 1:23) starts with an "if", and on the surface it appears that the glorious certainty of such a goal is toned down by the Apostle by bringing in the believer's responsibility

and the uncertainty of his continuance in faith to the end "grounded and settled". Let us see how the same expression in the original Greek occurs elsewhere and this will help us. In 2 Corinthians 5:3 we read "if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked". There cannot be any possibility of doubt here. When the believer is "clothed upon" with his house from heaven, the resurrection body (2), it is impossible for him to be found "naked". The sense is—"surely, being clothed, we shall not be found naked".

Again, Ephesians 4:21 reads "if so be that ye have heard Him", but we are certain from chapter 1:13 and 15 that the Ephesian believers *had* both heard and believed in the Lord Jesus. So here in Colossians, the believer's continuance in the faith does not ensure his being presented holy before God; it is rather the external manifestation in practice of what overwhelming grace has accomplished for him in the finished work of Christ, the *fruit* of having been *rooted* in the Lord Jesus (2:6,7). The Apostle was thinking of their firm holding of the hope of the gospel, for he says in 2:5, "I am with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ".

This hope he has already referred to in chapter 1:4-6 and as Israel at this point was out of covenant relationship with God through their unbelief, and their position as "first" in the out-working of God's plan for the earth (see Acts 3:26, 13:46) had vanished, the good news in all its fulness could go out to "every creature" which must include Gentiles, who by nature were far off and aliens from Israel's commonwealth (Eph. 2:11-13). Yet another reference to the hope is given in verse twenty-seven, "Christ in (or among) you, the Hope of glory", and here our minds are directed to "things above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God" (3:1).

Paul links this glorious hope with the ministry entrusted to him by the Ascended Christ,

"The hope of the gospel . . . *whereof I Paul am made a minister* . . . for His Body's sake, which is the Church: *whereof I am made a minister*, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you" (1:23-25).

He has already elaborated this in Ephesians 3:1-11 and in both passages he refers to the afflictions which had come upon him through his faithful witness to the Truth.

"For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ *for you*

Gentiles . . . wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you . . . (Eph. 3:1,13). "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ . . . for His Body's sake, which is the Church (Col. 1:24).

The Revised Version translates: "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". Here we need to take great care. What did the Apostle mean by filling up that which is lacking in the afflictions of Christ? There are some today who think this teaches that the Atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ is not complete, and that Paul's sufferings added something to the Work accomplished on the Cross. They would go even further and imagine that any inconvenience or hardship they encounter in their witness also adds to the Lord's redemptive work. It hardly seems possible that anyone who knows anything of the Truth of the Scriptures could put forward such monstrous and false ideas. No man can redeem his brother (Psa. 49:7), or have any part in the work of the Saviour as the Sin bearer. God alone can be man's Saviour (Isa. 43:11, 45:21,22) and He does not deputize this work to any frail and sinning creature. At Calvary the Lord Jesus uttered the glorious words, "It is finished." The word "finished" means *perfected*, completely reaching the end or goal, and so as a finished and completed work it needs nothing added to it and indeed it is the height of presumption and ignorance of God's Truth to attempt to do so.

Since that is a fact, we ask afresh what Paul meant by filling up that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ? In saying this he had a definite *quantity* of suffering in mind. When the risen Christ met him on the road to Damascus, He said to Ananias concerning him, "I will show him *how great* things he must suffer for My Name's sake" (Acts 9:16). The word translated "how great" is one denoting *quantity*. There was a certain quantity or measure of suffering which the Lord revealed to the Apostle at the commencement of his ministry as His will for him to undergo. That it was a large measure, 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 clearly testifies. Now it was Paul's desire not to shrink from the Lord's will, but rather to fill up to the last drop this quantity of suffering in faithfulness to His Saviour. When he wrote to the Colossian church his service for the Lord was not finished; there was still a measure of testing and suffering lying ahead, and it was this that was still lacking in his experience which he

was anxious to fill up, not in any sense to try to add to the Lord's finished work on the Cross (Phil. 3:10).

We can be thankful that in this respect Paul is unique. The Lord does not reveal to us the trials that lie ahead. We live a day at a time and find daily grace for daily needs. But the Apostle was like the man to whom much had been given. "Of him shall be much required" the Lord said (Luke 12:48). He was like the five talent man, whereas we may be like the man to whom was committed only one talent. The Lord does not ask from us that which is beyond our measure. If we are "one talent" believers we shall not be asked to produce five in return. But we *shall* be asked to produce *one* and if this involves a measure of suffering or loneliness are we going to grumble or shrink back to seek to avoid it? Specially when our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory! (2 Cor. 4:17,18). May the Lord give us grace and wisdom to look beyond the suffering and the things that are temporal and passing to the eternal glories awaiting us in resurrection life to come.

Having referred to his sufferings for the Body of Christ, the Apostle Paul now comes to his ministry for this privileged company ". . . His Body's sake, which is the church: whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you . . ." (Col. 1:24,25). This is going over the same ground as Ephesians three.

There he speaks of the dispensation of the Mystery (3:9 R.V.) and the dispensation of the grace of God which had been given him for them in a special revelation from the Lord Jesus Christ. The word dispensation, as we noted when dealing with this passage, means *stewardship* and is so translated in Luke 16:2. This precious stewardship was not for the whole world or for the Gentile nations as such but was given *for the Gentile believers* to whom he had been referring in Ephesians two. This he repeats in Colossians 1:24,25. His sufferings were *for them*; the stewardship had been given to him *for them*; it was manifested *to His saints* (26), and to go wider than this and seek to include unsaved pagan Gentile nations as distinct from saved members of the Body of Christ, has no authority from either of these passages which deal with the Mystery and its ministry. To do so brings nothing but discord and untruth into the unique ministry of the "Prisoner of Christ Jesus for us Gentiles".

The next characteristic that we notice is that it "fulfils the

Word of God" (25). The word translated "fulfil" means literally "to fill" and occurs exactly fourteen times in the epistles of Paul written after the period covered by the Acts. Colossians has five of these references: 1:9,25, 2:10, 4:12,17. It is indeed an epistle of *filling* just as Philippians is an epistle of *emptying* (Phil. 2:7 R.V.).

In view of the fact that this Mystery or secret was hidden in God during the period of the Old Testament, in no sense could the prison ministry of Paul be fulfilling the Old Testament Scriptures. Rather it filled or completed the revelation of God given in His Word and reveals the heavenly side of God's purpose, hidden up to this point, whereas the rest of Scripture deals with the earthly aspect of the same purpose and the Heavenly Jerusalem whose goal is to form part of the New earth (Rev. 21:2,10).

There is no need to deal with the word *mystery* again here, for we have done so when expounding Ephesians three. It refers to something hidden, not mysterious, a secret that cannot be known until told or revealed. As in Ephesians three, the Apostle uses the same word in this context—

"Even the mystery (secret) which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints."
(Col. 1:26).

Ephesians tells us that this aspect of Truth had been hid *in God* up to this point (3:9). Colossians says it had been hidden from *ages* (past time) and from *generations* (past people) but now is secret no longer, for God had revealed it through Paul's prison ministry; it was manifest *to His saints* and not to the unsaved world at large. It is *to them*, God wishes to make known "the riches of the glory of this secret" (27).

Our English word "would" is a common word and stands for more than one aspect of meaning. Here it translates the Greek verb "to wish". God *wishes* to make known this secret to His children; it is connected with "riches of glory", so high and vast that they baffle adequate description. But how many of the redeemed have ears to hear or show any signs of wanting to know it or respond to its wonders? Few indeed it would seem, judging by the response of Christians today. For the most part they are so busy taken up with other things and cumbered about like Martha of old, they have no time or heart to sit at the Lord's feet and listen. If they only knew what they are missing!

In Ephesians, the characteristics of the Mystery are that the

Gentile and Jewish members of the Body are on perfect equality in every way—joint-heirs, joint-partakers, and a joint-Body. Here in Colossians, another feature is emphasized: “to whom God wishes to make known what is the riches of the glory of this Secret among the Gentiles; which is *Christ among you (Gentiles), the Hope of glory.*”

The reader will notice the word “among” which occurs twice in this translation instead of once, as in the A.V. This is to recognize the preposition in the Greek which occurs twice. It is hardly consistent to render the phrase: “this secret *among* the Gentiles, which is Christ *in* you”, when the word is the same in both cases. The experience of the indwelling Christ was stated by Paul at the beginning of his ministry when he wrote to the Galatians: “I have been crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live: yet not I, *but Christ liveth in me*” (Gal. 2:20). Paul knew the deep experience of it, but he does not say that this is a divine secret hidden in God from past ages either here or anywhere else, and we have no Scriptural authority to teach that the Mystery is “Christ dwelling in the heart by faith” (Eph. 3:17) wonderful though this is. It is rather that the Gentiles who by nature are dead spiritually, under the domination of the prince of the power of the air, without Christ, Godless, aliens from all Israel’s covenants and blessings—far off and without hope (Eph. 2:1-16), now have the matchless privilege of having CHRIST AMONG THEM quite independently of Israel—“that I should preach *among the Gentiles* the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:8). From Genesis twelve to Acts twenty-eight, Gentiles could only get Divine blessing in one way; i.e., through the chosen channel Israel, God’s elect nation. That despised and far off Gentiles could ever be blessed quite apart from the Jew as a covenant nation, and that far above anything Israel ever had or imagined, was entirely a secret and would have been utter presumption to contemplate unless God had willed it to be and revealed it.

But that is what we have here—Christ among those who had been regarded as “dogs” and outcasts. He is among them as the *Hope of Glory*—the hope of being one day glorified and seated with Him in heaven’s Holiest of all when His glory shall be manifested (Col. 3:1-4). This is indeed a happy and certain hope! (Titus 2:13).

Paul now continues:

“Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man full grown (perfect) in Christ Jesus” (1:28).

Paul’s ministry had Christ at the very centre: it was indeed Christo-centric and a pattern for all future preaching. Judged by this standard, what can we say about modern preaching? Much of it is lifeless and powerless because it is Christless. If only ministers and preachers would present the Risen Christ in all His glory, the Christ of the Word, what might happen? The prison ministry of the Apostle revolved around the Ascended Lord seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high. In making known the riches of the glory among far-off Gentiles connected with this exalted Saviour, he both teaches and warns.

Presently he is going to use the word “beware” and show the things that will lead away from Him and prevent this “going on to maturity” with a reward in view (2:8,18). Here is the second presentation of Colossians, not just a repetition of the glorious presentation of verse twenty-two, but something additional which has to do with the experimental response and growth of the believer from spiritual babyhood to adulthood. We have considered this word “perfect” and its derivatives before and seen that it does not mean to improve or make sinless, for it is used of the Holy Son of God Himself (Heb. 2:10, 5:8,9). It points forward to an *end* or *goal* which in both the natural and spiritual life is *maturity*. There are things in both these spheres that militate against healthy growth, so Paul *warns* as well as teaches lest the prize or crown, additional to the glories of being a member of the Body of Christ, be lost.

At the end of the epistle we find Epaphras praying along similar lines, “Epaphras . . . always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that *ye may stand perfect* (full grown) and complete (or filled) in all the will of God” (4:12).

In each case there is an intensity about their ministry represented in the word “striving” of verse twenty-nine and “labouring fervently” of 4:12. Both are the same word in the Greek which describes the efforts of a runner in a race. This sort of labouring and service is hard indeed, but how effective! Alas, so few are prepared to engage in it with persistence, and so render real and fruitful work for Christ. Paul was a wise man; he did not labour in his own strength. He knew this was of the flesh and valueless; on the contrary he experienced the exceeding greatness of the power which brought Christ from the grave

and seated Him in the heavenly places far above all (Eph. 1:19-21). This energized (worked in) him mightily and the Apostle found it to be more than sufficient for all his needs and the needs of fellow members of the Body. Wise are we if we put it to the test. It is "to us-ward who believe" (Eph. 1:19) and its wonder working and strengthening power has not lessened or changed in the slightest degree.

CHAPTER IX

THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Chapters Two to Four

Chapter two of Colossians carries the theme on "For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh". The word "conflict" is the noun related to the word "striving" of 1:29. This striving relates to their "perfecting" and also to what follows.

"That their hearts may be comforted, they 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*, in Whom are *all* the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden" (2:2,3 R.V.).

The word "comforted" might be better translated "encouraged", for it suggests the need of strengthening in this going on to full growth. We come now right to the heart of the matter, for this progress is vitally linked to "full assurance of understanding", and getting to know and acknowledge the One Who is the Secret of God—namely the Lord Jesus Christ. "That I may get to know Him" must ever be the believer's aim (Phil. 3:10).

In the New Testament we have full assurance of *faith* (Heb. 10:22), full assurance of *hope* (Heb. 6:11) and here full assurance of *understanding*. These expressions are the very opposite of doubt or ignorance and are utterly essential to the believer who is going on to maturity (perfection) (Heb. 6:1). Not only this but we have the word "riches" linked with complete assurance. Riches are inextricably woven into the dispensation of the Mystery—riches beyond computation. Our redemption comes through *riches of grace* (Eph. 1:7). We are now to get to know what are the *riches of the glory of His inheritance* in the saints (Eph. 1:18). The ages to come are to be an unfolding of the Father's *exceeding riches of grace* (Eph. 2:7). The Mystery is linked with the *unsearchable riches of Christ* to be proclaimed among the Gentiles (Eph. 3:8).

The giving by God in Ephesians 3:16 is according to the *riches of His glory*. Our present and future needs are all covered be-

cause they will be supplied "according to *His riches in glory by Christ Jesus*" (Phil 4:19). We have already pondered upon the "riches of the glory of this secret" (Col. 1:27), and here we have *riches of the full assurance of understanding* of the One Who constitutes the Secret of God—even the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Here is wealth beyond dreams, waiting for the appropriation of faith. But Matthew 11:27 needs bearing in mind as well. Some secrets God makes known as Colossians 1:27 testifies. Other secrets God does not reveal and this one concerning Himself is not completely unfolded. Not until the sounding of the seventh trumpet in the Book of the Revelation is the mystery of God finished (Rev. 10:7); until then we only see in part and know in part the greatness of the limitless and Almighty One Who sums Himself up in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who deny His Deity can have no part in the full assurance of understanding of *this* Secret. But it is utterly essential for those who are pressing on to the goal of spiritual maturity.

What think ye of Christ? (Matt. 22:42). Is our estimate of Him like the Apostle Paul's? Our answer to this question is absolutely vital to our spiritual growth and going on to maturity (perfection).

The Apostle Paul speaks of the greatest Secret of all—the Secret of God and of the Father—even *Christ*, and we are told that this secret has not been fully revealed for "no man knoweth (completely knows) the Son, but the Father" (Matt. 11:27). However, it is our supreme privilege to get to know Him more and more, realizing that this is His will and an essential part of our spiritual growing up to maturity. "Till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, *and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full grown man . . .*" (Eph. 4:13 R.V.). In Colossians 2:3 the Apostle adds:

"In Whom are hid *all* the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

The only real antidote to error is to preach Christ Jesus in all His fulness, and Paul continually does so, but specially here, because he has in mind the teaching of deceivers who sought to lead the saints away from their completeness in Him. This heretical teaching had a "show of wisdom" (23) and a philosophy, but it was "vain and deceitful" (8); it was "knowledge (science) falsely so called" (1 Tim. 6:20). To seek for wisdom and knowledge apart from Christ must end in disillusionment

and deception, for Christ *is* the Wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24) and “*all* the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid in Him” and apart from Him, there are none.

“This I say, that no one may delude you with persuasiveness of speech” (2:4 R.V.)

Paul well knew the power of oratory and of the great value put upon it by the Greek mind. When he came to the Corinthian church he decided to discard mere oratory in making the Truth known.

“And my speech and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (1 Cor. 2:4,5 R.V.).

We know today the power of the spoken word and the way clever speeches can sway the human mind. The Devil uses people who can “put it across” as we say. Error can be promulgated very persuasively and the Devil knows how to suit his bait to every class of Christian at whatever stage of spiritual growth they may have attained. Believers at Colossæ had progressed far along the pathway of Truth otherwise they could not have rejoiced in the “strong meat” of the ministry of the Mystery. In the most important “warning” section that follows (2:8-23) no reference is made to sins of the flesh for these would not have been a temptation to such. Rather we have a false sanctification, “a neglecting of the body” (23); a false worship, “a worshipping of angels” (18); a false humility (23); a false stressing of ceremonials which are but shadows (16,17). All this, on the surface, appeared very *religious* and *spiritual*, but it was all vain and false, because it led away from Christ and the Fullness which is to be found in Him alone.

It was not “after (according to) Christ” (8) and came about through not holding fast to the Head (19). It had a “form of godliness”, but denied the power (2 Tim. 3:5). Satan is most to be feared when he comes as “an angel of light” and speaks through “ministers of righteousness” (2 Cor. 11:14,15). He lies like the truth, and we need to be constantly on our guard today, for the Lord Jesus predicted that *deception* would be characteristic of the last days of this age (Matt. 24:4,5,11). We need to beware of mere externals; the acid test, as we have reiterated before, is: *what place is accorded to the Lord Jesus Christ?* The Divine purpose is that in “*all things He should have the first place*” (1:18).

Anything less than this is Satan's lie, however good and right it may appear in teaching or practice, or however cleverly or persuasively it may be presented.

Paul was most concerned lest the Enemy, with his cunning wiles, should beguile the believers at Colossæ; and so he develops the warning side of his ministry mentioned in 1:28, and puts them on their guard respecting enticing words or persuasive speech. Before he elaborates this, he adds a word of praise to encourage them to keep in the pathway of Truth.

"For though I be 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. As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so walk ye in Him: rooted and built up in Him*, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving" (2:5,7).

So far they had been steadfast or firm. They had not only received Christ as Saviour, but also as Lord, so they should continue to give Him His rightful place as such, thus keeping close to Him and safe from deception. Rooted (verse 7) is literally "having been rooted" looking back to the initial work of salvation, and "being built up", their present growth in grace and knowledge of Christ. It was this "building up in Christ" that Satan sought to spoil in them, as he still seeks to do in believers today. But they had been taught otherwise (7). The word "taught" gives us the word "doctrine". True doctrine is God teaching His children through the Word of Truth rightly divided. It is only when we absorb this that we have anything real to practise.

To try and divorce practice from doctrine or to suggest that practice is more important than doctrine is false. We need *both doctrine and practice* and in that order, otherwise what we are practising will only be our own faulty ideas, or those of other people. The Apostle adds thanksgiving as another guard against error. We have seen before that a thankful heart is a great preservative against declension. The only safe position for the believer is to accord the Lord Jesus His rightful place as First and Last; to realize that all the fulness and all the treasures are found in Him alone and so to hold fast and keep close to Him, the Head (2:19), and realize that HE IS ALL and there can be no extras to Him in any way whatsoever.

The object of Satan is to detract from this position and to lead believers away from the fulness that is theirs in Christ. So the

Apostle warns and exposes the devices of the Devil. Chapter 2:8 R.V. reads: "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." The attack of the evil one was along three lines: (1) a vain, deceitful philosophy, (2) tradition and (3) the rudiments of the world.

(1) *Philosophy* is man's search for wisdom; an attempt to get to the bottom of things by himself. As long as man keeps within the limits of human experience he is within his depth, but directly he seeks to penetrate the realm of God he is in a limitless ocean in which he flounders helplessly. "The world by wisdom knew not God" (1 Cor. 1:21). Unless God in His mercy and condescension stoops to reveal Himself, man by his searching can find out nothing. But God *has graciously done this* in the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Living Word, and has made Him known in the Written Word. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). Ancient Greece produced some of the finest intellects that the world has ever known, but the tragedy was that, with all their talk of wisdom, they never came to realize that this was to be embodied and perfectly expressed *in a Person*, the Son of God. The Jews had their philosophers too, such as the Essenes, but they too, missed the mark in the same way. To represent that true wisdom can be found anywhere but in Christ is both vain (empty) and deceitful. It was a "shew of wisdom" being foisted upon the Colossian church which sought to turn their eyes away from the Lord Jesus in Whom are hid "*all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*" (2:3).

(2) *Tradition*. This word is usually used in a bad sense in the Scriptures. The Lord Jesus said to some of His day: "

"Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own *tradition* . . . making the Word of God of none effect through your *tradition*" (Mark 7:9,13).

Human tradition is the addition of man's fallible ideas and customs to the perfect Word of truth, thus making it of none effect.

Both Paul and Peter knew its crippling power:

"Being more exceedingly zealous *of the traditions of my fathers*" (Gal. 1:14).

"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things . . . from your vain conversation *received by tradition* from your fathers" (1 Pet. 1:18).

Tradition is just as rampant today. How much dogma in the Christian world is just human tradition, which, when honestly tested by the Word of Truth, is shewn up for what it is? It holds in bondage many believers who are kept back from going on to the deeper things of the Word and to maturity by its powerful fetters. In the Colossian church the enemy of Truth was seeking to put its chains upon those who had been redeemed and freed by the precious blood of Christ.

(3) *The rudiments of the world.* The Greek phrase rendered "the rudiments" came to mean the letters of the alphabet and then the rudiments or first steps in the knowledge of any subject. Here it is related to a world that knows not God or the Truth and is dominated by the god of this age (1 John 5:19). It represents the outlook, ideas and ways of the unsaved world about us. In what sense can this help any believer forward on the pathway to full growth? It can only enslave and turn such aside from the mind of Christ. How careful we should be that in spiritual things our thinking is not being influenced by the "rudiments of the world!"

Here then are the methods that Satan was using at Colossæ and the Apostle expands them in this section, adding the necessary correctives to save these believers from being trapped by his wiles. We find them still in evidence in Christendom and only by the most rigorous adherence to a rightly divided Word of Truth and holding fast to the Head can we be guarded from being deceived and led astray. The corrective is given us at the end of verse eight; these things are "not *according to (or after) Christ*". This is the acid test all along. The Lord Jesus and His unique position in the revelation of God is the Standard by which all must be measured. Anything falling short of this is not Truth. Christ cannot be supplemented, for "in Him dwelleth *all the fulness of the Godhead* bodily" (9), a tremendous statement that could not be true of any created being, but only of God in the fullest sense and verse ten goes on, "And *ye are complete (made full R.V.) in Him*, Who is the Head of all principality and power."

Here is the answer then to the heretics at Colossæ. Christ is *first*, and *all* the fulness of God dwells in Him. He is Head of heaven's aristocracy—principalities and powers; He is the one and only Mediator between God and men (1 Tim. 2:5). What need was there for the so-called mediators fabricated by the Colossian deceivers? And if members of the Body of Christ are

filled to the brim and complete in Him, what could these people add to such a glorious position? Their false humility, worshipping of angels, neglecting of the body were only spurious substitutes for the real thing, which, being COMPLETE, cannot be added to in any way without spoiling its truth. If only believers today could live in the conscious enjoyment of the fact that they are really COMPLETE IN CHRIST, filled to the full in Him, what a difference there would be in the standard of Christian walk and witness! It is when we try to add something to this glorious completeness, when we say we must have Christ *plus something else*, whether religious or otherwise, that we step aside from Truth into danger. These things, at the best, can only be shadows (verses 16, 17), and who wants shadows when they have the REALITY?

The Apostle, in the section that follows, is going to show that the Divine types of the Old Testament at the best were only shadows and could have no place when the reality and completeness had come, while the man-made additions such as the worshipping of angels and neglecting of the body were only the enemy's substitutes to lead away the believer into bondage and loss of reward.

Verses 11-23 are an expansion of what it means to be complete in Christ. Paul deals with the spiritual equivalent of circumcision and baptism and shows in both cases how the shadow has given way to the substance. "In Whom 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" (11 R.V.). In the Old Testament ritual circumcision took place on the eighth day. Now the eighth is the octave, the new beginning, a picture of resurrection. The sinful old nature of the believer in 'God's reckoning has been "cut off" and crucified with His Son (Rom. 6:6), and now the believer can rise in newness of life to serve the Saviour (Rom. 6:4) in glorious anticipation of resurrection life. If circumcision here is spiritual, *not made with hands*, so is the baptism that follows. In a section that is going to teach that food and drink, feast days, new moons and sabbath days are but shadows (verses 16 and 17) now that each member of the Body finds his completeness and fulness in Christ, water baptism (in itself a type or shadow) would only be an intruder and nullify the Apostle's argument.

We have seen that the sevenfold unity of Ephesians 4:4-6 only admits of *one* baptism, which must be the spiritual reality ad-

ministered by the Holy Spirit and not the type, otherwise there would be *two* and not *one*. Moreover, those who insist on the type in Colossians 2:12 evidently do not realize the implication underlying the verse. We quote from the Revised Version, "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". *This baptism is God's working not man's* and God is in no way dependent upon the administration of a rite by man to do His work whether Christian or otherwise. The believer who belongs to the Church which is the Fullness, has been united with the Lord Jesus in His death, burial, quickening, resurrection and session at God's right hand. This has been accomplished by the working of God the Holy Spirit, and nothing less than this could have made such a wonderful position possible. At the best, water baptism was only a type, shadowing forth this working of God on behalf of the believer, and in this context shadows flee away before substance and reality.

This unity with Christ means victory over all the believer's enemies, sin, death, the law, and evil principalities and powers, heavenly beings who had evidently fallen and ranged themselves under Satan. "And you, being dead through your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh (the old sinful nature), you, I say, did He quicken together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses; having blotted out the bond written in ordinances that was against us (the moral and ceremonial law), which was contrary to us: and He hath taken it out of the way, nailing it to the Cross; having put off from Himself the principalities and the powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (2:13-15 R.V.).

