

Ephesians - Commentaries by William Kelly

Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians, Ephesians 6:18-24, Remarks on

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

We have had the details of the panoply of God. But there is a hidden spring of power without which nothing avails; the expression of weakness, strange to say, but of weakness in dependence on God. Hence, the word is, "praying always with all prayer" (vs. 18)—praying at every season. There is nothing the enemy more dreads, nothing that flesh more seeks to hinder, or to make amiss if there be the form. But so much the more need we to bear the call in mind.

Besides, there is the exercise of spiritual desires and not dependence only; as it is said by our Lord elsewhere, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in My name, I will do it." "If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7). In a word, there is encouragement and exhortation to every kind of prayer and at every opportunity, while there is also that character of petition which is sustained in the power of the Holy Spirit, "supplication in the Spirit," (vs. 18) which all prayer of the saints is not.

Another weighty word is the call to "watch unto this very thing;" (vs. 18) for this supposes the activity of love which is quick to discern in the fear of the Lord and in the bowels of Christ that which might tarnish His glory on the one hand, and on the other whatever would contribute to the exaltation of His name in His saints and testimony. What a deliverance this is, not only from self-will, but from anxiety and from self-importance! And what a field for gracious affections to turn everything of good or ill into occasions of intercourse with the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to turn all—otherwise transient, or food for gossip—into channels of everlasting-blessing! How wise and good is every word of our God! May the thing itself, as well as His word about it, be precious in our eyes! Where this is so, there will be watching in this habit of prayer, "with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (vs. 18). For where God's presence is thus realized, there is no straitness in the affections, but love goes out energetically to Him and in communion with Him concerning all the saints. But as having at heart the interests of Christ, there is the special remembrance of such as gather with Christ. So here the apostle speaks of their supplication on behalf of himself; and, as it appears, with a link of greater energy than that which spread desires about the saints before the Lord—"and for me," (not merely *περὶ*, but *ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ*, as indicating particularity among the general objects of the action,) "that utterance may be given unto me that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, on behalf of which I am ambassador in chains; that therein I may be bold as I ought to speak."

It is blessed to find such a practical evidence of the apostle's own sense of the value of intercession, the intercession of saints, for his ministry. His consciousness of its dignity rather increased than diminished his wish to be thus remembered.

But again, he reckoned on their love, not only in thus praying on his behalf, but also in their desiring to know matters concerning him, how he fared; and, therefore, tells them that "Tychicus, the beloved brother, and faithful servant in the Lord, shall make known to you all things: whom I sent unto you for this very purpose, that ye may know our affairs, and that he may comfort your hearts." What a contrast with the spirit of men is the mighty, gracious working of divine love in the heart, which counts on the tender concern of the saints in him who served and loved them in the Lord! Man, as such, would either be indifferent and hard, or would fear the imputation of vanity, as if his matters could be objects of interest to others. But Christ changes all for the hearts of those that have received Him.

"Peace to the brethren, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace with all that love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruption."

Courtesy of BibleTruthPublishers.com. Any suggestions for spelling or punctuation corrections would be warmly received. Please email them to: BTPmail@bibletruthpublishers.com.

Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians, Ephesians 6:13-17, Remarks on

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

Is these verses, after a prefatory resumption, we come to the particulars of the Christian's armor. "Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth."

The first thing to be noticed is that the Holy Spirit calls on us to take up the panoply of God. Neither strength nor wisdom of man avails in this conflict. As we have to do with the hosts of Satan on the one hand, we need on the other "the whole armor of God" (vs. 11). Our natural character and habits may not signify, where the Spirit of God is at work to save our souls in His grace; but they are of vast moment in presence of a foe who knows how to take advantage of every unguarded opening. Even to those at Corinth, carnal as they were, and only fit to bear the food of babes, (not the solid meat which is set before the Ephesian saints,) he had shown that, walking in flesh, we do not war according to flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but divinely mighty to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down reasonings and every high thing that lifts itself up against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience

of Christ. Not flesh, but the Spirit of God has power against Satan.