The figure here is a military one. The Lord Jesus, the mighty Conqueror, has fought and defeated these spiritual foes, stripped them of their armour and displayed them in the manner of a Roman triumphal procession. He indeed led captivity captive (Eph. 4:8), and because of the victory of Calvary, the Resurrection and Ascension, we can be more than conquerors through Him that loved us (Rom. 8:37). For the members of the Body of Christ there can be nothing to fear. All trespasses gone, past, present and future and all enemies subdued by the Saviour. What greater position of security could there be? This is what being "complete in Christ" means, and how the Devil seeks to get the believer on to lower ground, keeping him occupied if possible with his own doing, in rites and ceremonies,

instead of being taken up with *what God has done for him in and through Christ!* It is all the operation of God. Let us thankfully take our stand on it by faith and realize how safe, how secure is the one so linked by God with Himself.

In view of this, Paul, in a mighty sweep, sets aside all the types and shadows of a bygone dispensation now that the reality that they pointed forward to had come into being. "Let no man therefore judge you (take you to task, Moffatt) 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." (16 R.V.). The food and drink were the Divine regulations of diet given to Israel in Leviticus 11. The feast days were detailed in Leviticus 23; all were a part of the ceremonial law and Israel's covenant relationship with God. They were only a "shadow of good things to come and not the very image of the things" (Heb. 10:1). Let no one then seek to introduce shadows into such a glorious sphere of reality and substance. To do so is a step backwards, playing into the hands of the Deceiver and leading away from the believer's fulness in Christ.

No wonder the Apostle goes on to warn the Colossian believers of the possibility of losing their *prize*. Their salvation and life was secure, being hid with Christ in God (3:3), and therefore beyond the risk of forfeiture. Their reward or prize, however, depended upon their faithfulness in service and witness and in their holding fast to the Head. It was this that was in danger if they gave heed to the insidious teaching that sought to lead them away in practice from their completeness in Christ. We need to beware of the very same thing today for Satan's wiles have not changed.

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 (verse 18,19 R.V.).

This verse and those that follow are difficult indeed, but they are describing the error, very like to the later Gnosticism, which was spoiling the church at Colossæ. Here was Satan's counterfeit of the Truth. Outwardly there was a false humility, false visions, placing angels as intermediaries or mediators in the place of the *One Mediator*, the Lord Jesus Christ; there was a severe asceticism and neglecting of the body, a spurious holiness

which undoubtedly looked impressive, but inwardly it was all nothing more than the puffing up of the sinful old nature, causing the believer to cease to hold fast to the Head—Christ Himself,

“Not holding fast the Head, from Whom all the Body, being supplied and knit together through the joints and bands, increaseth with the increase of God” (19 R.V.).

In our studies in Ephesians we saw the pre-eminent place that the Lord has as Head to the church which is His Body. Life, light, power, growth and blessing can only come from the Head to the members. Any dislocation can only mean withering and unfruitfulness, leaving one open to the deception of the Devil. Putting on the whole armour of God, which is Christ (Eph. 6), abiding in the Vine (John 15:1-8), holding fast to the Head are only three ways of saying the same thing, namely, remaining in close fellowship with Him Who alone can keep us from falling. The result will be fruitfulness to His glory and growth (increase) to spiritual maturity.

Paul now brings forth another reason why the Colossian believers should not be ensnared by this false teaching with its imitation of true sanctification, its rites and ceremonies, precepts and doctrines. *They had died with Christ* in God's reckoning and should have been dead to all this in practice.

“If ye died with Christ from the rudiments of the world (i.e. since this was their position in Christ), why, as though living in the world, do ye subject yourselves to ordinances (such as), 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” (20-23 R.V.).

The word translated “indulgence” has in its make-up the idea of filling. In Colossians there are two fillings standing in utter contrast—the believer filled (complete) in Christ and a member of the Church which is the Fulness of Christ, or this travesty of truth, Satan's “angel of light” teaching, which, however fair externally merely fills the flesh, the old sinful nature. Note the phrase “as though living in the world”. Some may object and say “are we not actually living in the world?” Not in the sense the Apostle meant. If we look back to Israel for a moment, we remember that they were redeemed from Egypt (a type of the world) and although their heart and mind looked back there on

occasions, they were *never allowed to return and live there*. They were living on earth but journeying home to Canaan. Never again did they live in Egypt. Likewise we have been redeemed from our Egypt (the world-system around us with its outlook and thinking controlled by the powers of darkness). We, like Israel, walk this earth, but we are not of the world in this sense, or living in the world with its domination. Note, too, that the injunctions put forward by the heretics at Colossæ were all *negative*, touch *not*; taste *not*; handle *not*. True sanctification is primarily *positive*—not so much what we do *not* do, but what we *are* and *what we actually practise*. This is what really matters.

Chapter three continues the argument and there ought to be no chapter break.

“If then ye were raised together with Christ (i.e. since this is a fact), 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”

(Col. 3:1,2 R.V.).

If believers of the Colossian church did this, there would be no danger of being ensnared by the false teaching in their midst. In the purpose of God, the Body of Christ has been raised with Him and seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly places, in Him (Eph. 2:6). This being so, the logical thing to do is to fix one's thinking there. The A.V. has “set your *affection* on things above”, which the R.V. rightly corrects to “set your mind—(the bent of your mind, your attitude of mind) on the things that are above,” where Christ is seated at the right hand of God and not on earthly things.

There are those who tell us that the destiny of the Body of Christ is an earthly one; in which case the most reasonable thing would be to think on earthly things. *But we are commanded not to do this*. In addition Philippians 3:18,19 warns of those believers whose end is loss (destruction), who do this very thing and *mind earthly things*. Strange indeed if this is the goal of the believer's faith and where his eternal inheritance will be enjoyed. Such a view is entirely against the spirit of revelation of the wondrous calling revealed in the Prison Epistles. If God reckons us to be in heavenly places *where Christ is enthroned*, we should set our minds there and our affections too, knowing that our hope will be the *realization* of our faith and *heavenward thinking now*. The more we are taken up with the exaltation and enthronement of the Lord Jesus in the highest glory

at the Father's right hand, the more we shall appreciate the wonders of our destiny and what Philippians 3:20 means when it asserts that our citizenship or homeland exists as a present fact in heaven.

After telling the believer to let the bent of his mind be upon the things above where Christ is enthroned and not on earthly things, the Apostle Paul brings forward yet another reason why this should be done:

"For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God"
(Col. 3:3 R.V.).

What attraction has the world to a dead man? He is beyond it all. Potentially the believer died when his Saviour died on the Cross and his real life, the life that is eternal, found only in Christ, is safely *hidden in God with Him*. Here it is absolutely secure, beyond the reach of Satan, the powers of darkness and the believer's own sin and weakness. No one who has any real conception of what this means could talk of being saved today and lost tomorrow. Who can touch the believer's life that God hides in Himself?

Note the two hidden things in Colossians: "Christ . . . in Whom are *hid* all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (2:3) and "your life is *hid* with Christ in God" (3:3)—hidden treasure and hidden life, precious things beyond reckoning in terms of earth or time. The Apostle proceeds:

"When Christ, Who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with Him be manifested in glory" (3:4 R.V.).

Matthew twenty-four gives us a picture of the revelation of the glory of Christ *when He returns to the earth* with all His mighty angels after the time of unprecedented world trouble called the Great Tribulation which largely involves Israel (the time of Jacob's trouble). After this, Matthew twenty-five describes the judgment of the living nations and settles their position, or otherwise, in the Lord's earthly kingdom.

But all this is foreign to Colossians three and in fact to all the Prison ministry of Paul. The believers at Colossæ are not directed to these prophetic events which will take place on the earth. As we have seen they are exhorted to turn their minds away from earthly things to the seated Lord Jesus in glory at the Father's right hand, where they are potentially seated in Him (Eph. 2:6). Consequently, their hope is in harmony with this glorious position as it always is in Scripture, with whatever

Divine calling one is dealing. This Church is directed to look forward in faith to a manifestation THERE, NOT ON THE EARTH. They have been made sufficient by redeeming grace to become partakers of the inheritance IN THE LIGHT (Col. 1:12), a *present* possession and one that can have no reference to any light or experience on the earth now. Rather does it point to the Holiest of all where Christ is seated and enthroned in glory. With this agrees Titus 2:12,13; we should "live . . . looking for the blessed hope, and manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ." This is entirely in harmony with the spirit of Colossians 3:1-3, with its leading away from things that are upon the earth, and the believer who holds this fast as something joyous, precious and practical, is not likely to become side-tracked with things of time and sense.

The Apostle now looks to a walk that is in harmony with such a heavenly calling and hope.

"Mortify therefore your members *which are upon the earth.*"
(3:5).

Note this last phrase, very much like the implication of "why, as though living in the world" of chapter 2:20. From one standpoint they were obviously upon the earth, but from God's standpoint they are seen by Him as associated with His Son in the highest heaven, and this is the standpoint of this Church all through the revelation given in Paul's Prison Epistles. Paul is concerned to make the believer see the implications of such a high calling of God in Christ Jesus. He does not ask the believer to try and mortify or put to death his sinful nature and its fruit. Such a thing would be impossible and verse five does not have this meaning. Rather it is the teaching of Romans six over again, where God has crucified the "old man" with His Son.

He alone has accomplished on the Cross its putting to death and now the believer is asked to reckon or count this to be so in his experience. He is expected to make explicit in fact what has graciously been accomplished for him in Christ. The practical section of Colossians which follows largely covers the ground of Ephesians chapters four to six. We do not intend to deal with this section in detail. The reader is asked to refer to the exposition of that passage earlier on. Colossians 3:5-15 is dealing with putting off the old man with his deeds and putting on the new man (see Eph. 4:21-24).

This "new man" is "renewed in knowledge after the image of

Him that created him" (10). As we have seen, God is here carrying on His purpose which became spoiled in Adam's fall. Adam was made in the Image of God and all his seed would have remained so had they not become involved in sin and death. But now redeeming love steps in and starts a new creation "after His Image" and presently all the saved will be conformed to the Image of the Son (Rom. 8:29). In this new creation all earthly distinctions are gone. The Revised Version reads,

"Where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman: BUT CHRIST IS ALL, and in all" (3:11).

It may be that in the phrase *Christ is All* we have the summing up of all truth, the most profound statement in the Bible. The more one reflects on it and realizes its implications, the more one realizes that it is so. Christianity is Christ; God to us now is Christ; all Truth is Christ; everything that is holy, right and beautiful is found in Him; Christ is indeed ALL. How long will it be before we and all professing Christians realize and act upon this fact in our life and witness? True, the revelation concerning Him starts as a small stream in Genesis three with the Seed of the woman, but by the time Paul's Prison Epistles are reached it has expanded into a mighty, limitless ocean with Him Who once stooped to the Cross, now so highly exalted in ascension that He fills *all things* in heaven and earth (Eph. 4:10) and has the *first place* (Col. 1:18) and so is ALL. It is in the Church which is His Body where this is most in evidence. This company of the redeemed are a new creation, formed into a *new man*, consisting of Jewish and Gentile believers, where these and all other distinctions cease (Eph. 2:14,15).

We have seen that in the calling-out, constitution and destiny of this Church there is set forth in miniature the goal of the ages. If Christ is everything, ALL and in all here, it is but a picture of the consummation of all things, when at last God shall be ALL in all (1 Cor. 15:28). If we have the infinite privilege of belonging to such a calling we can be described in the wonderful title of verse twelve, "God's elect (chosen), holy and beloved" (R.V.), and this takes us back to Ephesians 1:4, where we have been chosen in Christ by the Father and made holy and without blemish in Him. This is how the Father sees us in His Son, and surely then the logical conclusion is that we, in daily life and practice, shall "put on . . . a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering . . . forgiving each other . . .

and above all these things *put on love, which is the bond of perfectness*" (12-14 R.V.). Note this practical love is a *tie*, cementing together each member of the Body and it is the only way that the threefold unity of Ephesians four can be realized in deed and practice.

Continuing, the Apostle writes: "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." The passage in Ephesians 5:18,19 is very similar, but there Paul says: "Be filled with (or better, by) the Spirit." The Holy Spirit is the filler and Colossians 3:16 tells us with what He fills the believer; it is the *Word of Christ*. This does not refer to the words the Lord spoke during His earthly ministry, for the gospel records were neither written nor circulated in Asia Minor at this point. It rather refers to all the revelation of truth given by Christ when ascended, through the earthen vessel—Paul, His Apostle to the Gentiles. This may not be so spectacular to the senses as miraculous spiritual gifts, but it goes much deeper and leads to a fuller knowledge of the One Who should be ALL to the believer in this highest of all callings.

The Apostle now deals with the whole of Christian relationships as he does in Ephesians, dealing with wives and husbands, children and parents, masters and servants. The thought that underlies everything is given in verses 23-25:

"And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, *as to the Lord*, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the *reward* of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons."

All must be done with the Lord in view, remembering that, in the final issue, each believer is answerable to Him and not to man. Christian service is the theme ("Ye serve the Lord Christ") and there is an eternal reward for a service that the Master approves. Equally there is a loss of reward and receiving for the wrong that is done, for we deal with a God Who does not indulge in an unrighteous favouritism, but rather is the "righteous Judge" of the believer's thoughts and actions "in that day" (2 Tim. 4:8).

The Apostle now urges the vital ministry of prayer.

"Continue stedfastly in prayer, watching therein with thanksgiving" (4:2 R.V.).

God is still calling for those who are willing to learn how to pray effectively and persevere in so doing; as much may be wrought behind the scene in prayer as in the forefront of Christian service. Paul asks lastly for prayer on his behalf that he may have a "door for the Word". Let us remember for our encouragement that we deal with One Who "openeth and no man shutteth" (Rev. 3:7), and although the aim of the Enemy of Truth is always to try and close the door for the Lord's witness, God is sovereign and if He opens the door, not all the powers of darkness can close it. We ought to be ready then for every Divine opening and without fear of what other believers or unbelievers may say or do, we should give this Word of Truth boldly and yet in love, for so we "ought to speak". How often has fear closed the lips of Christians, possibly because they are thinking more of the estimate or reaction of others, believers or unbelievers, than that of the Lord and of the responsibility that the light of truth brings.

The rest of the epistle is more detailed and personal than the closing verses of Ephesians, where personal greetings are entirely absent. Paul has no need to write of his personal condition, for he has sent Tychicus to them for the very purpose of giving them this information (4:8) "that ye may know our estate" (R.V.), and not as the A.V. "that he might know your estate". Tychicus was a native of Asia Minor (Acts 20:4) and had accompanied Paul towards the end of his third missionary journey. Later we find him mentioned by the Apostle in connexion with the work in Crete and Ephesus (Titus 3:12; 2 Tim. 4:12). He was a beloved brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant, high commendation indeed. Onesimus, the runaway slave, is described as a faithful and beloved brother, but no details are given of his conversion.

Soon Paul was to write to his former master, Philemon, whom he (Onesimus) had wronged when unsaved, regarding receiving him back.

Aristarchus is called "my fellow prisoner" which can only mean that either his association with the Apostle had aroused suspicion and had caused him to be made a prisoner, or that he voluntarily shared Paul's imprisonment in order to comfort and minister to him. Verse ten gives us the first mention of Mark after the rupture of Acts fifteen. This young fellow had evidently made good, his previous failure being wiped out and forgotten; he is now a profitable servant. Of Jesus, called Justus,

we know nothing, but he is one who had been a comfort to the Apostle (11).

Epaphras, who has been referred to in chapter one, is now brought forward again with his wonderful prayer life on behalf of the Colossian saints.

“Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant (bond-slave) of Christ Jesus, saluteth you, always striving for you in his prayers, that ye may stand perfect (mature) and fully assured (completely filled) in all the will of God” (12 R.V.).

This is one of the shortest prayers recorded in the New Testament, but how comprehensive it is! Epaphras was entering into the Apostle's labour for the believers at Colossæ. Paul *strove* for them (1:29) that each might be presented *mature* (perfect) in the day of glory (1:28), and they might be *filled* with the knowledge of His will (1:9). In this way Paul worked on their behalf and in this way Epaphras prayed to the same end. Here is surely gathered up all that is necessary for the believer, from salvation and spiritual infancy to a full-grown man in Christ Jesus. Would that all our praying was so concise and effective.

Luke is next mentioned and described as the “beloved physician”. God in His love and mercy to Paul gave him a faithful and loving companion who could look after his bodily needs right to the end (2 Tim. 4:11). Then comes Demas with no remark from the Apostle as to his spiritual condition or service. Could Paul see the seeds of unfaithfulness already appearing, which finally resulted in his desertion as recorded in 2 Timothy 4:10? We have two contrasts in this section: Mark, who started badly and ended well and Demas, who started well and ended badly. May the Lord preserve us all from the latter experience.

Nymphas and the church in his house is now brought forward. The believer's home is where the church started and possibly where it will finish in a day of apostasy. Let no one think that a church in the New Testament sense is limited to ecclesiastical buildings. A dedicated Christian home can be an honoured place for the church in God's sight. The Apostle directs that this letter shall be read publicly among them and also one from Laodicea. Some think that this refers to the Ephesian letter. If it does not, then it forms no part of Scripture, for nothing of God's Word has been lost, for it is a complete whole. A personal note is now sounded.

“And say to Archippus (Philemon 2), take heed to the

ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou *fulfil* (fill) it" (4:17).

Here was an exhortation to faithfully complete the work and witness God had given him, and it is a message to us all. Lastly, Paul takes up the pen and concludes:

"The salutation of me, Paul, with mine own hand. *Remember my bonds*. Grace be with you" (18 R.V.).

Those bonds were for us Gentiles (Eph. 3:1,13). We do well to remember the cost that he paid so that we might know God's riches of grace and glory which are revealed here. Do we appreciate it?

CHAPTER X

THE EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS

Chapter One

The four doctrinal Prison Epistles of Paul (the Epistle to Philemon is a personal one and non-doctrinal) group themselves naturally into two pairs as viewed from their teaching, i.e. Ephesians and Colossians; Philippians and 2 Timothy: Ephesians and Colossians deal with the revelation of the dispensation of the Mystery from different aspects and the unique heavenly calling of that company of the redeemed which is entitled the "Fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:22,23). Philippians and 2 Timothy assume this teaching to be known, and proceed to elaborate the practical witness and service of each member of this assembly, with a view to the day of Christ, and his testing for service, and the possibility of a *reward* or *crown* being won or lost. This reward is something *additional* to what the believer receives by being placed by election and redemption into the Church which is His Body, with all its glory and riches. The latter position is given him in sheer grace and love and God does it all, first by the Father's choice (Eph. 1:4), and then by the Son's redeeming work (1:7).

His reward or crown, however, depends upon himself and is related to his *practical response* to the Truth in *faithfulness* and Christ-directed *service*. Obviously this divine prize then can be won or lost by the believer. We have before dealt with this, but repeat it again because of the confusion that exists in the minds of many Christians through not apprehending and keeping separate these distinct lines of teaching. If this were more generally known we should not have, on the one hand, people believing that they can be saved by grace and finally lost at the end, or on the other hand teaching that once saved it doesn't matter what sort of life or service the believer produces. Both views are unscriptural and wrong. These two parallel lines of teaching are given by an all-wise God, and when they are equally stressed we have *balance* and wholeness which is to His glory. Consequently we shall not be surprised to find that Philippians and 2 Timothy stress Christian service and witness

with a view to a PRIZE (Phil. 3:13,14) and a CROWN (2 Tim. 4:7,8).

Regarding the Philippian epistle it is not possible to be dogmatic as to the date of writing. There is every possibility that it was written by the Apostle Paul towards the end of his first Roman imprisonment, for he expects an early release (2:24). Evidently his trial was drawing to a close and the letter may have been written after his case had been heard by the Emperor, but before the public declaration that set him free. In Ephesians and Colossians there is no hint of his trial or possibility of being released which seems to clearly indicate that they were written before Philipians.

Verse one commences, "Paul and Timothy, servants (bond-slaves) of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons. (R.V.)." Paul links Timothy's name with his own in the introduction to 2 Corinthians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians and Philemon. The word "apostle" is omitted and in its place the writer calls himself and Timothy *servants* or bondslaves. This is all in line with the character of the epistle as we have already indicated, for it is pre-eminently one of service to one Master, for His commendation and approval. It is well to see that even He, the Lord of all, is brought forward as a SERVANT, for He took upon Himself the form of one in His matchless condescension (2:7). All the words for service are first of all applied to Him. He is THE APOSTLE (Heb. 3:1), THE HIGH PRIEST (Heb. 3:1), THE BISHOP (1 Pet. 2:25), THE DEACON (Rom. 15:8, where the word "minister" is literally "deacon"), and in Philipians He is presented as the greatest of all servants.

The word "bishop" means "overseer", and is so translated in Acts 20:28. The office was the same as presbyter or elder as can be seen by comparing Acts 20:17 with verse twenty-eight. In its verbal form it occurs in 1 Peter 5:2 where it is translated "take oversight". To understand this title we must rid our minds of all modern conceptions. Those eligible for this office were not necessarily high born or well educated. A list of essential qualifications is given in 1 Timothy 3:2-12, together with those of deacons, the chief feature being that their homes must be models of what Christian life should be, and as the church in its earliest form was "in the house", we can see how vital and necessary this was.

The word "deacon" is used of the lowly work of the house

(Luke 10:40), and Paul uses it of himself in Romans 11:13; those who held this office were ordinary individuals in themselves yet such as could be described as "faithful". Nor was this piece of service limited to men, for Phebe in Romans 16:1 is described as a deacon. While the Church is primarily an organism, a certain amount of organization was necessary that in its public witness everything should be done decently and in order and run smoothly.

After giving his salutation of grace and peace, the Apostle begins by giving thanks to God as he thinks about the Philippian church. Their practical love and faithful service were a constant joy to him (3). He remembers their "fellowship in furtherance of the gospel from the first day until now" (verse 5 R.V.). Their sharing (fellowship) in making known the good news from the first evangelization of their city until the time of writing had remained unbroken. For such faithful comradeship in the Truth, Paul was grateful and he was confident that it would continue: "being confident of this very thing, that He which *began* a good work in you will perfect (*finish*) it until the day of Jesus Christ" (6 R.V.).

He Who starts the good work by His saving grace is surely not going to do His work by halves. If He begins a work of salvation in a sinner, He will surely *finish* what He commenced, otherwise His purposes would be frustrated and it would be labour in vain. Let us thank God for the great confidence this brings.

The Apostle now links the finishing of redemption with the Day of Christ. "He Who has begun a good work in you will complete (*finish*) it until the day of Christ Jesus." (Nestlé Greek Text.) This "day" is one of five great prophetic periods of time made known in the Scriptures. The others are Man's day (1 Cor. 4:3 margin), the Day of the Lord (Isa. 2:10-22 and fifteen other references in the O.T. together with those in the N.T.), the Day of God (2 Pet. 3:10-12) and the Day of the Age (2 Pet. 3:18 literally). The Day of Christ is linked with His Second Coming (1 Cor. 1:7,8 as is 1 Cor. 5:5); 2 Timothy 1:12,18, 4:8 and 1 Cor. 3:13 are allusions to this period also. From these references it is clear that the Day of Christ refers to the time when the believer's hope is realized and his service and witness come up for testing before the Lord. Twice more in Philippians is this time referred to, namely 1:10 and 2:16.

It is evident that the bond between the Apostle and the

church at Philippi was very close. He uses the warm expression, "I have you in my heart" (1:7) and "I long after you all in the tender mercies of Christ Jesus" (8 R.V.). In their turn, they had manifested their love and gratitude to him very practically by "sending once and again unto my necessity" (4:16) as he puts it, which not only cheered and comforted him, but was well pleasing to the Lord (4:18). They had shared with him that grace of the Lord which not only saves, but enables the recipient to serve acceptably (cf. 1 Cor. 15:10).

Now he begins to pray for them. Always with the Apostle Paul his prayers for the saints had their spiritual growth and advancement in view. We have seen how this dominates his prayers in Ephesians and Colossians. Twice in the section under consideration the word "that" occurs, meaning "in order that"! "This I pray, *in order that* your love may abound (overflow) yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment, so that ye may approve the things that are excellent; *in order that* ye may be sincere and void of offence unto the day of Christ" (9 and 10 R.V.). Paul wanted to see abounding love, not only for its own sake, but that it might lead to a deeper knowledge, acknowledgement, discrimination and testing so as to understand the best that God has revealed and that this might result in being void of offence and sincere in the Day of Christ. We may think of a number of things that might result from overflowing love, but here it leads to a practical acknowledgement of the Truth and a fuller and deeper perception and discrimination.

We have seen before that this word "knowledge" is also rendered "acknowledgement" and therefore means not only what is *known*, but what is *put into practice*. Love, to be of any use, must be more than rhapsodizing; it must be practical in every way. The word "judgment" in the A.V. is rendered in the R.V. "discernment" which indicates the ability to weigh over or estimate "so that ye may approve the things that are excellent" (10 R.V.). The A.V. margin reads, "try the things that differ". The reader may wonder how these two different phrases can be a translation of the original. The word "differ" is rendered "better than" and "of more value than", in Matthew 6:26, 10:31, while in 1 Corinthians 15:41 it is used of one star *differing* from another star in glory. There is the idea of comparison at the root of its meaning, in order to assess what is better in value.

Paul prayed that these Philippian believers might grow in discernment so that they would be able to weigh over Truth

and arrive *at the appreciation of the best*. The word "better" is one of the key words of the Epistle to the Hebrews which in some ways runs parallel to Philippians in its teaching. In Hebrews we have One Who was better than angels (1:4, a better hope (7:19), a better covenant (7:22), better promises (8:6), better sacrifices (9:23), a better substance (10:34), a better resurrection (11:35) and a better thing (11:40). Abraham is a good example of one who tested the things that differ in order to get the best (the things that are excellent). God gave to him and his seed an earthly inheritance from the Nile to the Euphrates (Gen. 15:18); but Hebrews eleven reveals that the Lord also showed him a vision of the heavenly Jerusalem, even as He did many centuries later to the Apostle John as recorded in the Revelation. Weighing things over, he was able to appreciate that the heavenly City was *better* than an earthly inheritance, however attractive this might be (Heb. 11:9,10,16; 12:22,23).

It is this ability to assess the Truth of God given in the Scriptures that is so necessary, for there is a *progression of revelation* given in the Bible. If God says that some things therein are better than others, it must be so, and it is up to each one of us to search, pray and discover what these are if we really desire THE BEST. 2 Timothy balances Philippians and there, instead of an exhortation to test the things (of God's revelation) that differ, we have the command to "rightly divide the Word of Truth" (2 Tim. 2:15), but the object is the same, to arrive at understanding of the highest and best that God's Word makes known, and this we shall discover in the glory of the Ascended and Seated Christ with His Body, in Paul's prison ministry.

Such a knowledge will produce fruit; it will have practical results, leading us to be "sincere and void of offence unto the day of Christ, being filled with the *fruits* of righteousness, which are through Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God" (Phil. 1:10,11 R.V.). Thus the Apostle sought for fruit from his Philippian converts (4:17). In Ephesians he prays that the believers may have opened eyes and revelation given so that they might know and acknowledge the wonders that the Lord Jesus had revealed for them through his ministry. Here the result is the same. Would to God that there was more evidence that His people today desired to search and discover the divine riches given through Paul the channel. There is so little personal searching of the Word of Truth. The Devil puts a host of things in the way to make this difficult and there seems to be so little

spiritual hunger to urge the believer on to make discoveries in God's Word. If we have been led to do so, let us keep very humble and thankful that we who are so undeserving by nature, should have the exceeding riches of God made ours by redeeming Love in Christ.

In the section that follows, the unselfish, Christ exalting nature of the Apostle Paul is manifested to a higher degree perhaps than anywhere else in his writings. In it is also revealed the mighty enabling of the grace of God that made it possible for him to rise above the intense difficulties of his prison experience, the opposition of his enemies to his witness, and to become "more than conqueror" over it all. We quote from the Revised Version: "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 prætorian 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" (12-14 R.V.).

The bold, courageous stand for Christ had made its full effect. Paul would be chained to a Roman soldier and guarded day and night and through these men, apart from any other contacts, it would soon be manifest and spread abroad that he was the "prisoner of Christ Jesus", so that other believers, who would tend to be fearful owing to the danger of the times, became strengthened to give their witness without timidity. Fear is contagious and can be paralysing. Boldness in Christ can be contagious too, and its tonic effect seen in others who, left to themselves, would be timid and silent. What a reminder to each one of us today who bear the name of Christ to witness and speak boldly "as we ought to speak".

But even in his prison the Apostle was not free from the malignity of some of his foes. "Some indeed preach Christ *even of envy and strife*; and some also of good will: the one do it of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel; but the other proclaim Christ of faction, not sincerely, *thinking to raise up affliction for me in my bonds*" (15-17 R.V.). It hardly seems possible that spite should go to such pitiable lengths. What was the result? Did it depress and weigh down this man of God who already had enough to put up with by the very fact that he was a prisoner? Hear him give his testimony: "What then? only that in every way, whether in pretence or in

truth, CHRIST IS PROCLAIMED; and therein I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice" (18 R.V.). That magnificent "What then", "What about it"! Grace enables him to rise above it all and thrill with joy as he realizes that his Saviour was being proclaimed and brought before the minds of those who listened and that was all that the Apostle desired.

We have manifested in this letter extremes of experience; there was prison with all its rigours and suffering, but amidst it all an abiding joy, which runs through like a golden thread (see 1:4,25, 2:2,29, 4:1 and the word "rejoice" 1:18, 2:17,18,28, 3:1, 4:4,10). This shows us that lasting joy is not incompatible with suffering, if that suffering be for Christ and His Truth. The Apostle goes on: "For I know that this shall turn to my salvation, *through your prayer* and the supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ." What did he mean by his salvation? Was it deliverance from prison? It could be this, but possibly it was more. In a spiritual sense there is that salvation with the abiding glory of the overcomer which is referred to in 2 Timothy 2:10. Suffering and patient endurance for the Lord works out a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory as Paul well knew.

It is important to see the inter-relation between his prison experiences and the prayers of the Philippian believers. He says that it would turn to his salvation *through their prayers*, another reminder to us that prayer along the lines of God's will can accomplish mighty things. But even if he is not released, and has to die a martyr's death, his one object is the magnification and exaltation of his Saviour. "According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also *Christ shall be magnified in my body*, whether it be by life, or by death" (1:20). Note, he does not say Christ shall be magnified in my spirit, or in my mind, but in my body. It is easier to magnify the Lord in our thinking than in our bodies. In Scripture the body is sometimes linked with sin. The Apostle talks about "the law in my members, warring against the law of my mind" (Rom. 7:23) and Colossians 2:11 R.V. speaks of the putting off of the body of the flesh, and mortifying the members which are upon the earth (3:5). Yet this same body can be controlled by the new nature and it can be presented to God as a living sacrifice, acceptable unto God (Rom. 12:1). The body is for the Lord (1 Cor. 6:13), and we can glorify Him in our bodies (1 Cor. 6:19,20 R.V.).

It is clear then that the body, one of the Lord's most wonder-

ful creations, is neutral of itself and can be controlled by either flesh or spirit. In Philippians it is the "Spirit of Jesus Christ" that enables Paul to magnify Him in his body, so that in nothing he would be ashamed "in that day". Here again self is put right into the background. The Apostle is quite prepared to leave the question of living or dying to the will of the Lord; his only concern was that, either way, *He would be magnified* (20). Let us get this quite clear, for the next verse (21) can easily be misunderstood and this verse is connected by the word "for", showing that it is an expansion of verse twenty. "*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*" (21). Is the Apostle thinking of his own gain or Christ's? The question can only be answered by remembering the theme of verse twenty. Is Paul intruding any gain to himself there? There can only be one answer: No! This being so, it cannot be Paul's intention to insert it in verse twenty-one, otherwise the connexion shown by the word "for" is nullified. The full sense is: *Whether I live or die Christ shall be magnified. If I live it is Christ's (gain) or if I die it is (Christ's) gain—either way He gains or is magnified.* To bring in anything that the Apostle could gain would be an intrusion, something foreign to the context and would nullify his argument in verse twenty. Later on he talks about winning (gaining) Christ (3:8 R.V.), but this, too, is in harmony with the context there which is dealing with the steps forward to obtaining the *prize* related to the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Here he can live to the Lord's praise and if he dies for Him that will still be a wonderful testimony that will bring glory to His Name. Verses twenty-two to twenty-four continue: "But if to live in the flesh, if this is the fruit of my work, then what I shall choose I do not make known" (R.V. margin). The old English "wot" means "know". Paul does not say that he did not *know*, but rather he did not *make his choice known*—this is the meaning which is in harmony with his usage of the word in at least eleven other occurrences.

The Apostle is perplexed; two avenues opened up before him, abiding in the flesh or departing and being with Christ. There was no doubt which was the better, but had his work and witness finished? Could he not still be a means of blessing and help to the believers at Philippi and elsewhere? On reflecting upon this Paul knew that he could—"Yet to abide in the flesh is more needful for you . . . I know that I shall abide . . . for your progress and joy in the faith" (24,25 R.V.). Again self is put on

one side and the needs of his converts become uppermost. Can we catch this glorious spirit of unselfishness? This is of paramount importance if we wish to be of maximum use to the Lord in this day of opportunity.

He writes: "I am in a strait betwixt the two (living or dying), 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" (Phil. 1:23, 24 R.V.). The word translated "to be in a strait" means to "hold fast", "confine" and from a mental standpoint it can only mean that the Apostle was perplexed or "in a dilemma", as Weymouth translates it, by these two opposite things. He had a longing to depart. It has been suggested that this could be rendered "return", referring to the Return or Second Advent of Christ. But Paul uses the word again, as a noun, in 2 Timothy 4:6, "the time of my *departure* is at hand." Here it cannot possibly mean "return" in this sense but is a direct reference to his death. In view of this we believe the A.V. and R.V. to be right.

While this is so, we must not interpret verse twenty-three as though it sets forth the doctrine concerning an intermediate state. The Apostle is *expressing a desire* and this desire can only be properly understood in the light of 3:8-12, especially verse eleven. Resurrection is the Scriptural key to life after death. The One Who has conquered death and claims to be the Resurrection and the Life (John 11:25) is the only One Who can deliver from the power of death and the grave, and it is His all-powerful voice which will awaken the dead, whether believers or unbelievers (John 5:28,29 and cp. 1 Cor. 15:17-18). There was a resurrection which Paul was anxious to attain and in this way would he be with Christ. Entrance to glory is by *change* for the living believer and *resurrection* for those who sleep in Jesus, "SO (IN THIS WAY, as the Greek word means) shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17), and we have no right to introduce any other way. With this agrees the statement of the Lord Jesus in John 14:3: "*I will come again, and receive you unto Myself: that where I am, there ye may be also.*" This will be quite sufficient for those who are willing to accept what God has said and not bolster up man-made creeds or indulge in wishful thinking.

In spite of his strong desire to depart, the unselfishness of the Apostle Paul comes uppermost as always. He is willing to lay it all on one side and abide in the flesh for the Philippian be-

lievers, so that they might progress in the faith and the Lord receive the glory (25,26 R.V.). "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ" (27 R.V.). We are exhorted to "walk worthy of the calling" (Eph. 4:1); to "walk worthy of the Lord" (Col. 1:10), and here to "walk worthy of the gospel". This worthy walk is expanded to mean standing in unity—in one spirit and one soul, striving fearlessly for the faith of the gospel. Ephesians four reveals three great doctrinal unities which the Lord has created in the Body of Christ. Philippians assumes these are known and now stresses *unity in witness and practice*, for service, as we have seen, is its great theme.

It is of little use stressing the unities of Ephesians four and denying in practice the unity in service of Philippians. We shall see that the Greek preposition rendered *together* is a feature of Philippians as it is in Ephesians; in Ephesians it is used doctrinally, while in Philippians its usage is connected with Christian walk and witness.

This unity in service, "pulling together" is brought before us in verse twenty-seven R.V., "that ye *stand fast in one spirit, with one soul striving* for the faith of the gospel". The Greek preposition which sets forth this practical unity comes over into English in words compounded with *syn* and it is often rendered "together" or "fellow". This is of such importance in Philippians that it occurs at least eleven times. In this verse "striving" is literally "striving *together*". In 4:3 the same word occurs, and is this time rendered "laboured *with me*". In 2:17,18 the Apostle rejoices *together* with them and bids them do the same. In 3:17 he urges them to be "followers *together*" of himself, while he addresses one believer as a true "yoke *fellow*", yoked together in service with him. Chapter 2:25 described Epaphroditus as a "*fellow-soldier*" and "*companion in labour*", literally "soldier *together*" and "worker *together*" and we have other "*fellow labourers*" in 4:3. In chapter 2:2 the Philippians are exhorted to be of "one accord", literally "soul *together*".

There can be no doubt that this "being of one mind" in the truth and "labouring together" is of profound importance in service for the Lord and running the race for the Prize. Two extremes must be avoided. There are believers in lonely situations who are tempted to accept fellowship at any price, often at the expense of faithfulness. Loneliness is a tremendous test, but such fellowship is disloyalty to the Lord and must be avoided at all costs. On the other hand some believers are

isolationists by nature and to them this aspect of Philippians comes as a Divine corrective.

As far as we can, let us pull together in service and witness for the truths committed to us by the Lord. Unity is strength as the Devil well knows, hence his efforts, too often successful alas, to divide the members of the Body. Not only are the Philippian saints urged to stand together but they must be courageous: "in nothing affrighted by the adversaries" (28 R.V.). They can be "strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might" (Eph. 6:10) and if they are called to suffer for Christ's sake, then they should count it a gracious privilege because to them it had been "graciously given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (29).

It is important to realize that the word "given" has the word "grace" in its make-up; it is a gracious privilege to be allowed to suffer for the Saviour and His Truth. This is not the usual way of regarding suffering; too often we do our best to avoid it. But at the most, we shall only have a tiny sip of the cup of suffering that He drank right up for us and we should regard it as an honour to share in suffering for Christ in any small measure. In any case this cannot be compared with the "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17) which the Lord is holding for those who "patiently endure" (2 Tim. 2:12). Having this great encouragement we can go forward without shrinking, not counting the cost, realizing that whatever happens we have the promise of His abiding Presence with us (Heb. 13:5) right to the end of the journey home to Glory.

CHAPTER XI

THE EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS

Chapter Two

We have seen the great stress on unity in witness and practice, the "pulling together" that characterizes the last verses of chapter one. This is carried over into the opening verses of chapter two. We quote from Moffatt's translation: "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." The Apostle Paul appeals to all their deepest experiences as believers in Christ to preserve concord and a fruitful unity in service. He reminds them of all the encouragement and strengthening that was theirs in Christ; the impelling force of a great love which had been shed abroad in their hearts; their sharing together in the Spirit, the binding force of tenderness and compassion for each other. "Complete (fulfil) my joy," he says, "by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind" (2). They had already given him cause for joy (1:3,4, 4:10), but if they would make this joy complete then let them be fully united in loving service for the Lord and the Truth committed to them. Paul emphasizes this, for already there was an element of disunity between two believers (4:2) and he knew only too well how contagious this could be.

He continues (we quote from Weymouth's translation) "Do nothing in a spirit of factiousness or of vainglory, but, with true humility, let every one regard the rest as being of more account than himself; each fixing his attention, not simply on his own interests, but on those of others also" (3,4). Strife and conceit (vainglory), the splitting into cliques and the desire to make a fair show in the flesh and "swank", these elements have been potent forces in the Devil's hands to wreck Christian testimony all down the centuries. The antidote to all this is a true unselfishness, a complete emptying of self and *this is the essential spirit of this epistle*; it is the spirit that must be manifested in the life and walk if the heavenly prize and crown is to be

won. We have the greatest Example of this in the Lord Jesus Christ, Who, not regarding His own things, but the dire need of all His people, left the glory that was His, and stooped right down to the Cross of Calvary, with all its suffering, darkness, shame and degradation. We see it in Timothy, who unselfishly cared for them (2:19-22); in Epaphroditus, who, for the work of Christ, was nigh to death not regarding his own life (2:25-30).

Our greatest and subtlest enemy is often ourselves; we can be utterly enslaved to self and all its desires without recognizing it. It can even enter into the service of the Lord and dominate. We need to pray constantly that the Lord will deliver us from such bondage and continually encourage in us the spirit of selflessness. The order must be: The Lord Jesus first, others second and self last. The following passage (2:5-11) which gives us the supreme example of the Saviour, is one of the most sublime, yet most difficult of interpretation in the whole range of Scripture. One can easily get lost in its profundity; yet through it all, one thing must not be forgotten. It was not primarily written to teach us what was the mode of Christ's pre-existence before Bethlehem, or the nature of His Being. Rather it is an expansion of verse four: "look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." Here was One Who did this to the last degree; therefore "let *this mind* (this spirit of absolute unselfishness) be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (5). We look back to the Saviour in glory before time or the creation came into being and after this see His seven steps downward, a sevenfold humiliation to the Cross and then a sevenfold glorious exaltation once more to the glory He left and that was His by right. This is echoed in chapter three by Paul's sevenfold ground of confidence in the flesh, which he cast on one side, and his sevenfold gains in the spirit (3:5-11).

Coming then to the profound section before us, we may well be appalled at the heights of doctrine that it scales and the diversity of opinion prevailing among expositors as to its meaning. It is quite impossible to bring all these varying conceptions before the reader within the limits of this book. We will try, however, to express its true meaning as far as we are able, and are encouraged to realize that this must have been in some measure within the grasp of the believers at Philippi, otherwise it would have been useless to bring before them as an example to follow.

Verses five and six (R.V.) read: "Have this mind in you, which

was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself."

The first thing we must note is that the word "being" is not the simple verb "to be", but a word which means "existing originally". The R.V. margin reads "being originally". Moreover the tense of the word denotes indefinite continuance of being. We must not assume that existing in the form of God was changed for something else at Bethlehem. What does the word "form" mean? In English it often denotes "shape", but we must not fasten this meaning to the Greek word. We have the same word in verse seven; He took upon Himself the "*form*" of a servant. Obviously it cannot mean "shape" here for what could be the *shape* of a servant? Is a servant a different shape from any other man? It is clear that the Apostle means the "*status*" of a servant or bondsman. Likewise in the phrase "the form of God", shape is not referred to, nor could it be, because "God is Spirit" and omnipresent, without the limitations of shape or size. It rather denotes the whole nature and essence of Deity—His status as God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and *the Word was God*" (John 1:1). Later on in this chapter when we come to Bethlehem He is referred to as "God only begotten" (verse 18 Nestlé Greek Text).

So far then we see that the words "existing originally in the form of God" do not merely imply the pre-existence of Christ, but His existence *as God*, in a Divine mode of Being. The next phrase reads, "thought it not robbery to be equal with God" A.V. or "counted it not a prize (a thing to be grasped—margin) to be on an equality with God" R.V. These two renderings, while permissible, do not mean the same thing. Paraphrasing the A.V. we have, "Who, *because* He was existing originally as God, did not consider it an usurpation that He was on an equality of glory with God, *but yet* emptied Himself of that glory", or the R.V. "Who, *though* He was existing originally as God, *yet* did not regard His being on an equality of glory and majesty a treasure to be held fast, *but* emptied Himself of these." The A.V. says in effect that He did not consider His being God an act of usurpation, but He emptied Himself of divine prerogatives. The R.V. means that He did not consider His equality with God, i.e. the mode and accompaniments of Deity—His glory and majesty—something to be *clung to*, but He freely let these go and emptied Himself of them.

The question is, which interpretation fits the context? Which is stressing *unselfishness* and looking on the needs of others? Is it dealing with a rightful position which the Lord *claimed*, or a glory and mode of existence which He *renounced*? We believe the latter to be the true conception. This means that the Lord Jesus did not give up His essential Deity, His being God, when He stooped down and became man, but rather the *accompaniments* of His Deity, the glory and majesty, the *mode* of existence, that were His by right; and so, looking forward to the end of the work of redemption being completed on the Cross, He could say, "And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me . . . with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was" (John 17:5).

The Unitarian and those who deny the Deity of Christ assert that the phrase, "He emptied Himself", means that He relinquished His Deity and became a man and nothing more. But this is impossible, for Scripture makes clear that before Bethlehem He was God (John 1:1) and if He emptied Himself of His Deity, it would be equivalent to saying He emptied Himself of Himself, which is absurd. On the other hand, He could and did freely renounce all the glory that was His in past eternity, to stoop down and become man, so that He could bear the penalty of His people's sins, which is death (Rom. 6:23). 2 Corinthians 8:9 expresses it beautifully: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." The Saviour knew these two extremes in experience, but this did not touch His essential nature as God. Being "rich" and "poor" are modes of being that can be taken up and laid aside. Isaiah 9:6 does not hesitate to describe the Babe born in Bethlehem as the *mighty God*. He is Emmanuel—which means *God with us*. He, Who is the Almighty One and *Lord of all*, stooped down in His infinite love and condescension to become a bondsman—the *servant of all*—and to know the weakness of being in the flesh, being truly human; and at the Cross He was crucified through weakness (2 Cor. 13:4).

This is a Love so vast and so wonderful that we can never fully grasp it. No wonder the Apostle, in Ephesians 3:19 speaks of "the love of Christ, *which passeth knowledge*". The characteristic of true love is that it constantly denies self and gives and spends itself to the uttermost and here we have it in all its fulness. *God gave Himself in the Person of Christ* and on

the Cross we see Him dying for the creature He made in order to accomplish his salvation. "Thanks be to God for His unspeakable Gift!" (2 Cor. 9:15).

The self-emptying of the Son of God is directly linked with taking upon Himself the form of a servant or bonds slave, and this phrase in itself is an explanation of what self-emptying means, together with those that follow. The A.V. reads: "*But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant*" (7) which the R.V. rightly corrects to, "But emptied Himself, *taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men*"; the self-abnegation of the Lord Jesus, coming into the human sphere is an expansion of the statement, "He emptied Himself" and shows us something of His matchless condescension in so doing. The form or status of a bonds slave is in direct contrast to the form or status of God. What is the form or status of a slave? *A slave has no will, no rights and no possessions of his own; he belongs body and soul to his master.* And was not this the position of the Saviour while He walked this earth? Did He not say, "I can of Mine own self do nothing . . . I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me" (John 5:30)? "I came down from heaven (so that He must have been more than man) *not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me*" (6:38). "The words that I speak unto you I speak *not of Myself . . . ; the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent Me*" (14:10,24). "My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent Me" (7:16). "The works which the Father hath given Me to finish . . . bear witness of Me, that the Father hath sent Me." "I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day . . ." "The Father that dwelleth in Me, *He doeth the works*" (John 5:36, 9:4, 14:10).

The Emptied One not only laid aside all the majesty and glory of his Godhead, but also His own will, His own words, His own doctrine, His own works and of Him it could also be said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man *hath not where to lay His head*" (Matt. 8:20) so that He was homeless as well. How true then is Romans 15:3. "Even Christ pleased not Himself" and is not this the very essence of the epistle we are dealing with which stresses absolute unselfishness? Here indeed was the Perfect Servant.

But the lowest rung of the ladder has not been reached yet. "Being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death,

yea, the death of the Cross" (7,8 R.V.). He was made in the *likeness* of men which shows that, while He was truly man, He was something more, God manifest in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16). Truly great is the Mystery (Secret) of godliness. No wonder He is called the Mystery of God (Col. 2:2 R.V.), and as such can never be fully comprehended by man (Matt. 11:27). Yet He humbled Himself to the lowest depths of degradation for our sakes, not merely to death, but the death *of the Cross*.

In Paul's day crucifixion was meted out by the Romans to slaves and criminals only. No Roman citizen could be crucified, so even though the Apostle followed the Lord so closely in faithfulness and suffering, he, as a Roman citizen, could not follow Him here. Paul was beheaded by the Roman executioner but could not be crucified and so was not able to stoop as low as his Saviour. Yet "Christ . . . for the joy that was set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2).

This joy includes the salvation and presentation in glory of all His redeemed children, even though the cost was so tremendous. Looking forward to that day, it can be said: "He shall see His seed . . . He shall see of the travail of His Soul, and *shall be satisfied*" (Isa. 53:10,11). It will be worth it all to Him *then*. Amazing love, but what can we say and what shall be our response? Assuredly it must be as Isaac Watts expressed it:

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so Divine
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Having given a consideration to the sevenfold humiliation of the Lord in Philippians 2:4-8, we are now confronted with His sevenfold exaltation to the highest glory. The two experiences may be set out as follows:

Sevenfold humiliation. (1) He emptied Himself, (2) became a bonds slave, (3) likeness of a man, (4) fashioned as a man, (5) He humbled Himself, (6) obedience unto death, (7) even the death of the Cross.

Sevenfold exaltation. (1) He is given 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.

How glad we are that Calvary is not the end of the story! In His stupendous stooping down from the glory which was His by right, He ends by being despised and rejected of men and dying the shameful death of the Cross that was only meted out to criminals and slaves. But the goal of His glorious exaltation sees Him not only vindicated in the world He created and which rejected Him, but finally the whole universe, from highest heaven to things under the earth at last give Him His rightful place as LORD. "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.).

The word translated "highly exalted" is unique and occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It has been reserved for the Lord Jesus Christ in His exaltation. This is now expanded to include the Name which is above all others. The Authorized Version reads "A Name" but the Revisers rightly render "The Name" and to a Hebrew this can mean no less than the sacred name Jehovah. The A.V. consistently renders the Old Testament title Jehovah by LORD in capital letters. The occurrence of this great Name should be noted in Isaiah 41:4 (and refer here to Rev. 1:8,17, 22:13), Isaiah 44:6 and 48:12. In 45:18 we see Jehovah creating. He says, "I am Jehovah; and there is none else." In verses 21 and 22 He declares: "There is no God else beside Me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside Me. Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else."

Here, without any possibility of argument, we have the ONE God in all His Majesty as Creator and Saviour; verse twenty-three goes on, "I have sworn by Myself, the word is gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, *That unto Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear*" and without hesitation or reserve this is applied to the Lord Jesus in Philip-pians 2:10,11. It is the *Ascended Saviour* Who will one day be universally acclaimed and to Whom every knee shall bow. When He came to the earth in humiliation He was given the name of Jesus (Matt. 1:20-23) and this was associated with despised Nazareth (John 1:46, 19:19). The passage does not teach that this early name is the one above all others. Rather it is that the One, Whose earthly name was Jesus, is now given

the Name which is above every name, that of LORD (JEHOVAH) and in this name every creature shall finally bow. "We see not yet all things put under Him" (Heb. 2:8), but this is surely coming. We who know Him as Saviour have the privilege of bowing the knee *now* and owning His Lordship (1 Pet 3:15 R.V.), committing to His control all we have and are. There is one LORD (Eph. 4:5) and one Master and to Him alone we are all responsible. The Church of the Mystery anticipates this glorious day by acknowledging that He is "Head over all things" now.

What an expanse of Truth Philippians 2:5-12 covers! and all to explain the "mind of Christ", Who looked not on His Own things but freely gave them up for all whom the Father hath given Him (John 6:37,39, 10:27-29, 17:2) so that He could accomplish their salvation from sin and their presentation "holy, unblameable and unreprouable in His sight" (Col. 1:22). It is this "mind" that we must ever keep before us and seek to follow and work out in daily practice. Thus, the Apostle continues, "wherefore, my beloved, 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 do of His good pleasure" (12,13). Let us get this quite clear. He does not say, "work **FOR** your salvation", but work it **OUT** (in practical response). Ephesians 2:8,9 stands true for all time, "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." While this salvation-by-grace cannot be merited or earned by human effort, it can and does produce *fruit*, for the next verse insists that we have been created in Christ Jesus *unto good works*. This is what Paul means by *working out* our salvation—it is the believer's response in service to the Lord's most gracious salvation and because this brings us into the realm of human affairs with all its frailty, it must be done with fear and trembling.

Where God works alone there is absolute confidence and assurance (Phil. 1:6; Eph. 3:11,12); but concerning the believer's response with a Divine prize or crown in view there can be no assurance rather, "let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall". So even for the Apostle it is "not as though I had already attained, either were already mature, but I follow after if . . ." and previously he had said, "*if by any means* I

might attain . . ." (3:11,12). There was no certainty at this stage for him, for he could have failed the Lord at the last, like Moses did, and so lose his reward. Not until he reaches the end and finishes his course can he speak with assurance and say, "*henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness*" (2 Tim. 4:8).

Thus we must distinguish between our salvation and presentation in glory, which is one of absolute certainty because it depends upon the work of Christ alone, and our reward, or crown, which we can either win or lose according to our own faithfulness or unfaithfulness in service. God "works in" the salvation which is ours; He gives the believer the strength to "will and do of His good pleasure". But this is no mechanical thing, we must appropriate by faith what "He works in" and by life and lip "work it out" to His praise and glory.

As an expansion of this the Philippian saints are told in verse fourteen, "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" (14-16 R.V.).

Grumbling is not usually regarded as a grievous sin in Christian circles, but when we remember that it was the constant murmuring and unbelief of the children of Israel that lost them the promised land of Canaan; we see what serious results this attitude of mind can produce. (Note carefully Num. 14:2, 26-30). However difficult the pathway may be, we shall not have to look very far before we find something to thank the Lord for and so be preserved against this sin. The Apostle now looks for lasting fruit from these believers so that in the day of Christ, when all service will be tested by the fire of His holiness, he would not have laboured in vain. This is not the only time when Paul speaks of the possibility of his labour being in vain. He expresses the same concern in Galatians 4:11 and 1 Thessalonians 3:5. How anxious he was that all his service should bring the maximum of glory to the Lord, otherwise it was wasted time and effort! Likewise may this be the over-ruling consideration in all we do for the Saviour.

He goes on to express the quality of his service in the following words: "Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all" (17). The Revised Version margin reads, "Greek, poured out as a drink

offering," and the word refers back to the type in the Tabernacle service of the Old Testament (e.g. Num. 28:7). The drink offering could never be regarded as a *substitute* for the offerings of Atonement, but in certain instances it accompanied them. Paul's faithful service and sufferings for Christ could truthfully be described as "pouring himself out" for his Saviour, but in no sense did they have an atoning or redeeming value either for himself or for anyone else. They were an echo of the great pouring-out (Phil. 2:7) of the One Who emptied Himself for our sakes. The Apostle indeed spent himself for the Lord Jesus Christ as 2 Corinthians 11:21-28 clearly testifies, giving us another example of what Christian labour should be like. Paul kept nothing in reserve; he spent himself whatever the cost and *did it joyfully*. There was nothing of the martyr spirit with him. He counted it a glad privilege so to do.

We might well reflect on how much our Christian service costs us. Work for the Lord which costs little is of little value. We can easily tire ourselves out on our pleasures, but how often are we willing to tire ourselves out for the One Who gave Himself for us? May we all learn the practical lesson of the drink offering.

Two examples are now brought before us who exhibit this great characteristic of the mind of Christ. They are Timothy and Epaphroditus. The Apostle contemplates three visits to the Philippian Christians, one by Timothy (19-23), another by himself, when released from prison (24) and a third by Epaphroditus (25,28). Of Timothy he says, "I have no man like-minded, who will care truly (margin-genuinely) for your state. For they all seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ." (20,21 R.V.). Here was one who exhibited in practice the spirit of unselfishness that this epistle constantly stresses. Others were selfish; not so his son in the faith. The Apostle had practical evidence of this young man's devoted labours for others, for he had served with him as a "son with the father" (22).

Epaphroditus is given five titles: "my brother and fellow worker and fellow-soldier"; then "your messenger and minister to my need". Here was one who was translating the great doctrinal unities of Ephesians four into everyday practice. He pulled together (the word "fellow") with the Apostle and other members of the Body in service that nearly cost him his life, for he had been sick even to the point of death in witness for Christ (27,30). This was practical evidence of the "mind of

Christ" again, with the trait of unselfishness, for he was troubled, not because of what he had endured, but on account of the fact that the Philippians had heard of his illness and were grieving over him (26). Here indeed is a heart "at leisure from itself"! He had indeed "hazarded his life" (R.V.) for the Lord Jesus, being willing to "spend and be spent" to the limit.

In passing, it is important to note that Paul does not heal Epaphroditus. During the Acts period instantaneous healing was a prominent feature of the ministries of Peter and Paul; moreover believers were given this gift as 1 Corinthians 12:9,28 testifies, being one of the evidential miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit which are always to the fore while Israel is in covenant relationship with God and the earthly Kingdom purposes in view. When Israel pass off the scene at Acts twenty-eight in spiritual blindness and hardness of heart, these evidential miracles ceased, although they are prominent until the last chapter (28:3,4,8,9). Now even the great Apostle does not heal his companion in labour. If he had still possessed the power, he would certainly have used it. Once upon a time even a handkerchief from himself was sufficient to heal (Acts 19:11,12); but here all that he can say is "God had mercy on him . . . and . . . on me also, that I might not have sorrow on sorrow" (27 R.V.). Pentecostal gifts are kept for the Pentecostal people Israel, and those Gentile believers who were associated with this people as a "wild olive grafted into the true" (Rom. 11:17-22). Let us keep them where God puts them and we shall be safe.

We NOW have "every blessing that is spiritual" (Eph. 1:3) and are *complete in Christ* (Col. 2:10). Let us thankfully accept this position of indescribable wealth and not spoil it by seeking to add things which belong to other callings, leading our minds away from the fulness that is ours in Him Who is at the right hand of God.

CHAPTER XII

THE EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS

Chapters Three and Four

The third chapter of this letter commences with the injunction, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." A number of translators do not feel happy about the word "finally", especially as it occurs again towards the end of the epistle where we should expect it (4:8). J. N. Darby has "For the rest", Moffatt reads, "Well then", E. E. Cunningham "Further", E. J. Goodspeed, "Now", which shows us that there is no need to render the Greek "Finally", as though Paul was concluding here. What he does is to stress the theme of *joy* that runs throughout this epistle as we have already seen. We must realize that this joy is in the *Lord* and can only be found in Him. There is little abiding joy in self or circumstances and the instructed believer never looks to these sources for joy or satisfaction, but to Him Who is the same yesterday, today and for ever.

The Apostle continues: "To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not irksome, but for you it is safe" (3:1 R.V.). Most teachers feel sensitive about repetition, but this is often necessary, as most of us are slow pupils in God's school and need to be reminded again and again of the important doctrines of Truth.

Next comes a threefold warning: "Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision" (2). The Jews referred to the Gentiles as "dogs", but here the term of contempt is used of the Judaizers themselves, those of Paul's own nation, who, bereft of the truth, maintained bitter animosity against him and all he stood for. They were "evil workers"; the "concision" he calls them in distinction to "circumcision", which, in a past dispensation, had been an outward symbol of putting away the flesh and being in covenant relationship with God. Israel were now "Lo Ammi"—"Not My people", and the rite had now degenerated into a piece of empty ritual. He had already indicated that the true seed of Israel had the internal spiritual quality as well as the external rite which symbolizes it (Rom. 2:28,29).

Moreover, when writing to the Colossian church he had taught that every member of the Body of Christ, was circumcised with the *circumcision made without hands* (Col. 2:11), and so here he brings the spiritual teaching of true circumcision to the forefront in a threefold way: "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (3). The word translated "worship" is not the usual word which occurs sixty times in the New Testament. The Apostle uses a word which is more frequently rendered "serve". True worship and true service are vitally linked. Real worship does not originate from the senses, although these are employed in the act. It is a spontaneous expression of the divine nature which is given to the believer as salvation-spirit, as opposed to flesh, "God is spirit; and they that worship Him *must worship Him in spirit* and truth." (John 4:24). "The Father seeketh such to worship Him" (John 4:23). If worship *must* come from the new nature as opposed to the senses, and God is continually seeking such, one wonders how much true worship He finds in Christendom today? The true circumcision have learned that acceptable worship and service cannot spring from the old nature or from the senses. It is "in spirit" and comes not from the "flesh". They repudiate the "flesh" and all it stands for, and have no confidence in it or in themselves in any way. Their only confidence is the Lord Jesus Christ, they glory or boast in Him alone.

As he mentions the word "boast" (rejoice), the Apostle's mind travels back to his past days as a Pharisee and the things he boasted in then. This leads him to give the sevenfold profit and loss account which occupies verses four to eleven, an echo of the great sevenfold humiliation and glorification of the Saviour recorded in chapter two.

If any man had grounds for boasting in the flesh, Paul could go one further and say "I more". (1) Circumcised the eighth day, this put him directly into Covenant relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (2) Of the stock of Israel, one of the favoured seed which God had lifted out from among all the nations of the earth to be a channel of blessing to them. (3) Of the tribe of Benjamin, this tribe held fast with Judah at Jerusalem when others went into idolatry and captivity. (4) A Hebrew of the Hebrews, i.e. an eminent one. (5) As touching the Law, a Pharisee. We must not think that all Pharisees were hypocrites because of the Lord's stern denunciation of them in

the Gospel records. Some were high principled as far as their light went. If they had all been empty formalists it would obviously have been no ground for boasting. (6) Concerning zeal, persecuting the Church. Saul of Tarsus was not the sort of man to do things by halves. He was no "Laodicean". Whatever he was convinced was right, he went "all out" for. He was certain in his unconverted blindness that Christianity was rank heresy, and so with all the zeal he could summon, he tried to stamp it out. In doing so he met the Lord of Glory on the road to Damascus, Who turned his zeal towards Himself and the Truth. (7) Touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. This does not mean that, as Saul of Tarsus, he was sinless, but, judged from the standpoint of a Hebrew and a Pharisee, he gave a jealous conformity to its precepts.

If ever a person could have been saved by living a "good" life it was Saul, the Pharisee! Yet when he realized that God's law went internally and demanded a perfect mind and heart as well as a perfect external, he gave up. It "slew me" he says in Romans 7:10,11. How glad he was to throw over all these gains in the flesh, for the infinitely better things in the spirit which are found only in Christ. "Howbeit what things were gains (margin) to me, these have I 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: for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse (margin), that I may gain Christ" (7,8 R.V.). Here is Paul's balance sheet, his estimation of the things he once possessed over against the spiritual treasures in the ascended Christ that awaited his practical exploration by faith. *Such a correct estimation is absolutely vital to the runner in the heavenly race.* The things of this life, with its cares and pleasures, can so entwine themselves around our minds and affections that running is impossible.

What "gaining Christ" means, the Apostle continues to explain: "And be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith (or faithfulness) of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (verse 9). In this statement the Apostle sums up his own great doctrine of justification by faith as set forth in Romans and Galatians.

He must start here, as must all believers; to go wrong here is to go wrong everywhere.

He passes on to his third spiritual gain—"that I may *know*

(*get to know*) Him", not to know *about* Him, but get to know Him experimentally. This was the Apostle's greatest quest, and so it should be for every believer. It was not the Christ after the flesh that He desired to know. When he wrote to the Corinthian church he made the astounding statement: "Even though we have known Christ after the flesh, *yet now we know Him so no more*" (2 Cor. 5:16 R.V.). It was the glorified Christ, Risen and Ascended, that formed the Object of Paul's desire. The knowledge of God is surely the great goal of all God's purposes, "This is life eternal, that *they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou hast sent*" (John 17:3). For those on earth this will be when it "shall be full of the *knowledge of the Lord*, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:9 R.V.); for the heavenlies when we are with Him and like Him and know fully even as we are known. Christendom has got little further than knowing Christ after the flesh. No wonder the rich truths mediated by the Ascended Christ through Paul's ministry are so little known or enjoyed by believers today. The vital truth of the Ascension of the Lord and what God has made it to mean to the Church which is His Body, has almost completely dropped out of modern evangelical witness. Is it any wonder that the dispensation of the Mystery (Eph. 3:9) is so often looked upon as some new doctrinal fad?

It was the *Risen* Christ that laid hold of the Apostle Paul, and it was *Him* and His *power*, not the fact of His resurrection that he desired to get to know more and more. In Ephesians 1:19 he had prayed that the Ephesian saints might realize this mightiest of all powers—that which conquers death. Here, in Philippians, it is with a special end in view, that he might attain to the resurrection of the dead, a term that we will have to examine presently. In order that this might be true Paul realizes that it would only be possible by an *experimental* association with Christ in His sufferings and death. The knowledge of His resurrection power was a prelude to having fellowship with His sufferings and conformity to His death, and the two are linked together in the Greek, for it would be suicidal to contemplate the latter experience without the mighty power that alone could take him through it. In Romans six we have the doctrine of the identification of the believer with the Saviour in His death, burial and resurrection, but here the Apostle goes further and contemplates a *voluntary* identification with the Lord's sufferings and a conformability with His death *in experience* which

goes much deeper, for only in this way would he attain his goal, "if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." It is comparatively easy to talk of the *doctrine* of being associated with Christ on the Cross, but most of us have a lot to learn about it in *practice*. Here is something very deep and very searching which we do well to ponder over and ask ourselves what we really know of it experimentally.

What was this resurrection that Paul wanted to attain? Was he doubting whether he would be raised from the dead? Some expositors assert that he was not expressing contingency, but the word here translated "if" occurs three times elsewhere in the New Testament, and in each occurrence there is the possibility of failure. The passages are Acts 27:12, Romans 1:10 and 11:14. Moreover he goes on to say, "not as though I had already attained" and "I count not myself to have apprehended". Contingency is most definitely in this context, yet other Scriptures make it quite clear that resurrection is the logical and sure consequence of salvation (John 6:39,40,44,54) and he himself had written, "if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death (i.e. identified with Him by God) we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection." "If we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him" (Rom. 6:5,8 and see also Acts 24:15). "Because I live, ye shall live also," said the Saviour. This must be true otherwise it makes a mockery of salvation and the presentation in glory of the believer. The Apostle therefore was not doubting whether he would be raised from the dead. What then did he mean?

We must look closer at the expression he uses, for it is unique. Literally it is the "out-resurrection out from among the dead". There is a strong emphasis on the word "out", showing that something unusual is being stressed. Resurrection was part of the orthodox Jewish belief. When the Saviour assured Martha that her brother Lazarus would rise again she replied, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (John 11:24). It was only the rationalists of the day, the Sadducees, who denied resurrection (Mark 12:18; Luke 20:27). This being so it is strange to read in Mark 9:10 that the disciples, on being told by the Lord of His rising from the dead, "questioned one with another what the rising *from* the dead should mean", and this after witnessing the glory of His Transfiguration!

The word "from" is the word "out" that we have in Philip-
pians 3:10. Resurrection they surely believed in, but a resurrec-

tion that took someone out from the grave leaving other believers behind was both new and puzzling to them. In Luke 20:35 we have an expression nearer to Philippians 3:10. The Lord Jesus says, "they which shall be *accounted worthy* to attain to that world, and *the resurrection which is out from the dead ones*" (literally). Hebrews 11:33-40 is a parallel, for here is suffering and endurance in order that a *better resurrection* might be obtained (verse 35). Now the word "better" shows that there must be more than one resurrection, or there is nothing with which to compare it. 1 Corinthians 15:22,23 asserts that "in Christ shall all be made alive, but every man *in his own order* (or rank)".

The Scriptures know nothing about a general resurrection of believers which the creeds talk about. There will be a resurrection for all believers faithful or unfaithful; but there is the honour of attaining to a special one—an OUT-resurrection, out from among the dead for those who endure loyally, whatever the cost and are willing for the fellowship of His sufferings and conformity to His death in experience. This has in view a PRIZE, and it was *this prize that Paul was longing to obtain* (Phil. 3:14). In 2 Timothy 2:11 he teaches that all the redeemed will live with Christ, but only "if we suffer (patiently endure) we shall also *reign with Him*" and share His Throne. This figure of a CROWN is expressing the same Truth and it is entered by this out-resurrection. But crowns may be lost as the Book of the Revelation testifies. "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (3:11).

The Apostle Paul has now given us his profit and loss account—the seven gains he had in the realm of flesh which he cast aside as worthless in comparison with his seven spiritual gains leading to the possibility of attaining to the privilege of the special out-resurrection from the dead. He asserts that this was his goal. "Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect (mature, reaching the goal); but I press on, if so be that I may apprehend that for which also I was apprehended by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself yet to have 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." (3:12-14 R.V.).

It is obvious here that the Apostle had not attained the goal of the out-resurrection and the prize. He uses the figure of a

runner in a race, and when he wrote to the church at Philippi he had not yet finished the course and breasted the tape. As with an earthly runner, his eyes were fixed forward upon the goal and he was running with absolute concentration—"one thing I do". He did not allow any past experiences to become a hindrance; they were now "the things that are behind" and he was prepared to forget them and press forward as quickly as possible. He uses the same figure of a race in Hebrews 12:1,2, "let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking away unto Jesus, the Author (Beginner) and Perfecter (Finisher) of faith."

In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 he urges the Corinthian believers to run with a view to obtaining the prize. "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but *one receiveth the prize*? So run, that ye may *obtain (it)*." Divine prizes, rewards or crowns may be won or lost, they may be attained to, or not, by the believer in Christ, but these must never be confused with salvation and calling which are all of God's doing and are His free and gracious gifts. Those who constitute the Church of Christ's Fulness are saved with a salvation, "*not of themselves*" (Eph. 2:8), are "made meet for the inheritance of the saints in the light" (Col. 1:12) *by the Father*, made complete in Christ and will one day be presented in glory, "holy, unblameable and un-reproveable" in God's sight, *by the offering of the "body of His flesh through death"* (Col. 1:22).

None of these glorious realities can be merited, worked for, or come into the realm of attainment by the believer's own efforts. They are all of God through Christ. A multitude of Bible problems and much perplexity can be avoided if these two distinct lines of truth are kept in their right place. We need to take care then with the phrase, "the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus", otherwise we shall be teaching that the high and heavenly calling of the Body of Christ is the prize to be worked for or earned. It is not "the prize, that is to say, the high calling of God", rather "the prize *associated with* the high calling of God which is *in Christ Jesus*". This is along the same lines as "the reward of (or associated with) the inheritance" in Colossians 3:24,25.

This zealous concentration on all the things that go towards winning God's prize must be the mark of all those whose aim is to attain to it. "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect (mature), be thus minded; and if in anything ye are otherwise minded,

even this shall God reveal unto you; only whereunto we have already attained, by that same rule let us walk" (15,16 R.V.). Paul has already stated that, at this point, he was not "perfect" and it would be very unlikely that any believer at Philippi had outstripped him, the Lord's messenger, in spiritual knowledge and growth. The phrase "as many as be perfect", would be better rendered "as many as would be perfect"; such must be "imitators together" of the Apostle (17).

But not all believers are thus minded. It was necessary now to warn against those who were not running faithfully. "For many walk, of whom I 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 the belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things" (18, 19 R.V.). Five statements are made of those whose example is to be avoided. On the surface they all appear to refer to the unsaved, but closer inspection will show that they can all apply to the saved. We must remember that there is an aspect of teaching concerning the cross that applies to believers only. For such the cross of Christ stands for the crucifixion of the *flesh*—the old sinful nature (Gal. 5:24) and crucifixion to the *world* (Gal. 6:14). Those whose god is the belly are thus not just enemies of Christ, but enemies of the *cross* of Christ. Then take the phrase "who mind earthly things". No unbeliever could be reproached for this, because if Ephesians 2:1-3 is true, *they can do nothing else*. What unsaved person could be asked to mind heavenly things? But the believer undoubtedly is. Colossians 3:1-3 gives us the injunction to set our minds on things above where Christ sitteth, but we can be so taken up with earthly things that heaven, our heavenly citizenship, and the heavenly prize or crown mean little or nothing. The end for such is destruction. We must be careful here. It has perhaps been this word that has led many expositors to apply these statements to the unsaved. Perdition is certainly the end of the unsaved, but the word in a non-doctrinal sense is translated "waste" in Matthew 26:8. The basic meaning is "loss", and while no true believer can lose the gift of eternal life, for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance (Rom. 11:29), he can *suffer loss* (of reward 1 Cor. 3:15; Col. 2:18, 3:25).

Let us remember that this context in Philippians is dealing with the things that make for the "prize", and in these five statements Paul is sorrowfully describing believers who are not

imitating him in pressing on to the heavenly goal, and therefore were examples for the Philippian saints to avoid.

Having warned believers at Philippi of those who were not pressing on in the heavenly race, the Apostle Paul states positively, "For our citizenship is (exists) in heaven" (3:20). The Revised Version renders the A.V. word "conversation" as "citizenship". Philippi was a Roman colony and was intended to represent, in miniature, all that Rome stood for, although severed from Rome by distance. It was here that Paul claimed the privilege of Roman citizenship. The Philippian citizen, though far away from Rome, lived as a Roman citizen with all his privileges. So the member of the Body of Christ, though now far away from his heavenly home, lives here on earth as a heavenly citizen, enjoying his heavenly wealth by faith, setting his mind and affection above and awaiting the manifestation of the Saviour Who will give him the glorious "change" that will present him "holy, unblameable and unreprouable" in heaven's Holiest of all.

This citizenship *exists* as a present fact. The word in the Greek is stronger than the verb "to be". It *exists in heaven* and the reader should beware of any teaching or experience that turns the attention away from heaven and things above where Christ sitteth (Col. 3:1). "From whence, as Saviour, we are waiting for the Lord Jesus Christ, Who will transform our body of humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of His glory, by the power which enables Him even to subject all things to Himself" (21). This wondrous and necessary transformation of the believer will give him the body to suit the heavenly sphere of blessing "in the light". There are "heavenly bodies" (1 Cor. 15:40). These would not be necessary if the Church's destiny was earthly—for there are earthly bodies for such (1 Cor. 15:40). It is well to note the emphasis on the body here. The future glory is not to be enjoyed in a disembodied state. Resurrection to glory or this transformation of the living saint with a body of glory to the Saviour's presence is what is taught and it is for us to thankfully abide by it. Salvation looks to the future as well as the past, for we now wait for the adoption, that is the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:23) and so here it is the Lord Jesus as *Saviour*, we await, realizing that all this will be brought to pass by the might of His resurrection power, which will "subject all things unto Himself". This looks to the glorious goal of 1 Corinthians 15:27,28. Here again we

see God's working in and through the Body of Christ an anticipation of the consummation of His purpose.

Chapter four contains a number of features which were brought forward by the Apostle in chapter one. He returns to them to give them emphasis. The first is the exhortation to stand fast. It is only logical that those who have such a destiny of glory should exhibit steadfastness. "Therefore, my brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved" (4:1). This is a reference back to chapter 1:27. The Apostle now pleads with two women, who were evidently at variance with each other, sowing the seeds of disunity which is such an effective weapon in Satan's hands to wreck Christian witness, as a glance at Christendom down the ages will show. Women figure prominently in the beginning of the gospel at Philippi (Acts 16:13). We have seen that this letter stresses not just unity in doctrine, but *unity in witness and practice*, and it is up to all of us who belong by God's grace to this high calling, to see that neither by word nor deed do we introduce any discordant note that will give the enemy the opportunity to do his deadly work of division amongst those who constitute the Body of Christ.

To whom does Paul refer in verse three? Someone he calls "true yokefellow" (another of the "together" words of Philipians), with whom he was evidently closely linked in service. No name is given and all attempts to find one are just guess work. Although unknown to us, we can be sure he or she was very much known to the Lord, for all such are in His book of life. This verse, too, disposes of the foolish notion that Paul was biased against women. "Help those women which *laboured with me* in the Gospel." The Apostle was obviously grateful for the help such Christian women gave him in the proclamation of the gospel. They were "fellow-labourers" with him as much as were the men.

Once more comes the exhortation to rejoice, that runs throughout this epistle (4). The Lord's work can and should be done with joy at all times. Joy is attractive, just as gloom is repellent, and if members of the Church of the fulness, with its untold riches, cannot be joyful—who can? The Apostle proceeds, "Let your forbearance (moderation A.V.) be known to all men" (5 R.V.). On fundamental matters we cannot give and take. Loyalty demands that we stand steadfast whatever the consequences. We must be careful, however, not to introduce any hard, inflexible spirit into the things which are not

fundamental. We should be willing to bend and yield to others, providing truth is not compromised. This is grace in practice.

"The Lord is near." (Weymouth.) Paul does not say that the Lord's *Coming* is near and we have no warrant to introduce the word as some translations do. Rather it is the fact that the Lord is with us at all times whether the sun shines or the clouds gather, for He has said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5). Thus we have the high privilege of His fellowship and Presence with us all the way to glory.

This leads to the possibility of a walk day by day without anxiety and so touches a very practical issue. How often we worry, and worry needlessly about things that may never happen! It has been said, with truth, that it is "worry that kills, not hard work", and there are many of God's children today suffering with nervous breakdowns because they are constantly anxious. This context is going to give us the heavenly antidote to worry and its ill effects.

"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." (3:6,7 R.V.). God would have His children to be free from worry and anxiety. These things are crippling to the body, mind and spirit. In the Sermon on the Mount the Saviour had said: "Be not therefore anxious, saying, what shall we eat? or, what shall we drink? or, wherewithal shall we be clothed? . . . for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first His Kingdom, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:31-33 R.V.).

To make provision for the future is right and Scriptural. "If any provideth not for his own, and specially his own household, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim. 5:8 R.V.). But to regard the future with anxiety is completely wrong and unnecessary, for if our heavenly Father knows all our needs and is willing to supply them, what room is there for worry? "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee" (Psa. 55:22). He offers to carry all the burdens for us and to supply all our needs, so, having made known all our requests to Him, we can safely leave everything in His loving and all-powerful Hands. Let us not be foolish enough, when we have left His Presence, to take back the burdens and anxieties upon our own shoulders. If we leave all to Him, then the peace

of God which surpasses all our understanding, will keep (as a garrison of soldiers) our hearts and our thoughts. This precious experience is the Lord's will for all His children day by day, who fully trust Him in all things.

"Finally, 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 (marg. take account of) on these things" (8 R.V.). The Apostle here is not only saying that these graces are splendid to meditate on. The word "think" or "take account of" is translated "reckon", "impute", "count" in Romans four. "Reckon these things", that is *in others*. This is part of the mind of Christ. Instead of seeing the faults, let us reckon these graces in others as often as we can. How much sweeter Christian fellowship would be if this were always done!

The Philippians had a splendid example of this in Paul himself; so he could say "the things which ye both learned and received and heard and saw *in me*, these things *do*: and the God of Peace shall be with you (9 R.V.). The Apostle ever practised what he preached. He could therefore say without boastfulness, "be ye imitators together of me" (3:17 R.V.), and then not only the gift of God's peace, but what is greater, the Giver Himself—the God of Peace, shall be with you.

The Apostle now returns to the theme of chapter one, fellowship in the gospel. He rejoices again, this time because of the practical concern of the believers at Philippi for him. They had not been able to do for him all they wanted as they lacked opportunity. "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 *have I learned the secret* both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want" (11, 12 R.V.). There is no word "therein" in the original Greek. Paul was not content WITH his circumstances, but content IN them, whatever extremes they touched. "Content" is hardly a good translation; "independent" is better. I have learned, said the Apostle, to be *independent of all circumstances*, whether pleasant or painful. What would we not give to be in a similar position! How often our state of mind is bound up with our circumstances. If the sun is shining and all is well with us, we are happy. If trouble and darkness are our lot how depressed we get!

How did Paul always manage to rise above the difficult conditions that surrounded him? He had been *initiated into a secret which made this possible*. He now makes this known. "I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me" (13 R.V.); literally it reads, "I am strong for all things in Christ Who empowers me", the means used by the Lord being the power of His resurrection. The power that conquers death is more than enough to make each one of us blessedly independent of circumstances and sufficient to press on in the heavenly race. Here indeed is a secret that is worth knowing in experience, for such a mighty strengthening can never fail. It will enable us to be "more than conquerors" whatever we are called upon to go through.

The Apostle now thankfully refers to the gift the Philippian church had sent him by Epaphroditus. He says, "I am filled (literally, overflowing), having received from Epaphroditus the things that came from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God" (18 R.V.). What was sent we do not know; probably simple things to make the Apostle's lot in prison easier to bear, but it had the mark of sacrifice on it which made it specially fragrant to the Lord as well as to Paul. And because of their generosity he adds: "And my God shall fulfil every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (19 R.V.). They had been generous to him, and so the Lord would most certainly be generous to them.

Verse nineteen is not to be divorced from its context of generosity. Mean Christians cannot expect to experience the mighty promise of this verse. Note that the Lord supplies *according* to His riches—not just out of His riches. What a measure! Surely this must cover every need until travelling days are done and the race finished; not everything that we *want* but everything that we *need* is assured.

The epistle now draws to its close with its benediction and salutation from all the saints, especially those in Cæsar's household (22). Here is a note of triumph, for if grace could triumph in Cæsar's palace it can triumph anywhere. Paul finishes with his usual reference to grace, that wondrous basis of all God's dealing with His children in this age. So ends this letter with its emphasis on the mind of Christ in daily practice, finding its outlet in loving and faithful service, working out the salvation He has worked in, putting self in the background and running the race with a view to the prize associated with the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

CHAPTER XIII

THE POSITION OF THE EPISTLES OF 1 TIMOTHY, TITUS AND PHILEMON

We have pointed out that the Apostle Paul wrote seven epistles during the period covered by the Acts of the Apostles (if we accept his authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews), and a further seven after the Acts. Five of these are stamped with his Roman imprisonment, Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, Philemon and 2 Timothy. Two are not, namely 1 Timothy and Titus. Where are we to place these epistles in the outworking of God's purpose?

To do this we must get some idea of the events after the completion of the Acts period. Here we are confronted with difficulty, for no one can be absolutely certain of the order of these events or their dating. We have to carefully note the internal characteristics of the epistles that cover this time together with known facts of history. When these are brought together, something like the following emerges. When he wrote to the church at Philippi and to Philemon, Paul was expecting release from prison as Philippians 1:25,26, 2:23,24, and Philemon 22 clearly show. This release was probably in A.D. 62, and from then onwards the Apostle had about five years of freedom before being apprehended a second time. He evidently went to Crete and left Titus there to stabilize the work (Titus 1:5).

We know that he had an ambition to reach Spain with the gospel and the truth committed to him. In Romans 15:24,28 he says, "whenever I take my journey *into Spain*, I will come to you . . . when therefore I have performed this . . . *I will come by you into Spain.*" Spain was the limit of the then known world to the west and tradition asserts that he preached there. He also possibly visited Colossæ to the east as his intention in Philemon shows.

Around A.D. 64 from somewhere in Macedonia Paul wrote his First Epistle to Timothy whom he had left at Ephesus, and also to Titus in Crete, asking him to come to Nicopolis, for he had determined to spend the winter there (Titus 3:12).

In the spring of A.D. 65 he evidently visited Troas and was arrested the second time. At its beginning Rome tolerated Christianity as part of Judaism, which it recognized as a lawful religion. As the Truth spread and the gulf widened, Rome's

attitude changed to hostility. Christianity had now become an illicit religion and all who professed it were in danger of losing their lives. The great persecution under Nero broke out at Rome in A.D. 64 after the great fire for which Nero blamed the Christians, and this persecution spread to the provinces. The Apostle was taken to Rome and acquitted on the first charge, hence 2 Timothy 4:16,17. Alexander the coppersmith evidently accused him during the trial (4:14) and did him much evil. Paul's second trial took place in A.D. 66 or 67. This time he knew that there would be no release and that the end of his course had come. He gave his life for his Saviour and was executed shortly after his trial.

The pastoral epistles to Titus and 1 Timothy were therefore written during the Apostle's brief spell of freedom after the Acts period. Both Titus and Timothy were left in charge of the churches in Crete and at Ephesus respectively, and these letters were compiled for their guidance as leaders. At this time the churches under Paul's care had been instructed into the deeper truths of the Mystery, which he had made known in the epistles written during his first Roman imprisonment, namely Ephesians, Colossians and Philippians. They needed instruction as organized assemblies. We use the word "organized" with care, as this was of the simplest kind. There was no elaborate ritual or over-organization such as we often see around us, but as God is a God of law and order, it was not becoming or a good witness for local assemblies to be run in a disorderly fashion. Intimate details are given for those who were suited for the work of overseers (bishops) and deacons, while the men and women who comprised the congregation are also instructed in detail as to their behaviour and worship. 1 Timothy 3:15 is a key verse, "but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know *how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God . . .*" This "house" was the believer's home (Col. 4:15). No special buildings for worship then existed.

Titus had a peculiarly difficult task as a leader because of the bad character of some of the Cretans (Titus 1:9-13). Both the pastoral letters of 1 Timothy and Titus give us the Church of the One Body in simple organization and witness. But by the time Paul wrote his last letter, conditions had seriously deteriorated, faithful testimony had largely gone and all had become more or less individual. This will become apparent when we reach the exposition of 2 Timothy.

The letter to Philemon is a delightful example of the many private messages the Apostle must have written, but which were not inspired, and therefore find no place in Holy Scripture. This one evidently was guided by the Spirit of God and in it we see a wonderful example of the Truth in practice. Onesimus was a slave to Philemon, who was an intimate friend of Paul's and a leader of the church at Colossæ. The slave had absconded, possibly with some of his master's money, and made his way to Rome. There, under the wonderful providence of God, he came into touch with Paul and then to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus. He evidently attached himself to the Apostle, giving him what personal service he could. The time came, however, when Paul felt it was right and proper for Onesimus to return to his former master and the Epistle to Philemon was written to pave the way to reconciliation between them both. Colossians 4:7-9 shows that Onesimus was sent back by the Apostle to Colossæ with Tychicus and he is described to the Colossians as "one of you" (9).

The letter was written about the time of the Epistle to the Colossians, and is a wonderful example of tact and grace.

Paul, as an Apostle of Christ, could have *commanded* Philemon to take Onesimus back, but he does not do so; rather he asks him "for love's sake" to receive him (Philem. 8,9). "Receive him *as myself*" . . . "if he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on *mine account*" (17,18). Philemon surely could not resist this, especially as Paul tactfully reminds him how much he was in debt to him (Paul) and then he adds, "knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say" (21), looking to Philemon's generous and Christlike outlook.

Philemon had been grievously wronged, but now, since the conversion of his slave, the relationship had altered to that of two brothers in Christ and the practical teaching of Ephesians 4:32 concerning forgiveness had become paramount. The work of the evil one has been furthered many a time by quarrels between believers. If only the spirit of this precious epistle was constantly before our minds this sin could scarcely occur and how much trouble and bitterness could be saved! The Epistle to Philemon, while a prison epistle, was not written to scale the heights and depths of teaching such as is revealed in Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians. Nevertheless it is a necessary reminder to us all of what a worthy Christian walk should be in graciousness, tact, forbearance and forgiveness.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SECOND EPISTLE TO TIMOTHY

Chapter One

In our last chapter we saw that the Apostle Paul had a brief period of liberty after his Roman imprisonment recorded at the end of Acts. This lasted possibly four or five years and then he was arrested, put in prison and treated as a criminal (malefactor).

He knew now that his time was short and his course finished. This being so, his last thought was for his son in the faith, Timothy, who was so soon to carry the tremendous burden that he (Paul) had so faithfully shouldered for so many years. In addition to this, the times had become exceedingly dangerous from a Christian standpoint. The persecution instigated by Nero had spread and anyone who now professed the Name of Christ took their lives in their hands. A cruel death more than likely would be their lot.

How would this young fellow stand up to such severe and testing circumstances? The thought must have crossed Paul's mind again and again with great concern, so much so that he felt it was imperative to see him once more before his martyrdom to give him all the encouragement and help that was possible, so he takes up his pen and writes this last sacred letter. These are the human circumstances that called forth the writing of this Second Epistle to Timothy and over it all the Holy Spirit, in His own miraculous way, guided what the Apostle wrote, so that it became part of the Word of God, a most precious part that speaks so directly to us today.

The opening verse reads, "Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus". Nine of Paul's epistles open with a reference to his apostleship, while five do not. These latter epistles are 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Philippians, Philemon and Hebrews. He was indeed a Divinely sent messenger with a Divine message to the outcast Gentile world. But he was coming to the end of his earthly course. Death was not far away, and in these circumstances, what more precious thing could there be than "the

promise of *life which is in Christ Jesus*". This present life is transitory, and like a shadow when compared to the real and never-ending one. Eternal life and immortality are bound together and are alone found in Christ. "He that hath the Son *hath life*; and he that hath not the Son of God *hath not life*" (1 John 5:12). "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is *in His Son*" (verse 11). "Our Lord Jesus Christ . . . Who only hath immortality" (1 Tim. 6:14,16).

Eternal life and immortality is now received by faith in Christ, their only source, and will be actually enjoyed to the full and "put on" by the believer at resurrection. ". . . the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and *this mortal must put on immortality*" (1 Cor. 15:51-54). Not until this glorious experience can it be said with truth that "death is swallowed up in victory" (54). Now we have the *promise* of life in Christ Jesus; it is sure and certain and absolutely fundamental, for what use would be all the wonders of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus, had we not the assurance of life unending to enjoy it?

The Apostle adds "mercy" in verse two to his usual salutation of grace and peace. "Mercy" occurs twelve times in Paul's writings and signifies compassion, the feeling of sympathy toward the state of another. We have a God Who is rich in mercy, in understanding of our every need. He knows us far better than we know ourselves. Verse three continues: "I thank God, Whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience". . . . Timothy's ancestry was different from Paul's from a spiritual standpoint. Timothy had the privilege of a Christian home, a saved mother and grandmother (5), but the Apostle had no such background. His forefathers were orthodox Hebrews, and while God's salvation and leading had taken him away from much of what they and Pharisaism stood for, yet he had not left their God; he still served Him, with a pure conscience.

Paul expresses his deep longing to see his son in the faith, his beloved child (verses 2-4 R.V.) for the last time. There was a bond between the two that was closer than that of any other fellow-worker with the Apostle. While he appreciated all those who 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 this letter makes clear. He refers to the young man's tears at their last parting and his genuine, unfeigned faith. There occurs a threefold reference to remem-

brance in chapter one and we shall find the number three stamped on this epistle as it was on Ephesians. "Wherefore I put thee in *remembrance* that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands" (6), and we have already had the word in verses three and five.

We need not be disturbed because Timothy was reminded to stir up a gift that was given during the Acts period. Some of the Pentecostal gifts were basic to faithful ministry and so were beyond dispensational limitations. Such must have been this gift to which Paul was referring. This, Timothy is asked to re-vive, a word that is used of rekindling the dying embers of a fire. "For God gave us not a spirit of fearfulness; but of power and love and discipline" (7 R.V. "a sound mind" A.V.). The word "fear" or "fearfulness" is really the word "cowardice", and here the Apostle is delicately reminding his son in the faith of the need of being brave and courageous and not playing the coward however difficult and dangerous the times were. A sound, or literally a "salvation mind" is a precious gift, for which we constantly need to thank the Lord. The work of salvation starts with the *mind* and works in us the mind of Christ. This is the only thing that keeps us balanced and usable servants of God, for the mind is the spring and source of all our actions and service.

Now comes a threefold reference to being ashamed. "Be not therefore *ashamed* of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner" (8). . . . "I am appointed a preacher . . . for the which cause I also suffer these things, nevertheless I am not *ashamed*" (11, 12). "Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not *ashamed* of my chain" (16). This is in a context of rejection as we shall see. Paul says in effect to Timothy, in spite of this rejection do not be ashamed of the testimony given me by the Lord; I am not ashamed of it, nor is Onesiphorus ashamed of my chain and all it stands for in the revelation of glorious truth.

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" (10,11). "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast

heard *of me*" (13). "All they which are in Asia be turned away *from me* (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 himself *would be* sheer egotism apart from the position given him by the Ascended Christ as His mouthpiece to us who are Gentiles. When the Apostle 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). 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 speaks with all His authority. If this is appreciated the constant references to himself and his ministry can be seen in their true light.

To be ashamed of Paul and his ministry is to be ashamed of the Lord and 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 witness given through Paul, the Prisoner, 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 teaching given through Paul's prison ministry.

Timothy is now reminded that he must be willing to accept any hardship that the perils of the time might bring, "but suffer hardship with the gospel according to the power of God" (8 R.V.).

Again and again we have seen that the Apostle looked alone to the "power of His resurrection" as the origin of all strength, wisdom and endurance and constantly urged Timothy and all 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 and Timothy is urged not to fear the consequences of

standing faithfully for the sacred trust committed to him, for the power of God could be his at all times enabling him to triumph over all the difficulties through which he might have to pass.

The Apostle continues: "God, Who hath saved us, and called us with an 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" (9). While the Bible is the revelation of a mighty plan conceived by God in past eternity involving heaven as well as earth, how wonderful it is that the individual child of God is not lost in all its vastness! Each one who comprises this holy calling, this company with the unique title of the "Fulness of Christ" (Eph. 1:23) was not saved by accident. It was all part of His design and exceeding grace; 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 they were "chosen in Christ *before* the foundation of the world", so here a part was given to each one in Christ Jesus before the age times (literally), a unique time period as we have seen when studying Ephesians. Other phases of God's purpose 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 cannot refer to the same time period. We have the same expression in Titus 1:2, where the A.V. translates "before the world began". J. N. Darby renders both "before the ages of time" and the Weymouth version reads, "before the commencement of the ages", which are both truer to the original than the Authorized Version.

In contrast to this vast look back into the past and the beginnings of God's great plans 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" (10,11 R.V.). This is parallel again to the opening of the Epistle to Titus, the "now" of 2 Timothy one, corresponding to the "due times" of Titus 1:3 A.V. or as the R.V. renders it, "God, Who cannot lie, promised before times eternal (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 purpose and His Truth and these time periods are always exact. The reverent and 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 had this always been carried out. How often do we read of an explanation of the Mystery—the Secret of Ephesians three, that takes us back to the Old Testament, when it is clearly stated that, at that time, it was hid in God! (Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:26). The revelation of the Mystery and its heavenly calling is “now” according to God’s own “season” and is made known through Paul the Prisoner according to “His commandment”.

The Apostle Paul 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 marg.), and an apostle, and a teacher” (10,11 R.V.), the word translated “abolish” is one that is almost exclusively used by Paul. “Abolish” is too strong a translation. The original means *to render inoperative*. We notice this usage in Romans 6:6, where it is translated “destroyed”—again too strong a rendering. In both cases “to render inoperative” is better. Death was not abolished at the Saviour’s first Advent, but He defeated it by His redemptive work on the Cross and by His resurrection from the grave and took the sting out of it for the believer, which is sin (1 Cor. 15:56). Death cannot finally hold the believer, for he has been united with the Conqueror of Death, and, because He lives, we shall live also.

Not only did the Lord Jesus make death inoperative but He brought life and incorruption to light through the good news which He committed to the Apostle Paul. The Revised Version rightly reads “incorruption” instead of “immortality” of the Authorized Version. We have already seen that this incorruptible life and immortality are only to be found in Christ Jesus our Saviour and not in fallen humanity. Any teaching that man possesses either apart from the Lord and His Salvation is pagan in its origin, flatly contradicting the revealed truth of the Scriptures and comes from the Father of lies. The Apostle refers to his threefold office as herald (preacher), apostle and teacher 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.

"For the which cause," he says, "I suffer also these things". His imprisonment and treatment as a criminal was the direct result of his faithful stand during this perilous time for Christ and the ministry given him. "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" (12 R.V.). The margin of the Revised Version here reads, "or, that which He hath committed unto me (Greek—my deposit)." Paul is not thinking here of something which he had deposited with the Lord, but rather of all the wondrous Truth that the *Lord had deposited with him* to proclaim and make known. In spite of the darkness of the days in which the Apostle lived, the Lord was able to guard His own Truth until "that day" of which Philippians 1:6 and 10 speaks. This brought tremendous comfort to Paul. He as the messenger was imprisoned and his witness curtailed, nevertheless not all the malignity of Satan and the powers of darkness could obliterate the wonders of the good deposit of truth given to him. "The Word of God is not bound," he asserts in 2:9.

This "deposit" is referred to again in verse fourteen of chapter one and in 1 Timothy 6:20. The phrase "that good thing which was committed unto thee" is literally "the good deposit" in the Greek (see R.V. margin). Likewise 1 Timothy 6:20 reads, "O Timothy, guard the deposit" (R.V. margin). This is further explained in 2 Timothy 1:13. "Hold the pattern of sound words which thou hast heard from me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus" (R.V.). This word "pattern" is only used once more 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). It means delineation or outline. Arndt and Gingrich in their *Greek-English Lexicon* give the meaning as *standard*, which fits the context 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. We live in the "times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24), and the sacred deposit made known by the Apostle of the Gentiles covers this period. How thankful we should be that

we have this Divine standard of Truth by which we can test all we hear and read with its many conflicting opinions and ideas. This is the only 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 the eleven, he is not directed to this by the Apostle. Such constituted the standard of Truth in a past dispensation and to the Circumcision, and it will be so again at a future time when Israel begins again to be dealt with by the Lord. He must now guard what he had heard and received from Paul, in faith, and minister it in love (13). 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 its verbal form and is translated "commit".

The Lord had deposited the standard of Truth for this dispensation with Paul. He was now ending his course and so he deposits this treasure with Timothy who, in his turn, is instructed to deposit it with faithful men who are able to teach others. There should be no doubt in the mind then as to what constitutes the "good deposit". It must consist of all the Truth made known through Paul's prison ministry. This first of all must be the gospel which he received from the Lord (Gal. 1:8-12), the glorious good news of salvation by grace. But it is a profound mistake to stop here. Some expositors talk as though this gospel was the limit of the Apostle's ministry and witness. It was only the beginning. Upon this foundation 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 and Colossians). 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) for us Gentiles. In the mercy of God all this has come down to us at the present day. Do we regard it as a sacred trust?

Timothy is thus encouraged to hold fast and guard the special teaching which had been given to him through the Apostle Paul. Now the Apostle warns him of some who had not done so. "This thou knowest, that all that are in Asia turned away from me; of whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes" (15 R.V.). The A.V. renders it "be turned away from me". The R.V. is more exact, pointing to a definite time and act of repudiation. Later on he states that all men forsook him at his first defence (4:16).

It is not easy to assess just how many were involved in this turning away from Paul and his doctrine. We do know that at least Timothy, Onesiphorus, Aquila, Priscilla and Luke stood firm, for they are mentioned in this epistle.

It has been suggested that witnesses for the Apostle who had come from various centres, were terrified by the attitude of Nero and out of fear forsook him. This may have been true, but such a number could hardly justify the phrase "all in Asia". That the perils of the day played a large part in this defection from the Truth, there can be no doubt. Any who publicly associated themselves with Paul, took their life in their hands and if they failed to stand, who are we to judge them? Are we ready to give our lives for the Saviour if need be? The Apostle names two believers, Phygelus and Hermogenes, unknown to us, but evidently well known to Timothy. They were among this company who had forsaken him in his hour of supreme need, and would 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 the Apostle laboured could not have been healthy. No mention is made of local churches in this epistle. All is individual—"thou", "thy" are the characteristic words. Later on he uses the word "turn away" again and refers to those who will turn away from the Truth (4:4). This is usually the order; first to turn away from the Lord's messenger for this age—the Apostle Paul, and then to turn away from the Lord's message given through him. And as we look around upon modern Christendom is this not largely what we see? The truth given through this servant of the Lord is for the most part unknown or repudiated. Is it any wonder that we live in a day of spiritual darkness?

Such a defection in Paul's day must have had far-reaching consequences. One searches in vain for the distinctive truths of his prison ministry during the early centuries and in fact these made little imprint upon history all down this age, though there must have been the faithful who had eyes to see and divine courage to hold fast wherever they were placed. In the spiritual darkness of the Middle Ages even the basic truth of justification by faith was lost. Since the Reformation, truth has been in the process of recovery.

The Apostle now refers to the ministry of one who had remained faithful to him and therefore was an example to Timothy. "The Lord grant mercy unto the house of Onesipho-

rus; 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 that beset anyone who publicly linked himself with Paul. How easy it would have been for Onesiphorus to have made excuses for not so doing! He could have easily excused himself by saying that he was not able to find Paul in Rome. Instead of this he searched "diligently" till he discovered the Apostle's whereabouts and not only this, Paul asserts that "he often refreshed me". The word refreshed is unique in the N.T. As a noun it occurs in Acts 3:19, "the times of refreshing", referring to the blessed effects of the Lord's Second Advent. The simple ministry of this man 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". Onesiphorus was not ashamed of the truth for which Paul stood and this gives us the third occurrence of the word "to be ashamed" in this epistle.

CHAPTER XV

THE SECOND EPISTLE TO TIMOTHY

Chapters Two and Three

The word "therefore" which occurs in the first verse of chapter two leads to a summing-up of the encouragements and warnings of chapter one. Because of the personal examples of each of these, Timothy is now reminded of his need of Divine strength in order to stand fast as a faithful witness to the Lord. "Thou therefore, my child, be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2:1 R.V.). The Apostle uses the tender word "child" to his son in the faith which marks the closeness of their relationship to each other. He does not merely exhort Timothy to be strong, but tells him *where he can get his strength from*. This is a practical word to each one of us, for none are so strong and independent in themselves that they can afford to ignore it. Once again we are brought back to the grace of God, and as we have seen before, it is a profound mistake to limit grace to initial salvation. "Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Eph. 4:7). Grace not only saves, but equips and strengthens for Christian service, however exacting that may be.

We find the word "be strong" used of or by the Apostle eight times, the number of resurrection, and each occurrence has a message of importance (Acts 9:22; Rom. 4:20; Eph. 6:10; 1 Tim. 1:12; 2 Tim. 2:1, 4:17; Heb. 11:34). How grateful we should be that the Lord does not expect us to manufacture the strength necessary for a victorious life and witness, but is ready to give it to us day by day. It only waits for our appropriation by faith in His promises.

After reminding Timothy of his need of God's strength to stand fast, Paul writes: "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit (deposit) thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2:2). Paul had received the sacred deposit of Truth from the Lord Jesus. Through Paul's ministry Timothy had received it, and now he was commissioned to commit the "good deposit" to (1) faithful men, (2) with the ability to pass it on and teach others. Note the

order, it is absolute *loyalty* first and *ability* afterwards. Many times this has been reversed in Christian circles with disastrous consequences. A man is given prominence in Christian work because he is an able speaker; or he is a scholar; or he has a winning personality and is capable. None of these qualifications are accepted by the Lord 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. Those who ignore it do so at their peril, for there is the judgment seat of Christ to face and He is requiring not *quantity* first but *quality*. Without such quality, all may be regarded as wood, hay and stubble, to be consumed by the fire of His holiness (1 Cor. 3:11-15).

Those who decide to be utterly loyal to God's truth committed to them whatever the cost, are not likely to be popular or ever have a large following. The pathway is more likely to be lonely and sometimes very difficult, but He is with all such till the end of the journey and then His smile, His commendation, His reward! The Apostle Paul was very concerned about the transmitting of the Truth given to him, hence this injunction to Timothy and in this context we have the only "apostolic succession" known to the New Testament. All else is based on claims which cannot be substantiated by God's Word.

We have commented before on the importance of the work of the *teacher*. He is as much a gift from the Ascended Christ as the evangelist (Eph. 4:11). For the most part today it is the evangelist that gets all the prominence, while the teacher is relegated to the background as someone of less importance, with the result that churches and chapels contain babes in Christ who never advance and grow up spiritually. They cannot receive the strong meat, the exceeding riches of Paul's prison ministry, and this is one reason why these glories are so little known and received among God's children today.

Another reason is the difficulty of the way of the faithful witness to the Truth to which we have already alluded. This has been so from the very beginning for Paul now says to Timothy, "Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (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 and to

emphasize this Paul uses three figures (1) the soldier, (2) the athlete, (3) the farmer or husbandman.

(1) The soldier is brought forward first but it is not fighting qualities or fighting prowess that is stressed. Indeed the faithful servant of the Lord is told that he "must not fight (strive)" (2 Tim. 2:24). Rather it is the quality of *endurance* and the complete freedom from all business and other *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 in wartime are the comforts and luxuries of home. Not only this, but no Roman soldier was allowed to engage in business or commerce. Soldiering was a full-time job 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" (4 R.V.). The word "life" is translated "living" in Mark 12:44; Luke 8:43, 15:12. It means *livelihood* or getting one's living, i.e. one's business or daily work. The lesson is clear. If we want to please the Lord and receive a crown from Him, we must be willing, if need be, to suffer hardship for the Truth's sake. We must watch our daily vocation to see that not only is it one that goes in harmony with Christian witness but that it does not take too large a place in our lives, so becoming an idol and *entangling* us in the race. Anything that entangles must be avoided however good it may appear.

(2) The Apostle further enforces his point by reference to the *athlete*. "And if also a man contend in the games, *he is not crowned, except he have contended lawfully*" (5 R.V.). Again many points could have been stressed concerning the athlete; but the one brought forward here is the need to "contend lawfully" or keep the rules. The rules governing the Olympic games were stringent. There had to be a period of severe self-discipline and preparation and then if the rules were not rigidly adhered to, contestants were fined and disqualified. Paul has already used in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 the figure of a race with a prize in view that can be won or lost. Again the teaching is clear. Grace has placed our feet in the heavenly race but there is no possibility of our being crowned by the Lord at the end unless we have kept the rules. Those rules are 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" (6 R.V.). It is literally the *labouring* husbandman, i.e. the farmer or gardener who *works*. Everyone knows that work must precede any results in gardening or farming. The lazy man gets no results. His land, covered in weeds, is an open indication of his idleness. The stress here is on Christian *service* and all it entails. Crowns and rewards are for *servants*, those who have laboured for the Lord and receive His approval for what they have done. This epistle is going over the same ground as Philippians and these two epistles are a pair, just as Ephesians and Colossians are. In both Philippians and 2 Timothy the theme is faithful service rendered to the Lord, and its demands on the believer and the possibility of a prize or crown at the end.

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.). Timothy is asked to pause and reflect upon the challenge that these figures teach and then the promise follows that the Lord would give him all needed understanding. The Revised Version here is better than the A.V. for the future tense "shall give thee" is a precious promise which is missed in the A.V. Understanding of spiritual things can only come from One Source—God the Holy Spirit, and this He is ready to give to those of His children who will take time to consider and ponder prayerfully over the Word that He has written to teach and guide them.

Paul has already brought before his son in the faith not only God's Truth, but what it would cost, if faithfully lived and proclaimed. There are "afflictions of the gospel" (1:8) but even so, the power of God is more than sufficient. If Timothy is called to suffer hardship with the Apostle (2:3), then he is bidden to look away to the Risen Christ, who would take him through triumphantly, "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" (8,9 R.V.). Here again the Revised Version gives us a different rendering of the original text. The Authorized Version says, "Remember *that* Jesus Christ . . . was raised from the

dead," as though Paul was asking Timothy to remember the *fact* of the resurrection. While the basis of all Paul's ministry is the resurrection, he is also saying in effect, "look away from the present testing and hardship to the Risen One, Who is all-sufficient". This is very much like Hebrews 12:2 where the runner in the heavenly race is bidden to look away from everything else to Jesus, the Author (Beginner) and Finisher (Completer) of our faith.

The Apostle was now being treated as a criminal, chained night and day in a Roman dungeon; yet the Lord Jesus was his sufficiency. He was able to endure all these things *for the elect's sake* (10). He was indeed the prisoner of the Lord for us Gentiles (Eph. 3:1), yet he rejoiced in the fact that no one, not even Satan, could chain and bind God's Word of Truth. His desire was that the elect should not only obtain salvation but the age-abiding glory that accompanies salvation for the overcomer. To enforce this he quotes one 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. 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" (11-13 R.V.). Here are two distinct lines of truth that we have already touched upon when dealing with the Philippian epistle—the difference between salvation by grace and all it entails, which is not "of works", and Christian service which should follow or accompany salvation, resulting in a prize or crown which will be awarded by the Lord at His judgment seat if that service is reckoned by Him as faithful. If not, the crown will be denied, but the initial salvation cannot be lost for "He abides faithful, He cannot deny Himself" or take back what He has given as a free gift. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance", i.e. change of mind on His part (Rom. 11:29). If this is still not clear we urge the reader to 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 (Rom. 6:8), they will all live with Him. 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 and being raised from the dead or changed into His likeness does not

depend on them either; it is the culmination of the glorious work of salvation wrought by Christ and will be brought about by Him that "quickeneth the dead".

But in 2 Timothy 2:12 we step out of the realm of free grace into the realm of responsibility. We are saved to give a life of faithful witness, to become servants of God; to work out our salvation in practice. In this realm of Christian service we can be faithful or unfaithful. If faithful, then we shall not only *live* with Christ, but also *reign with Him*. The word "also" shows that 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.

"If we patiently endure, we shall *also* reign with Him; if we shall deny Him, He also will deny us" (the reigning, the crown). But even if unfaithful or faithless, He cannot deny Himself or take back the free gift of eternal life (2 Tim. 2:13; Rom. 6:23). There is not one of us today who does not need a clear understanding of these distinct yet related aspects of truth and a constant reminder of their practical implications.

These are such important truths for the believer to apprehend that Timothy is now charged to constantly remind those under his charge of these things. "Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting (overthrowing) of the hearers" (14). This is not the first time that Paul had warned Timothy concerning this senseless striving (see 1 Tim. 1:4,6,7, 6:3-5, 20; also Titus 1:10,14, 3:9). It may not be possible to say exactly what the "endless genealogies" were, but it seems clear that Satan had fabricated a scheme of ages and false mediators which was a travesty of the Truth revealed in the Scriptures. The Colossian heresy was probably linked with a similar thing. This led to endless debates and arguments which only accomplished what the enemy was aiming at; the dividing of God's people and their being turned away from Christ.

It is the Truth that forms the subject of the section now before us. The word occurs three times "rightly dividing the word of *Truth*" (15); "those who concerning the *Truth* have erred" (17, 18) and "repentance to the acknowledging of the *Truth*" (25).

Can anything be more important for the believer? Of what use will be all Christian effort and witness if it does not square with the Truth? Surely here we come to the heart of all service. If we are wrong here, we shall be wrong everywhere. No time, effort and pains should be spared by any sincere Christian to come to a knowledge of what God calls the Truth. Pilate's question comes ringing down the centuries, "What is truth?" Thousands have asked it since, many oblivious of the fact that the Saviour had already answered it. "*Thy Word is Truth*" (John 17:17).

Here in the context we are dealing with we have it again, but this time giving us instructions how to handle it: "rightly dividing the Word of Truth". Just what does rightly dividing the Word mean? We will give the rendering of a number of translations: "rightly handling the message of truth", *Cunnington*; "skilfully handling the word of truth", *Rotherham*; "the way you handle the word of truth", *Moffatt*; "rightly handling the word of truth", R.S.V.; "cutting in a straight line the word of truth", *J. N. Darby*; "correctly analysing the message of truth", *Berkeley Version*.

The Greek word literally means to cut straight—or to cut in a straight line as Darby renders it. It has a secondary meaning, "to handle aright", and the translators are divided as to which meaning to use. In the end it comes to the same thing as we shall see, but we must not forget that Timothy's Bible which he had known since infant days (3:15) was the Greek version of the Old Testament and in this the word "rightly divide" occurs twice only, namely Proverbs 3:6 and 11:5. In 3:6 instead of "He shall *direct* thy paths" (the Hebrew version) we have "He (or it, referring to wisdom in verse 5) shall *rightly divide* thy paths". There can be no question that the original meaning is used here, for the Lord's guidance is likened to a sign-post dividing off and pointing to the right road out of a number before the person concerned; so the Apostle's usage and Timothy's understanding was bound to be influenced by the usage of the word in the holy Scriptures (the Old Testament) which had made Timothy wise unto salvation (3:15).

We must not be misled by the word "study". It has no connexion with books or learning, but is rendered "do thy diligence" in 4-9 and 21. Weymouth renders it "make an effort", while Moffatt and Goodspeed translate it, "do your best". Timothy is asked to do his utmost to present himself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed. Surely

here is the goal of all Christian service. It would be well for all who are engaged in the Lord's work to stop and ask the question, "What is the *motive* behind my Christian service?" This needs to be faced honestly, for all sorts of motives can lie at the back of Christian witness. It can be done because one has a natural attraction for such work; or it may be done to please one's friends or relatives or the church or chapel where one worships—or the minister in charge. All these motives are wrong, for they have as their first consideration the *approval of man*, whereas, in the final issue, the only thing that matters is *the approval of God*. The Apostle Paul, Timothy, and each one of us who owns Christ as Saviour, will one day have to appear before His judgment seat to give an account of our witness and stewardship. *Then* individuals, organized Christianity, and every other human institution will have faded into the background for ever and the only thing that will matter will be *His assessment of our service*.

Shall we be approved unto God? Shall we receive His commendation? Or shall we receive His disapproval and stand before Him ashamed? There can be no question more important for a believer. Surely it should be our *first* aim in life to present ourselves approved unto God. We ought to do our utmost to secure this and the context we are dealing with stresses an essential, without which such Divine approval is impossible. This is "rightly dividing the word of Truth". The issue is solemn and as the subject is of such importance we must consider what this command involves. Right division is not chopping up the Bible into sections of our making, but recognizing the divisions and distinctions that the Author, God the Holy Spirit has Himself made. If we obey this injunction we shall distinguish between *the time periods of Scripture*. What was true in the Old Testament times is not necessarily true today. If a believer sins now he does not bring to God an animal sacrifice in order to be forgiven. Yet this was God's command in Old Testament days and refusal to obey it would have meant 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. It will mean that we must distinguish Law from Grace, works and human merit from that which is given by God as a free gift.

Conversely, the present must not be read into the past. The truth of the Mystery (secret) which God hid in Himself from past ages and generations (Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:26) must not be read

into Old Testament times or these two Scriptures are made null and void and emptied of all their glorious meaning. The future must not be read into the present. The future prophetic period of wrath and judgment 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). We have the supreme example of right division of the Word given us by the Lord Jesus Himself in Luke 4:14-21. In giving the public reading of the Scripture, Isaiah sixty-one, He stops in the middle of verse two, closes the Book and sits down. The reader should consult Isaiah sixty-one and carefully note exactly what the Lord did. He stopped at 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 continued with truth, "*This day is this* Scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21) for He came not to judge and condemn but to save. The day of the Lord with its wrath and vengeance will be true in the future. It is not true now. God does not sit on a Throne of grace and judgment at the same time. Grace now reigns (Rom. 5:21) and judgment and wrath are held back. It is the "acceptable year of the Lord". Here is *right division of the Word in practice*, and all who handle the Word of God are without excuse with this Example before them.

Right Division will distinguish between the *standing* and *state of the believer*; what the believer is made to be *in Christ*, holy and clothed with His righteousness, and what he is in himself and in his daily walk. It will not confuse *salvation* and *reward for service*. One is solely of grace apart from works and the other is directly connected with works and service. We have sought to make this clear with its most important lessons in previous chapters. Again, distinction must be made between the various *judgments of Scripture*. The judgment of believers for service (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) or the judgment of unbelievers. *The various resurrections* must be distinguished. The Word of God knows nothing of one general resurrection. It is "every man in his own order" (1 Cor. 15:23). The *first* or *former* resurrection of Revelation 20:5, before the Millennium, cannot be the same as the Great White Throne judgment after it (verses 11-13). The word "first" clearly indicates that there must be more than one.

The future spheres of blessing for the redeemed must not be confused. If the "meek shall inherit *the earth*" (Matt. 5:5) is

the same as being seated together in the *heavenly places* where Christ is now enthroned (Eph. 1:20, 2:6), then words have lost their meaning and Bible study is a waste of time. Yet, in spite of this, many Christians believe *all* the saved will be blessed on the *earth*, while others believe that *all* the saved will go to *heaven*. The Scripture reveals three goals for companies of the redeemed—earth, Heavenly Jerusalem which descends to the new earth, and the right hand of God. If these are muddled up, how can a clear hope for future glory be entertained?

These are some examples of 2 Timothy 2:15 in practice. We only lightly touch upon this great principle, for, to do it justice, a large volume would be needed. However, a sincere attempt has been made in these expositions to carry it out faithfully, whether the conclusions arrived at are popular or unpopular.

It is a principle that ramifies right throughout the Bible, going much further than distinguishing dispensations, which very often are confused with ages or periods of time. Even if “rightly divide” is translated as “handle correctly”, the results are the same. How can the Word of God be “correctly handled” if the foregoing differing lines of teaching are confused? Some truths made known in the Scriptures are perpetually true, e.g. sin, and its remedy salvation; sanctification and the great basic doctrines. Others, as we have seen are true only for a limited time or are separate lines of truth which must not be blended.

We believe that this is a *sane and reverent way* of handling the Word of God, and moreover is a principle that we all carry out to some degree in our daily lives. Who would mix up the contents of the drawing-room and the kitchen in their homes, or the various departments in their business? The same sanity is needed in the approach to God’s Word.

If 2 Timothy 2:15 is not obeyed, then confusion reigns and we see the result in the divided state of Christendom around us. All denominations appeal to the Bible, but 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 that God has placed it in, 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 day".

On the other hand when right division is consistently carried out, *every statement of the Scriptures can be taken without alteration*. It allows God to mean what He says and to have a meaning for everything He says. There are no contradictions, and everything falls into its proper place in the outworking of the purpose of the ages made in Christ, and is seen to be carried through to a glorious conclusion by Him.

Paul, continuing his instruction of Timothy, has already warned him concerning deceivers who strive about words to no profit and upset the faith of others (2:14). He repeats this warning in verse sixteen. "But shun profane babblings: for they will proceed further in ungodliness, and their word will eat as doth a gangrene: of whom is Hymenæus and Philetus; men who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some" (16,17 R.V.). Hymenæus is referred to in 1 Timothy 1:20 in a bad sense, and of Philetus we know nothing, but both were obviously well known to Timothy.

The Apostle evidently takes a very serious view of their false teaching, likening it to a spreading gangrene. In what way could they have taught the resurrection was past already? They could not have been referring to the *Lord's* resurrection for this was a blessed historical fact (1 Cor. 15:20) 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 condition, or they taught that believers who had died had already experienced bodily resurrection. Either denies the need of a *literal bodily resurrection in the future* at the manifestation of the Lord. "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 these two ideas and we need to beware lest we fall into the same error as Hymenæus and Philetus. Let us note that they did not deny the *fact* of resurrection; they merely misplaced it *as regards time*, putting into the past teaching that can only be true in the future. 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. We are told, in some quarters, that the time element is not important in doctrine. In view of the swerving aside of the two men mentioned above and the leading away of others into error, we need to decisively reject any such notion. 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 compare 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 particular season or time for the revelation of God’s Truth and if this is not perceived or is ignored, then instead of Truth, serious error is propagated which can only bring the Lord’s condemnation.

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 that has two sides: (1) the infallible Lord and His knowledge—“The Lord knoweth them that are His”. The tares and the wheat are all known to Him. (2) “Let everyone that nameth the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness” (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. The Bible student will find another example of this seal in Numbers 16:5 and 16:26. In these contexts we have Divine sovereignty and human responsibility, but it was the *responsible* side that the Apostle wished to bring home to Timothy. Consequently he now brings 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” (20, 21).

The vessels unto honour may be likened to the things of beauty in the drawing-room; the vessels of a lack of honour or beauty those in the kitchen. Obviously the Master values the

articles of beauty more than the kitchen utensils, and Paul, by this illustration is urging Timothy to aspire to be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use.

Hymenæus and Philetus and those who followed them could be compared to vessels of dishonour and there was only one course open to Timothy, namely, to purge and separate himself from such. Only then could he be true to his name, Timothy, which means "one who honours God" or who 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), hence the stress on every *good work*. By separating himself from all who taught false doctrine, Timothy would be taking to a practical conclusion the sanctification that 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. Doubtless by so doing he would render himself open to the charge of being narrow and unchristian and one who caused divisions, but there must be no compromise whatever the cost.

All who wish to be honoured servants of the Lord must follow the same pathway. Such must choose whether they wish to please fellow Christians 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).

The Apostle 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, either bad or good. Inasmuch as any strong inclinations can be fraught with danger, specially during the impetuosity of youth, Timothy is exhorted to avoid such and follow those fruits 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 break the unity of the Spirit (23). "The Lord's servant must not strive (fight), but be gentle towards all, apt to teach, forbearing, in meekness correcting them that oppose themselves" (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 flesh 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 has disfigured controversies in doctrine. Those who oppose may be temporarily in the Devil's snare, allowed by the Lord, Who alone can give them that change of mind or repentance to the acknowledging of the truth so that they may recover themselves out of it (26). We need to continually pray for all such that the Lord will graciously give this needed change of heart and outlook.

Chapter three opens with a fore view of the last days of this dispensation and it does not make pleasant reading. Wherever this is dealt with in the Scriptures whether in prophecy, symbol or doctrine; whether in the Gospels (Matt. 24 and the Lord's discourse concerning the end of the age) or in the epistles, as here, the picture is as black as it can be. One may long for revival, but there is no possibility of reading revival on a large scale into 2 Timothy three and four. Such darkness can only be dissipated by the Lord's Second Coming and those who know the Lord and live in these times must hold fast by His grace to the end.

Those who constantly pray for revival stress the work of the Holy Spirit, often forgetting that His work 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 and exalt the Person and Work of the Living Word, the Saviour. His great office is to testify to the Lord Jesus and glorify Him (John 15:26, 16:14). When this is done, revival will surely follow.

But the last days, described here by the Apostle are days of apostasy when men shall turn away their ears from the truth to myths (4:4). They are indeed perilous times (3:1). The word "perilous" is translated "exceeding *fierce*" in Matthew 8:28, describing the condition of a demon-possessed man. These days will be activated by the powers of darkness and will be a return to paganism covered by the merest Christian veneer, having a form of godliness, but denying the power (5). This can be seen by comparing with Romans 1:28-32. In 2 Timothy 3 six words are repeated from the terrible verses in Romans showing how much

in common there is between the paganism of the beginning and the paganism at the end.

We note, too, the recurrence of the word "love"; "lovers of their own selves" (2); "covetous" (2) (literally, lovers of money); "not loving (despisers of) those that are good" (3); "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (4). Here is the tragedy of misplaced love. When we touch love we are going to the very centre of human personality whether for good or evil. Where truth is concerned, all may be summed up in the word "love", which is the fulfilling of God's law (Rom. 13:10). It fulfils all service (Gal. 5:13; 1 Thess. 1:3) and without it Christian labour is made null and void (1 Cor. 13:1-3). The believer is "rooted and grounded in love" (Eph. 3:17) and his aim should be to get to know more of the love of Christ which passes knowledge (Eph. 3:19).

Sin, however, has twisted man's capability of loving in the proper sense, with the result that we see in the passage we are now dealing with. Instead of loving God, he loves himself, his pleasures, his money, and this precious thing is frittered away upon empty transitory things that can never satisfy. It is sad to read in 4:10: "Demas hath forsaken me, *having loved* this present world." It seems almost impossible that after nearly two thousand years of Christianity, men could lapse to such a condition as described here, but God's Word never exaggerates. This is a true picture of the end time and believers must face up to it. Whatever appears to be Christian will only be the thinnest exterior—a mere outward form of godliness but its power denied (5).

Thus the last days will have no time for Jesus Christ crucified, risen and ascended and the gospel concerning Him, for this gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16) as is the preaching of the Cross (1 Cor. 1:18) followed by the power of His resurrection (Eph. 1:19, 20; Phil. 3:10). All this will be unknown or denied and will follow a turning away from the truth of the Word of God to fables and myths.

The reference to Jannes and Jambres, the magicians that withstood Moses, again throws light on the 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. Those who withstand the truth at the end (8) do so by the same means; they are corrupt and reprobate concerning the faith. The word "reprobate" is the negative of the word translated

"approved" in 2:15. This is the antithesis of the unashamed workman.

It is good to realize that there is a Divine limit to this evil. Just as Jannes and Jambres reached a point in imitation of God's power operating through Moses and could go no further, confessing "this is the finger of God" (Exod. 8:19, 9:11), so here we read: "But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs also was" (9). The Apostle now turns away in his thought to Timothy and reminds him: "But thou 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" (10, 11 R.V.). The Revised Version is preferable to the Authorized. Instead of "thou hast fully known" of the A.V. we have, "thou didst follow" of the R.V. This meaning is put in the margin of the A.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 be always said with truth that the Apostle practised what he preached. He not only called attention to his teaching, but could uphold it all by his manner of life, thus giving power to his witness. He could say: "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). His life was dominated by one divine purpose, which was nothing less than to complete and fully make known the truth entrusted to him by the Risen Saviour.

Timothy also well knew Paul's faith, his persuasion, his longsuffering and patience which enabled him to endure extremes of testing when others would have given up long before; his love which ever manifested itself in his pouring out himself for others, a practical example of the wonderful exposition he gave in 1 Corinthians thirteen. He knew also the Apostle's sufferings and persecutions and how faithfully they were endured. Paul's mind now travels back to the beginning of his ministry at Antioch and the first great missionary journey he undertook where 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 daunt Timothy, Paul adds, "but out of them all the Lord delivered me" (11), clearly showing him that he dealt with a God who was able to deliver, however intense the trial. He continues, "Yea, and all that would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (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. Wondrous blessings and anticipations of glory there are certainly, but faithfulness will surely entail misunderstanding, persecution and possibly loneliness, for we follow One Who is still "despised and rejected of men" and the servant is not above his Master.

Though evil has a limit (9), it will increase up to this point, and truth having been cast away, deception is bound to take its place (13). Deception is the hall mark of the end time (Matt. 24:4,5,24; 2 Thess. 2:9,10) and its only antidote is God's Word of Truth which is our one protection against Satan's lie. This is the point that Paul is now reaching with Timothy and he proceeds to point to the Scriptures as the source and substance of all true ministry and witness. He exhorts his young follower "abide thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them" (14 R.V.). The A.V. has "continue" but "abide" is better.

Timothy's safety and effectiveness as a teacher were essentially connected with his remaining unmoved respecting the truth he had received from Paul. The R.V. margin reads, "Greek, what persons" and it is a little difficult to decide whether Paul is referring to himself as the channel through which Timothy had been taught, or his mother and grandmother (1:5). Both are really true, for he had known the Holy Scriptures from a babe through the wise witness of his Christian mother, and had come to a knowledge of salvation through them; and then later on he had come to know the distinctive truths committed by the Lord to Paul, and was now about to assume the burden of this great and sacred deposit.

The passage that follows is of supreme importance for it deals with the inspiration of Scripture and what it involves. This is a fundamental which has been the object of persistent attacks which are characteristic of the time of the end (4:2-4). These

started in Eden with the insidious question of the Devil "hath God said?" and has continued all down the centuries. Satan is able to do his work easily when doubt concerning God's Word enters the mind. If this is not true, then we have no sure basis for our faith, for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

Paul could say to Timothy, ". . . 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" (3:15-17).

The word "child" would be better rendered "infant". It is the same as the "new-born babe" of 1 Peter 2:2. Timothy's Christian mother was a wise woman. From his earliest days she sought to lead him into the way of truth by bringing before him the Old Testament Scriptures; thus he grew up naturally into a knowledge of God and there was probably no special day to which he could point back for his conversion. He would not need the sudden "right about turn" that was necessary for the Christ-opposing Saul of Tarsus. We have sought to constantly stress that the main function of the written Word is to lead to the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Old Testament looks forward to Him in type and shadow and believers living in those times looked *forward* to Him by faith as we today look *back*.

The Revised Version translates verse sixteen: "Every Scripture inspired by God is also profitable". This rendering gives a loophole to the modernist, for it suggests that there may be parts of Scripture which are not inspired. There is parallel construction in the Greek in such passages as Romans 7:12, 1 Corinthians 11:30 and Hebrews 4:13. If translated as the R.V. we should get such absurdities as the following: "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). We do not attempt to explain the Revised Version of 2 Timothy 3:16. Evangelical scholars have shown the futility of such a rendering. There is no doubt that the Authorized Version is correct: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God", literally God-breathed. The word "Scripture" means "that which is written" and if all that was *written* was *God*

breathed then there was no room left for fallible human opinion in the original manuscripts of the Old Testament, for it is the Old Testament that is primarily referred to here. The New Testament was at this time only in process of writing. If the Old Testament is fully inspired by God, then it follows as a matter of course that the New Testament must be too, for both are so interwoven as to make their separation impossible. There are those who will admit the inspiration of the N.T. but deny it to the Old. Such should weigh over the far-reaching claims of 2 Timothy 3:16 and remember it is the Old Testament Scriptures with which this verse is primarily dealing.

Earlier on we brought forward some evidences of the truth of the full inspiration of the Bible. They were (1) Numerics, (2) the Unity of the Bible, (3) the evidence of prophecy, (4) The Bible's indestructibility, (5) its endurance of translation, (6) the witness of archaeology, (7) the witness of Christ Himself to the Scriptures. We cannot traverse this ground again but refer to chapter one. Any one of these points would mark the Bible as a Book distinct from all others, but the combined witness of the seven surely indicate to any unprejudiced and reasonable mind the truth of the great claim made in 2 Timothy 3:16.

We would point out, in order to avoid misunderstanding, that Divine inspiration applies only to the original *records* in Hebrew, Chaldee and Greek. It does not apply to translations, nor does it mean that all which is recorded in the Bible is inspired. We have the words of Satan in the prologue to the Book of Job. No one could possibly call these words inspired, but we have an inspired and accurate *record* of what he said. Often we read of the sayings and doings of those who were enemies of God. Neither of these could be inspired, but the *account* of them is true.

What is the alternative to the plenary inspiration of the Word of God? Whatever is brought forward in its place can only have a human basis and is therefore fallible and useless to rest one's faith upon. If some parts of the Bible are divinely inspired and others are not we are no better off, for who is going to decide infallibly which passages are inspired and which are not? There never could be any unanimity among scholars and teachers on a point like this. The Roman Catholic will point to an inspired Church, but this is a claim that every true Protestant rejects and rightly so. 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, blot out the Word

of God down the centuries, and how much concerning Christ could have been known, and how much could be known today?

All one could be certain of would be what history records, namely that a man called Jesus Christ walked this earth nearly two thousand years ago and somehow stamped His name on our calendar. Of what He did or said, we should know practically nothing for He Himself left nothing on record.

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 purposes revealed in and through Him. If 2 Timothy 3:16 is not true, then we can never say with assurance: "Thus saith the Lord," as the prophets of old did. We are thrown back upon fallible human thinking and are forced to replace assurance and peace with doubt and uncertainty. Moreover both Peter and Paul must have been deceived men for Peter in his second epistle asserts that "no prophecy ever came by the will of man; but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost (2 Pet. 1:21 R.V.). The Apostle Paul speaks of the "sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God" (Eph. 6:17). If it is not fully inspired, it is a broken sword, utterly useless as a weapon for Truth. Alas, that it is so regarded by many professing Christians and ministers of religion, and those who accept plenary inspiration are looked on as old-fashioned and unintelligent. Let us remember the example of the Saviour Who met Satan in the wilderness, with a three-fold "It is written" (Matt. 4:4,7,10). What was good enough for Him should be good enough for us. We can consistently pin our faith to the "Word of God, that liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Pet. 1:23).

Having considered the supreme fact that "All Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16), let us now note the consequences for Timothy enumerated by the Apostle Paul and not only for him, but for all who would follow in his footsteps and render faithful service to the Lord. Because it is fully inspired it is therefore "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" (16,17 R.V.).

Teaching or doctrine occupies a very important place in the Pastoral Epistles where it occurs fifteen times, eight occurrences in 1 Timothy, three in 2 Timothy and four in the epistle to Titus. The ability to teach or pass on the Truth to others has already

been stressed in 2 Timothy 2:2. Here we have the one subject matter for the teacher, namely the inspired Word of God. One of the last of Paul's exhortations 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 for the Saviour. The great lack today 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 preacher. What we need is not just fluent preaching or oratory, but a clear and distinct setting forth of the message of God's Word. This gives the Holy Spirit something divine 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 whereto I sent it" (Isa. 55:11). Timothy, to be a profitable leader for Christ, must constantly handle aright, rightly divide and set forth the Word of Truth. This indeed is the only teaching that God recognizes or will bless. 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 words seem to be included in the next item, "instruction in righteousness". The A.V. has rendered this word as "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 (15) and right the way through to adulthood, to the "man of God". This was an outstanding title first borne by Moses and then by Elijah, Elisha, David, Shemaiah and Igdaliah. Timothy, who knew 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 word "perfect" in the original 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 could cause Timothy to be "furnished completely unto every good work" (17 R.V.) and thus be the loyal and fruitful servant that God required him to be and this is still true of us all today who seek to walk worthy of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SECOND EPISTLE TO TIMOTHY

Chapter Four

Chapter four opens with a solemn charge. The Apostle in writing his first letter to his son in the faith had used the word "charge" twice (1 Tim. 5:21, 6:11-14). Here was his last charge to this young servant of the Lord. "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" (4:1,2 R.V.). The A.V. reads "*at* His appearing", whereas the R.V. renders it "*and by* His appearing and His Kingdom"; which is nearer the original Greek. Timothy is directed away from himself and his service and the difficulties of the times in which he lived to the Lord Jesus and His judgment seat, at which one day he would have to render an account of his stewardship. All wise Christian servants will constantly keep an eye on this future assessment 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 old English words. "Quick" means *living*, so there will be some members of the Body of Christ who will be alive when He is manifested and 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 it as a daily inspiration to service. We are not told here how this will be accomplished, but flesh and blood can never inherit the Kingdom of God, so the glorious change of Philippians 3:20,21 is a necessity and we can rest assured that it will be true of all such. Paul has already referred to the Kingdom of the Son of His love in Colossians 1:13 into which the Body of Christ has been placed by the gracious work of the Father. Later on in 2 Timothy he looks forward by faith to this "heavenly Kingdom" (4:18) associated with the Ascended and seated Christ at the right hand of God. This must not be confused with that phase of God's purpose which deals with His Kingdom coming on the earth and with which redeemed and restored Israel is so intimately connected.

Phillippians 3:20 has already taught us that our homeland already exists not on earth, but in heaven and Colossians urges us to keep our minds fixed there (Col. 3:1).

As the days grow darker, may our testimony to the truth of God's Word, committed to us as surely as it was to Timothy, grow brighter, shining as lights in the world (Phil. 2:15 margin). We have the great privilege of being light-bearers for Him, Who is the only true Light that this world can have.

The Apostle Paul continues his last solemn charge to Timothy, his beloved son in the faith. 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 the word "preach" is literally "proclaim" and has no direct reference to preaching, as generally understood today, on Biblical texts from the pulpit. This is not just for the guidance of ministers, it is for all God's children who should feel the responsibility that a knowledge of the Truth brings. Each one of us is under an obligation to proclaim the Word to others as opportunity offers. If we do not do this, we are not redeeming the time (Eph. 5:16). Timothy was not asked to pass on his opinions, or the opinions of other believers however exalted they might be. He was counselled to proclaim that good deposit of Truth which had come into his possession through the ministry of the Apostle Paul. Here is safe guidance for all who are determined to give a loyal witness, one that will meet with God's approval "in that day".

It is significant to note that the Greek word *logos*, translated "word", occurs seven times in this epistle and anything that the Holy Spirit has stamped with the number seven is of outstanding importance (1:13, 2:9,11,15,17, 4:2,15. Here is a vast expanse of truth which will never be fully understood this side of glory. It will be more than sufficient for the teacher and for those who are taught till the day of glory dawns.

Timothy is told to reprove, rebuke and exhort and this would remind him of the fully inspired Word of God concerning which reproof is mentioned (3:16). But he must do this with great patience and not give up, specially with a view to the turning

away from the Truth of people who only want to hear that which pleases them and tickles their fancy. What a temptation it is for the servant of God to give the people what they *want* rather than what they *need*—in other words, to avoid running 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 to be God's Truth, because he realizes that his job would be in jeopardy and his daily living gone. 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 *true* reason.

The result is clearly declared 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" (3,4 R.V.). In chapter 1:15 Paul declares that all in Asia turned away from him. If people turn away from the human channel through which the Risen Christ is speaking, the logical result is that they will finally turn away from the Truth. And that is precisely what we see today. Modern Christendom has largely turned away from the witness that covers this dispensation, 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.

One has only to pick up a modern commentary and read how many times the word "myth" occurs in connexion with the book of Genesis, to realize how exactly Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, describes the last days of the age. Much that goes under the name of science is anything but scientific and is merely speculation. Yet how many eagerly cling to speculation and fallible human opinion rather than submit to the authority of the rightly divided Word of God, which only indicates just where their hearts and true inclinations lie.

The Apostle continues: "Be thou sober in all things, suffer hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil thy ministry" (5 R.V.). The word "sober" indicates watchfulness and care, being ready for all eventualities. In 1:8 and 2:3,9, Timothy had already been forewarned to be ready to endure hardship if need be for the Lord, and we have seen that the pathway to glory is seldom easy. We must be prepared to "rough it" for Christ's sake. With regard to the work of an evangelist, 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 specially inspired apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20) there follows the evangelist, the pastor and the teacher as gifts of Christ at His Ascension (Eph. 4:10,11). We are to expect no more apostles and prophets for their work is done in laying the foundation. They are succeeded by a lower yet necessary order of ministry, that of the evangelist, the shepherd and the teacher.

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 and not to give up however difficult the way became: "Fulfil thy ministry"—complete it.

This was also the message that the Apostle gave to Archippus in Colossians 4:17. Evidently this believer was in danger of giving up, and if we are ever tempted to do likewise because of many discouragements, let us remind ourselves of the goal to which we should be pressing: Christ Himself in glory. Let us look away unto Him (Heb. 12:1) the Author (Beginner) and *Finisher* of our faith. He, Who has started us on the heavenly pathway can save to the uttermost and bring us safely to the goal as we appropriate Him by faith.

The Apostle Paul, having given his last solemn charge to Timothy in view of his early martyrdom, goes on to say: ". . . 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 "offered" and "depart" in Philippians 2:17 and 1:23. There he was running the race for the prize and uncertain of the result, but here he has reached the goal. In Philippians he had to say: "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect" (3:12) but now he can write: "I have finished my course" (2 Tim. 4:7). The Revised Version margin of verse six tells us that the word "offered" means "poured out as a drink-offering", a beautiful figure of sacrificial spending of himself in service. Moffatt translates: "The last drops of my own sacrifice are falling; my time to go has come". Paul's one idea of service was to spend himself and all he had for his Saviour and Lord. This was the "mind of Christ Jesus" Who freely gave Himself to the utmost, even to Calvary's Cross, and this mind possessed the Apostle right to the very end.

He 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" (7,8 R.V.). The fight Paul refers to is not pugilistic combat, but the athletic contest—particularly the race. "I have contested the good contest" and now he had the assurance at last that he had breasted the tape and won the victor's crown. This was his one aim all along—"One thing I do" (Phil. 3:13). "I press toward the mark for the prize of (or in association with) the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (14).

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). He has now attained his goal and could write: "I *have* finished (completed) my course", the word "course" being the racecourse with the crown in view. The word "crown" speaks of the added reward and reigning of the overcomer and faithful servant. "If we suffer (patiently endure), we shall also reign with him" (2:12), and we have before stressed the vital difference between salvation, membership of the Body of Christ, and living with Him, which is a free gift of grace, and the added prize, reward or crown which gives the unspeakable privilege of not only living with Christ, but of sharing His throne in the glory to come, this being contingent on loyal witness and unselfish service 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 safely leave all to His impartial assessment. The opinions of men, Christian or otherwise upon our lives, will not intrude there and we can safely disregard them here. "One is our Master, even Christ", and all service should and must be rendered as to Him. The Revised Version correctly translates the perfect tense "*have loved* His appearing", not "love His appearing" of the A.V. A sudden love at the end of our lives for any phase of the Second Advent will not win a crown; it must be the consistent love all along, influencing our life and service.

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 which the believer may obtain. With Paul it was a crown associated with *righteousness*; righteousness being the very heart of his ministry, commencing with Galatians and Romans—"the *just* shall live by faith".

The Apostle now steps down to his present circumstances in a way that is quite natural. He urges Timothy once more to do his utmost to come quickly to him, lest the difficulties of winter travelling prevent him from doing so. Paul longs to see his beloved son in the faith once more before his death. He now informs Timothy of the forsaking by Demas, whose failure is attributed to loving the present age rather than loving the Lord's appearing. How we need to beware of the pull of present things, rather than the "things above where Christ sitteth". Undoubtedly, too, the fear of being publicly associated with Paul the prisoner also played its part in the failure of this believer. In contrast with the forsaking by Demas, we find Luke the beloved physician, faithful to Paul right to the end. The Lord was merciful to the Apostle in not only granting him 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, and the cause of the dissension between Paul and Barnabas, is now "profitable for the ministry". Timothy is enjoined to bring the long cloak that would help to ease the rigours of winter in a Roman dungeon, together with books and parchments of which we know nothing. The Apostle then gives a serious warning regarding Alexander the coppersmith who had bitterly opposed him and the Truth (14). Is he the same as the Alexander of 1 Timothy 1:20? We cannot be certain, but possibly it was so. Certain it is that he was well known to Timothy, who was bidden to beware of him.

Although forsaken by so many and opposed till the last, we find Paul gladly recording that the Lord stood with him and strengthened him, so that he could go on victoriously to the end. What a testimony and what an example to everyone who names the name of Christ!

The Apostle comes now 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 pro-

claimed, 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.).

So bitter was the hatred against all who professed the Name of Christ and so dangerous had it become to be publicly associated with such a prominent Christian as the Apostle Paul, that no one was brave enough to come out into the open as his friend or to plead his cause. All in Asia turned away from him (1:15) and Paul stood his trial deserted and alone. Like the Saviour, 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 in his hour of need, could pray and say, "may it not be laid to their charge".

But the Apostle, severely tested though he was, could never cry, like his Saviour, "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". He was the sent one (Apostle) to 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 were enlightened as to the Mystery (Eph. 3:1,9 R.V.).

What a satisfaction it must have been to him to realize that all the Gentiles who had been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4) would finally hear through his ministry, in spite of all the bitterness and suffering he had endured and the opposition of Satan and the powers of darkness (2 Cor. 1:8-10; Eph. 6:12). He could rest assured and write: "And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom: to Whom be glory for ever and ever, Amen" (18). The word "preserve" is "save" and so the Revised Version translates it. Salvation means not only deliverance from sin but a glorious taking right through to the end. This included for Paul deliverance from the mouth of the "lion". Whether this is a cryptic reference to Nero, or from literally being thrown to the lions, we do not know. But it meant that the Apostle was immortal until his work was finished and then he could look forward with unspeakable joy to his portion in "the above-heavenly kingdom" (literally).

God's great kingdom embraces heaven as well as earth and we have learned, we trust, to differentiate between the earthly

portion of it, in which Israel and the Nations figure so largely, and the heavenly portion at the right hand of God in heavenly places where the Body of Christ is now linked with the Ascended Saviour and Head (Eph. 2:6; Col. 3:1-3).

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), which suggests that he was either deceased or away from home; Erastus remained at Corinth; Trophimus is left ill at Miletus, 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.

Once more Timothy is urged to make every effort to come to the Apostle before winter has set in (21). Salutation is sent from Eubulus, Pudens, Linus and Claudia. We know little or nothing of these believers. Linus was the name of the first bishop of Rome according to Irenæus. Claudia has been identified by some as a British princess whom Pudens married, a daughter of either the British king Cogidunus, or Caractacus. If this was true then it would mean that Paul, while at Rome, made the acquaintance of a princess from our own country. While this is interesting, we cannot be sure of its veracity.

Did Timothy reach the Apostle in time? Did he stand faithfully after Paul's departure? We do not know and cannot until "that day", when we shall all stand together in resurrection likeness to our Saviour 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 and executed by the Roman sword, and that three of the guard were converted on the way and that they too suffered martyrdom later on for the Lord Jesus.

The Apostle's last words, in his own handwriting, were his characteristic ones referring to grace which guaranteed the authenticity of his epistles (2 Thess. 3:17,18) and they were his final message to his dearly loved son in the faith:

"The Lord be with thy spirit. Grace be with you" (22).

How much Timothy would need the Lord's Presence 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, persecution and bitter opposition would be more than sufficient for this young man, so soon to take the tremendous burden and responsibility for the truths which 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 gift 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 outpouring, or borne in his mortal body such evident brandmarks 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 since striven to follow the example of his devotion to his Lord".

CHAPTER XVII

IDENTIFICATION WITH CHRIST

One of the great doctrines that is peculiar to the teaching that the Lord Jesus gave through the Apostle Paul's ministry is the identification of the believer with Himself. The riches that are associated with the dispensation of the Mystery cannot be properly appreciated unless there is first of all an understanding of this doctrine of identification, and as this seems to be so little known among believers today, we must recapitulate and gather up the teaching given through the Apostle upon this most important theme.

We have seen that the second chapter of Philippians reveals the seven downward steps of the Saviour from the glory that was His before creation came into being. They are (1) He emptied Himself; (2) taking upon Him the form of a bondsman; (3) being made in the likeness of men; (4) and being found in fashion as a man; (5) He humbled Himself; (6) and became obedient unto death; (7) even the death of the Cross (Phil. 2:6-8). In these things the believer can obviously have no share. On the Cross the Lord Jesus was "numbered with the transgressors" (Mark 15:28). The word "numbered" is translated "count", "reckon" and "impute" in the Epistle to the Romans. God reckoned Him with the transgressors. He that knew no sin was "made sin" for us, who are sinners by nature.

We cannot plumb the depths of such love or fully understand such "reckoning", but we believe it to be true because God has revealed it in His Word.

By virtue of this reckoning we can begin to reckon ourselves dead unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 6:11), for here a new bond of union begins between the believer and his Head. Philippians two gives us the seven steps upward in the exaltation of Christ to the glory that once was His.

In the crucifixion, death, burial, quickening, raising and seating of Christ at the right hand of God, the believer is now identified by God, and the climax comes in the final manifesting with Christ in glory (Col. 3:3-4). In God's purpose each indi-

vidual member of the Body is so linked with the Head that whatsoever happens to Him, happens to every member.

The Apostle starts with (1) Crucifixion. "I have been *crucified with Christ*," he asserts (Gal. 2:20); and to the believers at Rome he wrote, "Knowing this, that our old man was *crucified with Him*" (Rom. 6:6 R.V.). Crucifixion means death. (2) "Now if we be *dead with Christ*, we believe that we shall also live with Him" (Rom. 6:8). After death comes burial, (3) "Therefore we are *buried with Him* by baptism into death" (Rom. 6:4). Then verse five says, "If we have become *united with Him* by the likeness of His death" (R.V.). Thus this unity is here clearly indicated (see also Col. 3:3). The next step must lead to life if there is to be a future for those who are dead, (4) "But God . . . hath quickened us *together* (made us alive *together*) with Christ" (Eph. 2:4,5). This leads to raising together, (5) "And hath raised us up *together*" (literally, roused us up together, compare Col. 3:1) and then comes the climax, the apex of revelation in the Scriptures for the believer, (6) "and made us *sit together* (seated us together) *in heavenly places in Christ Jesus*" (Eph. 2:6).

From this most marvellous position the instructed believer looks forward to his sure and certain hope, (7) "When Christ, Who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also *appear with Him* (or, be manifested with Him) in glory" (Col. 3:4). This will lead to an unending life with the Lord Jesus Christ. "If we be *dead with Him*, we shall also *live with Him*" and the added possibility, if we are faithful and endure, "if we patiently endure, we shall *reign with Him*", i.e. share His Throne and government (2 Tim. 2:11,12).

These seven steps upward to the glory with Christ are an integral part of the truth of the Mystery, which, as we have before indicated, cannot be apprehended without them. The believer needs to take time for meditation over each stage of this glorious reckoning by God so that the fulness of each one may grip the heart and mind. We must reckon as God reckons, but while we do this we must also remember that there can be no *literal* union with the holy Son of God until sin is done away in resurrection likeness. Then we shall be completely conformed to the Image of the Son (Rom. 8:29), not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing (Eph. 5:27), and not until this goal is reached will such a union be possible.

Meanwhile let us continually praise our heavenly Father for the closeness of the union with the Lord Jesus that is ours even

now, which is symbolized by the Head and the Body. This is the closest figure of unity that the Word uses. It is virtually impossible to conceive of a living person as a head without a body, or as a body without a head. This illustration is closer than even that of husband and wife.

One of the great effects of this teaching gripping us is that it lifts our thinking away from earth, from man and from self to the Lord Jesus Christ. It makes us *Christ-centred*. *This is the great need of every one who names the Name of Christ*. It helps us to obey Col. 3:1,2, and to set our minds on things above where Christ is enthroned at the right hand of God.

While this is true in our experience, the world will take its lawful place in our lives and no more. We shall not allow the transient things of this world to dominate our affections or our outlook, but rather we shall continually "look away unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2).

Some of us stay at the Cross
Some of us wait at the Tomb.
Quickened, raised, seated together with Christ
Yet lingering still in its gloom.
Some of us bide at the Passover Feast
With Ascension all unknown—
The triumphs of grace in the heavenly place
That our Lord has made His own.

If the Christ Who died had stopped at the Cross
His work had been incomplete.
If the Christ Who was buried had stayed in the Tomb
He had only known defeat.
But the way of the Cross never stops at the Cross
And the way of the Tomb leads on
To victorious grace in the heavenly place
Where the Risen Lord has gone.

CHAPTER XVIII

SOME PROBLEMS CONSIDERED

It is true to say that many of our Scriptural problems are of our own making. Our limited knowledge, the power of tradition and upbringing, and our attempts, often well meaning, to tie God down to one course of action, the only course that we can see, produce difficulties which we cannot solve. It may not be amiss here to re-consider several points and put them in the form of questions:

(1) In view of the fact that Christ came, according to the flesh, to Israel and preached the immanence of the Kingdom, would that Kingdom have been set up *then* had Israel received Him?

(2) What constitutes a true Israelite? Is this a matter of physical descent only? Can Gentiles ever be Scripturally called spiritual Israelites?

(3) Is the Kingdom of God spiritual and inward, or is it external and visible?

(1) We may add yet other questions here. Where would Calvary have come in had Israel accepted Christ instead of rejecting Him? On the other hand would it be true to say that the Crucifixion was ordained by God from past eternity? Some speak and write as though it was. If so, then Israel, in crucifying their Saviour, were really only carrying out what God intended and cannot be held responsible by Him. In this case it would not have been true for Peter to accuse his nation of crucifying and slaying Christ "by *wicked* hands" (Acts 2:23). Yet he did so.

Sometimes our difficulties are caused by our stating and believing half-truths. It is only partially true to say that Christ came to Israel as their King to establish the Kingdom. Truth can suffer from its friends as well as its enemies. Certainly Zechariah 9:9 was fulfilled when the Lord rode into Jerusalem on the colt—"Thy King cometh unto thee". But in Zechariah 6:13 it is said of Him, "He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be a PRIEST UPON HIS THRONE".

So He is more than a King; He is a King-Priest, and in the Epistle to the Hebrews He is likened, not to the priesthood of Aaron and Levi, but to Melchizedek who was both king and priest (Heb. 7:11,17,21). We must also remember that the Lord was not only the Priest but the Offering as well, He offered Himself once for all (Heb. 7:26,27, 9:25,26, 10:9,12-14).

Now the priestly side deals with sin, and one thing should be abundantly clear from Scripture, that there can be no solution of the problems of the individual or the world at large until the sin question, which is the root of all failure, is dealt with by God. In other words there can be no possibility of the fulfilment of the Kingdom prayer, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven", without redemption and the putting away of sin. The whole of God's revealed purposes hang upon this fact. Hence, although the Lord Jesus came to Israel in the days of His flesh and called for repentance, because, He being present as the King, the Kingdom had drawn near, yet He also revealed that He had come *to give His life*, a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28), to *lay down His life* for the sheep (John 10:15). So we can say with certainty that the atoning death of the Son of God was an *absolute necessity* whether Israel accepted Him or not. This is indeed the pivot on which the whole purpose of the ages rests.

We may not know just what would have happened had Israel believed and accepted Him, but had they done so, He would still have had to die. This, however, would not have been an insuperable problem, for He declared He had the power to lay down His life and take it again as He chose (John 10:17,18). He could have laid it down *voluntarily* and taken it again after three days and so fulfilled all the Scriptural predictions as the Sin-Bearer. In which case the glowing prophecies of the earthly Kingdom spoken of by the Old Testament prophets could have begun fulfilment there and then and the Millennium run its course. If any object and say, what about the out-calling of the Body of Christ? This would have been no difficulty with God, for if He could give Abraham an earthly inheritance and at the same time enlighten him as to a *heavenly* calling associated with the Heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 11:9,10,16, 12:22), He could likewise have enlightened each member of the Body in the same way to a sphere of blessing even higher, at His right hand, above all heavens.

Israel were not *forced* to crucify Christ in order to fulfil God's

purposes. If this had been so, then God would have been doing evil that good might come, which would be monstrous and is utterly repudiated in Romans 3:8. God can and does *over-rule* sin, and in the case of Israel He did so when they crucified His Son; at the same time they were left responsible for their terrible act.

(2) Is a true Israelite one by physical descent only? Some of the Pharisees in the Lord's earthly lifetime said, "We be Abraham's seed" (John 8:33). Physically this was true, for Christ said, "I know that ye are Abraham's seed" (37). But He also added, "Ye are not of God" (47), "Ye are of your father the devil" (44). Though physically descended from Abraham, they were repudiated by the Lord. So it is obvious that something more than this is needed. In Romans 2:28,29 Paul states, "He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh; But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly . . ."; "they are not all Israel, which are of Israel" (9:6), so there is an *internal* reality as well as the *external* physical side, but here again we must beware of half-truths and avoid stressing one side at the expense of the other. Alternately, although there must be this internal reality, the physical side is not ruled out, for while the Apostle asserts in Romans 9:6 that the true seed of Israel are not merely of the flesh, yet the same context shows that God is reckoning for His seed those *in and through Isaac*, the child of promise, which is also according to *physical* descent, ignoring Abraham's descendants through his other children. The true seed of Israel combine both the internal and the external side, and it is this true seed that will finally be restored according to Romans 11:26. The Lord Jesus Himself was physically descended from Abraham through Isaac, as the genealogy of Matthew 1:1-16 clearly shows.

Gentiles, whether believers or unbelievers, are never called "spiritual Israel" in the Scriptures; in fact the phrase does not occur once. Nor is the *whole* church referred to as the "Israel of God". One would think, to hear the way the spiritualizers constantly use this title to describe the church, that it was of common occurrence in the New Testament. The fact is that it occurs *once only*, namely in Galatians 6:16, and that before Acts twenty-eight, "As many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, *and upon* the Israel of God". The force of the words "and upon" is usually ignored. The preposition "upon" is used twice in the Greek. There are two companies

spoken of in this passage, those who "walk according to this rule", "AND UPON the Israel of God". The Epistle to the Galatians, as we have seen, was Paul's first epistle written during the Acts period when the bulk of Israel were sinking into spiritual blindness and darkness. The churches of the Acts consisted of believing Jews and believing Gentiles. Those Jews who believed formed the faithful remnant and could be truthfully described as faithful Israel, the "Israel of God", in contrast to the Israel of apostasy. After this epistle the term is never used again. The phrase, "the Israel of God", is often on the lips of those who deny the future restoration of the nation of Israel and teach that the prophecies relating to Israel after the flesh have been fulfilled in the Church. We will deal with this later in the chapter.

(3) Here again we can be led astray by half-truths. How often those who deny a future literal kingdom with restored and saved Israel as the priestly nation quote Luke 17:21, "The Kingdom of God is *within* you", forgetting that the margin gives an alternate reading which is equally true, "The Kingdom of God is *among* you". Or they refer to Romans 14:17, "For the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost". But God's Kingdom, like the true Israelite, has two aspects, internal and external. God's work always starts in the heart and mind, and in this way it will start for Israel under the terms of the New Covenant. God says:

"I will put My law in their *inward parts*, and write it *in their hearts*" (Jer. 31:33).

"I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: that they may walk in My statutes . . . and do them, and they shall be My people, and I will be their God" (Ezek. 11:19,20).

They will then be a restored, saved and holy nation. "Thy people also shall be *all righteous*" (Isa. 60:21). Not only this but they will be the Priests of the Lord, the first nation upon the earth, the Gentile nations being subservient; but in no sense will they be overbearing, but rather a gracious, holy channel through which the knowledge of the Lord will gradually flow out to all the earth. Such a kingdom will be both spiritual and physical and again one aspect must not be stressed at the expense of the other, for, if this is done, a distorted picture can only result.

The denial of any future restoration of the nation of Israel in God's purpose and the transference of their blessings to the Church is part of what is known as A-Millennialism. This simply means "no Millennium" and those who believe it deny a literal thousand years' reign of Christ following His Second Advent. Likewise they deny any future restoration of Israel and assert that the predicted reign of Christ is *now taking place* and that Satan has been bound from the *beginning* of this age. That such ideas can be held by any who profess to be grounded in the Truth of God's Word is strange indeed, but as a-millennialism is apparently increasing in evangelical circles (we are sorry to have to say this), it is very important to note the following facts.

A-Millennialism is no new doctrine. In the first two centuries of this era there is clear testimony that the early Christians believed in the literal Second Coming of Christ and a literal reign for a thousand years. But as the Lord tarried, the hope of His Coming began to fade away. Not understanding the truth for this present age revealed through Paul's writings, *the key to the problem was lost*. The visible churches were linked with the State under Constantine and we have the beginnings of Roman Catholicism. There was no *organized*, visible church in the early centuries, nor was there the division between "clergy" and "laity".

Later on believers began to wonder whether the Second Advent and the promises to Israel ought not to be regarded in a *spiritual* way, in which case they thought the problem would largely be solved. Doubts began to be expressed by the Greek Church father Origen (A.D. 185-254), who laid the foundation of a-millennialism by teaching that Scripture must not be taken literally but "allegorized", that is, spiritualized; in other words it does not mean exactly what it says. Augustine (A.D. 354-430) finally crystallized the non-literal view of the Millennium into a-millennialism and set these ideas forth in his renowned work, *The City of God*. In this he asserted that the visible Church of this age is the Kingdom of God on earth. He taught that the binding of Satan took place during Christ's earthly ministry (Luke 10:18), and that the first resurrection is the new birth of the believer.

We can well understand how this suited the Roman Catholic Church which has always viewed itself as the only outward expression of God's Kingdom on earth, and a-millennialism

has always characterized Roman Catholic doctrine. Some of the Reformers, leaning to Augustine's teaching, also adopted this view. Variants of this appear from time to time and today we have another example of it in the teaching of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Most Protestant adherents of a-millennialism reject Rome's claims, but substitute for this the true invisible Church and teach that all the literal promises to Israel are fulfilled spiritually in the Body of Christ. They deny the literalness of the thousand years of Revelation twenty, yet believe the literalness of Satan, the nations, and the resurrections of the same chapter—strangely inconsistent!

We do not base our faith upon what men teach, whether the early Christians or the Reformers, great men though they were in many respects. Our one appeal must be to the Word of God, the only sure basis for our faith. When we come to the major and minor prophets of the Old Testament, their teaching regarding Israel may be summed up in:

- (1) Judgment for sin and declension from God and
- (2) Restoration to Divine favour again because of God's unchangeable love and His unconditional promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

As Jeremiah 31:10 puts it:

“He that scattered Israel will *gather him*.”

Or Isaiah 54:7:

“For a small moment have I forsaken thee (Israel); but with great mercies will I *gather thee*.”

If the “scattering” and “forsaking” refer to literal Israel, which they undoubtedly do, the “gathering” must also refer to the same people. What nonsense it would make of the context to read, “He that scattered *Israel* will gather the *Church*”. This gathering of Israel after judgment is referred to in Deuteronomy 30:3, and Isaiah 43:5,6 reads:

“Fear not; for I am with thee (Israel, see verses 1 and 3). I will bring thy seed from the east, and *gather thee* from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring My sons from far, and My daughters from the ends of the earth.”

This gathering will take place at the Second Advent.

"Immediately *after* the tribulation of those days . . . shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven . . . and He shall send His angels . . . and they shall *gather together* His elect . . . from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt. 24:29-31).

Consider also the following:

"In a little wrath I hid My face from thee (Israel) for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. For this is as the waters of Noah unto Me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee"

(Isa. 54:8-10).

". . . The Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; the Lord of Hosts is His Name; If those ordinances depart from before Me, saith the Lord, *then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before Me for ever*. Thus saith the Lord: *if* heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the Lord"

(Jer. 31:35-37).

Jehovah, the Lord of Hosts, throws out a universal challenge, referring to His promise in connexion with the Flood, the stability of His creation and the inability of man to plumb its immensity, and gives all this as His guarantee that He will not finally cast away the nation of Israel, but will gather, save and bring them into the land promised to their fathers. The basis of this is the New Covenant, ratified by the shed blood of the Lord Jesus. In the prophecy of Ezekiel we read:

"I will make them (Israel and Judah) *one nation* in the *land upon the mountains of Israel* . . . and will cleanse them . . . and *they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob My servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt*; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever . . . moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore . . . yea, I will be their God and they shall be My people" (Ezek. 37:22-28).

Note the clear references all through to the nation of Israel and the land which God says He has given to Jacob, in which

their fathers dwelt. In no legitimate way can all this be spiritualized; it must refer to the literal land promised to Abraham in Genesis chapter thirteen, from the River Nile across to the Euphrates, and confirmed by God to Isaac and Jacob.

We have a clear guide to Scriptural interpretation in the prophecies of the Old Testament relating to the Lord's first Coming. When the faith of John the Baptist began to fail, the Lord sent two of His disciples to him in prison, and reminded him saying:

"Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear . . ." (Matt. 11:4,5).

thus looking back to such a passage as Isaiah 35:5,6:

"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing."

If there were any spiritualizers in Isaiah's day, we can well imagine them asserting that these verses must not be taken *literally*, but some hidden spiritual meaning must be sought. *But they would have been wrong*, for these predictions, fulfilled *literally*, were a part of Messiah's credentials to Israel (Acts 2:22).

And we have seen in our first chapter that, at the Crucifixion, at least fourteen Old Testament prophecies were likewise fulfilled *literally*. Any attempt by previous generations to spiritualize these passages would have led to misunderstanding and error. This is surely a Divine guide to the interpretation, not only of unfulfilled Scriptures dealing with His Second Coming, but of Scripture generally, and wise are we if we heed it.

When we come to the New Testament, specially Romans 9-11, a section of the Word which is conveniently ignored by the a-millennialists, we find that "God hath not cast away His people which He foreknew" (11:2); that "blindness in part is happened to Israel, *until* the fulness of the Gentiles be come in" (25). The spiritual blindness of Israel is not for ever, it is for a certain limited time only—until the fulness of the Gentiles takes place, and then

"*All Israel* (that is, all the true seed of Israel as we have seen) shall be saved; as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from *Jacob*; *for this is My covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins*"

(Rom. 11:26,27).

This is the New Covenant, which is Israel's national covenant (Jer. 31). We have yet to learn that "Jacob" can be the Church, or in what sense, at the Second Advent of Christ, God will turn away ungodliness from the *Church*, which in Christ is holy and without blemish (Eph. 1:4, 5:27)! Israel, declares Romans 11:28, are beloved of God for the fathers' sakes, although temporarily they are enemies of the Gospel.

"For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance", that is, without change of mind on His part (29). God will not alter the thing that has gone out of His lips concerning this people (Psa. 89:34), but if the a-millennialist is right, He has done so; He has broken His covenant with Abraham and altered His promise by finally rejecting Israel and transferring all their blessings to the Church. And if God has broken His Word to Israel, how do we know that He will not break His Word to us and the whole of our sure foundation be gone?

This undoubtedly brands a-millennialism as serious error and we are indeed sorry to see some leading evangelical leaders and preachers taken up with it. Moreover it breaks the fundamental principle of interpreting the Bible literally wherever possible and confuses God's earthly and heavenly purposes. As for teaching that Satan has been bound all through the present age, we look around and see the increasing materialism, the world problems regarding armaments and diabolical means of destruction, the progress of atheistic communism, the growing ungodliness and violence and Christ-rejection all over the world, and ask ourselves, are we deluded or is the a-millennialist? For if this is a sample of Christ's Kingdom in operation, God help us; we may as well throw away our Christian beliefs and all they stand for.

To sum up (1) The Lord Jesus most certainly came to Israel in the days of His flesh, not just as their King, but as their King-Priest, to confirm the promises made to their fathers (Rom. 15:8), so that they might be a channel of blessing to the world, and that the earthly Kingdom might become a reality. But this could not be apart from His atoning death to righteously remove their sin first (and incidentally of all His people). This redemptive work was absolutely essential before the Kingdom could be established. While this was true, there was no need to delay this Kingdom for nearly two thousand years as has happened. This has been due to the continuation of Israel's rejection of the Lord, and His temporary rejection of them.

(2) This blindness is only for a season. In the verses already quoted from Isaiah, God describes this as a "moment"! One day the true seed of Israel will look upon Him Whom they have pierced and will repent and their blindness will be taken away. They will be saved, restored, cleansed and made usable by God once more. This true seed has an internal side which is spiritual (Rom. 2:28,29), and an external side, according to physical descent "in Isaac" (9:7-12). It can never be formed of Gentiles as such.

(3) The Earthly Kingdom likewise has an internal aspect (it commences with regeneration and a renewed heart and mind), and will finally have an external result in bringing righteousness and peace upon the earth, the knowledge of the Lord finally covering the earth as the waters cover the sea, and restored Israel, as we have seen, will be God's instrument to bring this about and so Genesis 12:1-3 at last will be gloriously fulfilled.

As regards the Church, the Body of Christ, the wonders of God's purpose in the heavenlies for this redeemed company we have sought to show in the previous chapters dealing with the Prison Epistles of Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles. This church can well stand on its own Divine foundation with its overwhelming blessings. It does not need to purloin Israel's rights and privileges and those who do so can have no clear conception of the future of either Israel or the Church as revealed in God's Word.

CHAPTER XIX

PRACTICAL CONCLUSIONS

In our closing chapter we may well ask why so few Christians in this Gentile age seem to be in enjoyment of the spiritual wealth given by the glorified Lord Jesus through His messenger to the Gentiles, the Apostle Paul. We must remember that in this age, Truth and Righteousness are not on the Throne. Christ is still "rejected of men", and the Truth is rejected with Him. Satan, the deceiver, is the god of this age and he is not restrained until the Millennium dawns (Rev. 20:1-3). Truth has never been with the majority and there have been times in past history when it has practically vanished from the earth. In the spiritual darkness of the Middle Ages, how many believed and gave a faithful witness to the basic doctrine of justification by faith in Christ? No doubt Luther was taunted with the question, "if this new teaching of yours is in accordance with the mind of God, why is it that the rest of Christendom does not see and accept it?" But the fact remains that *he was right and on the side of Truth* and the bulk of existing Christian profession was *wrong*. And this has not only been so regarding justification by faith, but with other and deeper aspects of God's revelation also.

Let no one be deceived by trying to assess Truth by *numerical* response. We should be thankful to realize that God has always preserved a faithful remnant however dark the times have been, but this remnant, by the very nature of things, has always been insignificant from a numerical standpoint. Another reason for the present-day poverty of spiritual knowledge is because the Word of God is so little studied and apprehended both by those in the pulpit and in the pew; neither is it given its place as the *Word of God*. Modernism does its deadly work and unbelief and spiritual darkness surely follow. We hear much talk in evangelical circles of revival and an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. But how can there be revival when God's Revelation, His Word, which is the work of the Holy Spirit, is ignored or denied? When the sacred Scriptures are put into their rightful place in pulpit and pew we can expect blessing, but not until then.

Another thing that often causes confusion is the lax way in which such well-known Scriptural words as "gospel" and "church" are used by Christians. Unless these words are clearly defined in Scriptural language they have no precise meaning, but merely reflect the personal opinion of the user. Take the word "gospel". It means "good news", but this is colourless unless we define *what* or *whom* the gospel is about. If this is not done, we have a word very much like "democracy", which can be made to mean almost anything, for it is used today by communists and non-communists. It is to the Apostle Paul's writings we must go if we want a clear and full exposition of God's gospel; so much so that the Apostle could state that God's anathema is upon any preaching that does not square with the gospel as made known through his ministry:

"But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8,9).

This gospel was not his own creation, for he goes on to assert:

"But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, *but by the revelation of Jesus Christ* (Gal. 1:11,12).

The gospel of God is "Concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 1:1-4). God's good news is Christ-centred and without Him in His rightful place it ceases to be good news and becomes an empty sham.

Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4:

". . . I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you . . . by which also ye are saved . . . for I delivered unto you . . . *that which I also received*, how that *Christ died for our sins* according to the Scriptures; and that He was *buried*, and that He *rose again the third day* according to the Scriptures."

Here is precise language. We have the death of the Son of God, not just as an example, but undergone *for our sins*, for it is a truth that runs through all dispensations that "By one man (Adam) sin entered the world, and *death by sin*; and so death passed upon all men, for that *all* have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). "The wages of sin is death" (6:23). "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6), and so the Atoning death of God's beloved Son was utterly necessary if we are ever to be

forgiven and redeemed from sin and death. The penalty was either borne by Him or it will be borne by us.

But this is not all, for the gospel that Paul received and proclaimed did not finish with a dead Christ, "He *rose again* the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:4). "He was delivered for our offences, and *raised again* for our justification" (Rom. 4:24,25), so that, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart *that God hath raised Him from the dead*, thou shalt be saved" (10:9). He is now "able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing *He ever liveth* to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25). Here then is the only gospel that God recognizes, which has as its centre the Atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ for sin, His burial and His Resurrection. This is the acid test for all gospel preaching and writing, and every time we come across this word in sermons or evangelical literature, we should test the presentation by these statements in Romans, Galatians and elsewhere in the Apostle's letters. The language is unambiguous, and because of this it is a mistake to use the word "gospel" as a covering term for all revealed truth. Thus the Mystery of Ephesians and Colossians is often explained away by commentators as being merely the presentation of the gospel to the Gentile as well as the Jew. But this just fritters away what the Mystery actually stands for.

The believing of the gospel gives the sinner forgiveness, spiritual life and deliverance from the domination of sin and death, but it does not automatically give him *spiritual growth and maturity*. These can and should follow, but they will only do so if the recipient leaves the milk of the gospel and goes on to receive the deeper truths that lead on to full growth and adulthood. "Let us leave behind the elementary teaching about Christ and go forward to adult understanding" (Heb. 6:1, J. B. Phillips). This is what some of the Corinthian church did not do. With their lack of growth and carnality Paul could only give them the "milk" of simple gospel teaching and nothing stronger, for they were not able to bear it (1 Cor. 3:1,2), and this, alas, describes many a believer to-day. Such do not see the truth of the Mystery and rejoice in the riches of Paul's prison ministry because, in their spiritual infancy and lack of growth, *they are not able to receive them for these truths are too advanced*. To some extent this lamentable state of affairs has been brought about by stressing the gospel at the expense of spiritual growth

and building up, and the lack to-day of a sound teaching ministry to lead on those who are saved.

It is almost impossible to over-stress to the saved the need for leaving spiritual babyhood behind and growing up to the state of maturity. Some of the most stringent things in the New Testament are said, not to unbelievers, but to believers who do not grow in grace and knowledge of the Word and the Lord Jesus Christ. The Epistle to the Hebrews speaks in no uncertain way of those who cannot appreciate the deeper truths—the “strong meat”, but can only take “milk” because of their infancy and lack of growth (5:9-14). The need then for the progression and building up of the believer is tremendous. The Apostle Paul uses the word “edify” and “edification” some twenty-four times and each of these occurrences should be studied by the reader with the aid of a concordance so that its importance may be fully realized. We give a selection:

“Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may *edify* another” (Rom. 14:19).

“Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and *edify* one another . . .” (1 Thess. 5:11).

“We do all things, dearly beloved, for your *edifying*”
(2 Cor. 12:19).

“He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers . . . for the *edifying* of the Body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11,12).

“But speaking the truth in love, may *grow up* into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ . . . according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the Body unto the *edifying* of itself in love” (15,16).

“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of *edifying*” (4:29).

“Neither give heed to fables . . . rather than godly *edifying* which is in faith” (1 Tim. 1:4).

“Rooted and *built up* (edified) in Him” (Col. 2:7).

“Let all things be done unto *edifying*” (1 Cor. 14:26).

Not only is the word “gospel” often used in an ambiguous way, but the same thing can be said of the word “church”. This can mean (1) a building for worship, (2) a denomination, (3) professing Christendom as a whole, (4) a called-out company by God, of His redeemed children, irrespective of their earthly Christian label. In the New Testament the word is never used in the first three senses. It is applied to the original assemblies of believers formed through Paul’s ministry and missionary

journeys. This is the way it is used during the period covered by the Acts of the Apostles. After this time the sense given under (4) is the chief meaning of the word "church", that is, it designates the Body of Christ. Yet, as we have before pointed out, the Scriptures do not limit the word to this Church. The word basically means a called-out company of people, so there is nothing strange in Stephen describing the people of Israel as "the church in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38), for they were redeemed and separated by God from all other nations. What we *must* do is to be *precise and Scriptural* in our usage of the word. Too often speakers and writers use it of their own particular sect, or of Christendom as a whole, and apply statements to these which are only true of the real Church, the Body of Christ. This also causes misunderstanding and confusion, so once more we must test what we hear and read concerning the word "church" by the way it is used in the Word of God.

In a previous chapter we have mentioned the landslide away from the Truth before the Apostle Paul died and its gradual recovery down through this age. Even to-day the full-orbed truth given by the glorified Lord Jesus through the Apostle is little known in our pulpits. This is a potent reason why these riches are not received and enjoyed among the people of God. Another stumbling block is for Christians to approach the Bible from the wrong end, so to speak. Instead of first of all seeking an understanding of the purpose of the ages in the *large* and seeing it as a *whole*, and then finding the place in it that God's Love and Redemption has secured for them, they approach the other way round and become so taken up with themselves and their own needs that many of them never advance beyond this point. Consequently they know little or nothing of other callings and imagine that God's plans revolve solely around themselves. This is a species of slavery to self that we all need to be delivered from. One result of this is to see a part of the revelation of God and imagine that it is the whole.

There are those who can only see God's purposes for a Kingdom on this earth. Others deny this and see only a spiritual fulfilment and going to Heaven after death. Both are only half truths, and like all half truths, are thoroughly misleading. God's mighty purposes embrace both heaven and earth, and both these spheres will be finally peopled with His redeemed children as we have attempted to show in previous chapters. The goal of God will not be realized until this becomes true and all things

in heaven and earth come under the Headship of the Lord Jesus Christ. One thing the ages will have made clear is that there can be no permanent stability and security as long as creation stands in the headship and strength of any created being. When at last all things in heaven and earth are brought under the Headship of Christ, when all enemies are put under His feet and *all* rule, authority and power is subject to Him and He is *manifestly* First and Last and All in between, then, we are told, He will hand over the Kingdom to the Father, that GOD may be all in all (1 Cor. 15:28).

This is the furthest limit to which Divine revelation takes us, and beyond this it would be idle to speculate, except to say that what God has prepared beyond this is too wonderful for our present limited comprehension. The final goal is that GOD (not just the Father, the Son or the Spirit) may be ALL IN ALL. We see now an anticipation of this glorious end in the out-calling of the Church of the Secret, The Body of Christ, where He is ALL AND IN ALL (Col. 3:11), and where all types and shadows have vanished, for the believer in this company has the *reality* of every type and shadow in Christ Himself, the Head of the Body. He is COMPLETE IN CHRIST—filled to the full in Him (Col. 2:10). What need then is there for such things as shadows? Shadows can add nothing to such a glorious position, but merely minister to the senses, denying in practice and detracting from this COMPLETENESS and the reality of a walk by *faith*. God is calling each member of the Body to walk by *faith* and not by *sight or sense*.

So many believers are like Thomas of old who said: "Except I shall see . . . and put my *finger* (touch) . . . I will not believe" (John 20:25). They are willing to read in the Scriptures about walking by faith and they talk about it, but at the same time their actions deny it, because they must have something in their Christian lives to which the senses can cling. To ask them to go hand in hand with the One Who has filled them to completion with His matchless glory and to walk by faith in Him alone, is like heresy to them, and if they see such a walk in other believers it is incomprehensible. They do not understand the import of the Lord's reply to Thomas: "Because thou hast *seen* Me, thou hast believed. Blessed are *they that have not seen* (that is, are not relying on the senses to bolster up their faith), *and yet have believed*" (John 20:29).

In this most comprehensive and highest of all callings of the

redeemed, that of the Body of Christ, the Lord Jesus completely fills the picture. He is ALL in creation, both physical and spiritual; He is ALL in Redemption and Sanctification; He is ALL as Head to His Body which is His Fulness and therefore must be ALL to each member.

One thing above everything that should follow is a faithful response and testimony both by lip and life to this Truth. Sometimes it may lead to a lonely walk and misunderstanding, and perhaps even persecution from fellow believers who do not see and understand in some measure the glory revealed in the Prison letters of the Apostle Paul. Some, looking at the pathway ahead, draw back, fearing the consequences. Instead of looking away to the Lord, they look at other believers and for their approval. They fear to lose their reputation in Christian circles and the possible loneliness and isolation that may follow. They forget the One Who has so graciously promised: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee, so that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb. 13:5,6). Oh to be delivered from the fear of man that bringeth a snare (whether Christian or otherwise) and to keep in mind *Him to Whom alone we must give account* (Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10).

Let us constantly remember that the "Lord is *near*" (Phil. 4:5); near to strengthen and encourage; near to sympathize and understand; near to guide and to give His joy which is overflowing and His peace which passes all understanding. He can be our sufficiency right to the end of the earthly pathway however testing it may be, and enable us to keep utterly loyal to the Truth He has committed to us. This will not only lead to eternal life with Him and becoming a living stone in the Temple of glory, that permanent Home He is now building for Himself in the heavenly Holiest of all, but also the possibility of receiving His Crown, which means the unspeakable privilege of sharing His throne, above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come.

This being so, what else matters?

"Yea, thro' life, death, thro' sorrow and thro' sinning,
He shall suffice me, for He hath sufficed:
Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning,
Christ the beginning, for the end is Christ."

(St. Paul. F. W. H. Myers)

“For to me to live is CHRIST” (Phil. 1:21).

“That in ALL things He might have the FIRST PLACE (pre-eminence)” (Col. 1:18).

**“CHRIST IS ALL”
(Col. 3:11).**

APPENDIX I

**The Epistles of Paul with relationship to the
Dispensational boundary of Acts twenty-eight.**

- (1) Galatians.
- (2) Hebrews.*
- (3) 1 Thessalonians.
- (4) 2 Thessalonians.
- (5) 1 Corinthians.
- (6) 2 Corinthians.
- (7) Romans.

Acts 28:25-31—the Dispensational boundary.

- (1) Ephesians.†
- (2) Philippians.†
- (3) Colossians.†
- (4) Philemon.† (Personal letter).
- (5) 1 Timothy.
- (6) Titus.
- (7) 2 Timothy.†

* The writer believes in the Pauline authorship of the epistle to the Hebrews, although this is not a popular conception today.

† These are Prison epistles.

APPENDIX II

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.

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 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.

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 the Mystery. The second pair reveal a prize or crown for faithful ministry and witness in connexion with this transcendent Truth and the Gospel of God's grace.