Here, too, the character of the time in which the conflict goes on is designated as “the evil day.” Evil indeed is the entire period since Christ was crucified and the enemy acquired the title of “the prince of this world” (1 Cor. 2:8). Hence, in chapter 5 we are expected to walk with carefulness, not as fools but as wise, seizing every good and suited opportunity, because “the days are evil” (ch. 5:16). But here we have something more precise, “that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day” (vs. 13). For there are occasions when the power of evil is allowed to press more closely and the danger is great for the careless soul. It is emphatically then “the evil day;” and it is well when the Christian has anticipated it; for the point at such a time is not to take up the panoply, but, having already taken it, “to withstand.” “The evil day” should find us already and fully armed, if we are to make effectual resistance. Nor is this enough. For how often the victory of faith is too great for the faith that won it, and a saint who has long and afresh vanquished the enemy, may tire of the struggle and turn aside into a seemingly easier path, to prove his own folly, and his exceeding danger, even if in the end delivered by the pure mercy of God. To resist, then, does not suffice, but “having done all,” (vs. 13) having thoroughly accomplished all things requisite, “to stand.” The fight—the fights—may have been keen, the victory complete through the Lord’s goodness and might; but the war is not over. Our place is still to stand our ground.

“Stand, therefore, having girt your loins about with truth, and put on the breastplate of righteousness, and shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” I have changed the English version slightly, so as to adhere more closely to the true sense, which supposes not only a settled position, but the soul in activity according to the summons of the Holy Spirit. Much mischief has arisen from regarding this passage as if it treated of standing, whereas, in truth, it is essentially different. It is practical arming and conflict, founded on the most blessed standing anywhere revealed in the New Testament, and suitably closing the epistle which reveals it.

To know the truth and be set free by the truth is one thing; to have girt about our loins with truth is another. It is the intimate dealing of truth with the soul, so that there is no laxity of heart or indulged will, but on the contrary, the affections and judgment braced up to Christ and the things of Christ. Thus the saint cleaves to the Lord with full purpose of heart; and, self being searched and judged by the truth, there is vigor imparted through the revelation of His mind and grace, which are now more than ever enjoyed. It is the power of truth in keeping the soul, delivered in God’s rich mercy, and too thankful to be under an authority so comprehensive and penetrating and absolute as to leave nothing, let it be ever so inward, outside the range of God’s will and the saint’s obedience. To bear and delight in this, however, assumes that the heart is established in grace; it can then welcome the truth in all its energetic claim and control.

Next follows “the breastplate of righteousness” (vs. 14) put on. This is quite distinct from the righteousness of God, which we are made in Christ. The latter we need before God; the former we want for successful wrestling with our adversary, the devil. As the Spirit, in the girding round our loins with truth, shows the first piece of armor to be the thorough application of the word to us in self-judgment and withal in moral energy, so the next demanded is that we put on practical righteousness as our breastplate. Nothing exposes a saint in conflict more readily than a bad conscience in his ways. I do not mean a conscience unpurged, but where evil, after the knowledge of redemption, has been allowed and communion is broken.

Connected with this is the having “the feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” This, again, is evidently a matter of practical power and enjoyment, the effect of maintaining a good conscience, as the latter can only be where all is held and guarded by the truth. Then the soul goes on in peace. “The fruit of righteousness,” (ch. 5:9) as another apostle says, “is sown in peace of them that make peace” (James 3:18). Where there is laxity, the conscience gets bad; and the result is trouble, and making trouble; where truth governs, the conscience is kept bright, and, happy ourselves, we shed happiness around us.

Verse 16 introduces another and quite as necessary a part of the divine armor, but, doubtless, justly put subsequent to what we have seen. “Above [or, beside] all, having taken up the shield of faith with which ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.” This means that confidence in God Himself which the soul is entitled and encouraged to cherish: I say, in Himself, because, though inseparable from the godly and righteous state the previous portions of the panoply intimate, it is a confidence springing only from what God is known to be in His own nature and character. All the envenomed efforts of the wicked one are futile where God is thus known in the power of the Holy Spirit ungrieved within us; all his darts not only fail to produce despair and distrust, but they are extinguished by the shield of faith.

But there is more: “and receive the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God” (vs. 17). The shield of faith is more general confidence; the helmet of salvation is rather the bold and joyful consciousness of the full deliverance God has wrought for us in Christ. This crowns the various parts of the armor already noticed, and is therefore followed, not by further means of defense, (for it is complete,) but by the instrument of offensive energy against the adversary, the sword of the Spirit, even God’s word. How wisely it is thus placed in the last place of all, will be apparent to the instructed mind. Indeed, if there be not this order known practically, the word is made a mere toy of, or perhaps a scourge for self, rather than it has the character of the sword of the Spirit; it is misused and powerless. Handled in the Spirit, what deliverance it works! What disabling of adversaries and what a detector of Satan!

Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians, Ephesians 6:10-12, Remarks on

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

WE now enter on the final exhortations of the Epistle, no longer occupied with the several relationships of the saints in their earthly circumstances, and hence looking at distinct classes, but addressed to all. “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” (vs. 10). It is the opening of the solemn subject of proper Christian conflict, viewed, naturally in Ephesians, as carried on at the height of our heavenly privileges in Christ. In 1 Peter the scene lies, so to speak, in the wilderness, where, most appropriately, sobriety and vigilance are enjoined on the pilgrims and strangers who pass onward to the incorruptible inheritance; because their adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour. Here the enemy is regarded as on high, where the saints are blessed with every spiritual blessing, where their Head is exalted, where they are seated in Him, where the principalities and powers are learning by them the manifold wisdom of God; there too is the real struggle with the prince of the power of the air and his hosts.

But if, on the one hand, there is no keeping back from the believers the formidable conflict to which they are inevitably committed, there is, on the other hand, no weakening of their hands. On the contrary, the trumpet, which here summons to the battle, gives the most certain sounds of good courage, without presumption, in the saints, and of the amplest provision for their victory in the Lord, who has called them to warfare at His charges. What was His name by faith in His name to him that was lame from his mother's womb, whom they laid for daily alms at the gate of the temple? Is it less for our need? Far be the thought. All that is needed is the faith which is by Him; and faith comes by a report and this by God's word; and what more inspiring to us than such words as these, "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might?" (vs. 10).

Nevertheless, the mighty contest with the powers of darkness admits of no negligence on our part. We cannot afford to be unguarded anywhere. We have to stand, not so much against the strength of the devil (Christ did this) as against his wiles. In truth, he is to us a vanquished foe in the cross; and we are entitled always to treat him as such. Therefore says James (ch. 4:7), "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." It is his artifices that are chiefly and always to be dreaded; and to resist these we need to put on the panoply of God, as it is added here: "Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places."

Well might we tremble if we stood in any resources of ours against such an array. But it is not so. The battle is the Lord's, and our exposure but draws out His mighty hand and unfailing wisdom. Still we have to fight. It will not do to plead our weakness or His strength in order to shirk our responsibility. We must not merely look at, or point to, the panoply of God as our possession, so to speak, but must put it on at His bidding.

Another thing must be borne in mind. It is no question here of our wants before God. For He has no conflict with us; but having delivered our souls, He calls us to wrestle for the mastery with the unseen armies of His enemy. As naked in our lost estate once, we needed to be clothed; and His grace did clothe us with the best robe, with Christ. This is our clothing as before God: nothing less, nothing else, would suit His presence as His guests. But here it is a question of fighting the enemy, after we are clad with Christ; and we needed armor of divine tempering to stand aright and securely. On the details of this armor we shall enter by and by; it is only on the general truth that I would insist now.

How remarkably we are here reminded of Joshua in verse 10, and Israel's foes in verse 12! To Joshua the word was, "Arise, go over this Jordan, thou and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land which I swear unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous." (Josh. 1 Compare also verses 9, 18.) Again, it is clear that if the Canaanites were but enemies of flesh and blood, they are types of the still deadlier foes we have to fight foes whose effort it is to hinder the Christian from taking possession, in present enjoyment, of his Heavenly inheritance.

It is not here, note it well, the Red Sea crossed, and then the desert, where we have to learn what God is and to be proved ourselves. The wilderness is the great scene of temptation; though no doubt there are occasional battles, as with Amalek and with Midian, still it is the place where we have to go or stay at God's bidding, in need of daily, heaven-sent supplies, where there is nothing else to sustain, ever marching onward with the heavenly land before us. But the wrestling here, as in the Book of Joshua, supposes the passage of the Jordan and entrance into Canaan, where the day of conflict begins, rather than that of temptation in the wilderness.

Is the evangelical school right in making Jordan to be the act of death at the end of our career when the saint departs to be with Christ? Clearly not; for in this case what would answer to the wars in Canaan? No! Excellent as Bunyan was, in this he was mistaken, following the mistakes of others before him and perpetuating them far and wide to this day. Indeed, this is one of the tests of where the soul is and how far it is emancipated from traditional theology, which limits its disciples to a minimum of truth. Elsewhere, as for instance in the teaching of the Passover and Red Sea, there is defectiveness; here there is absolutely nothing, or error. And this I say, singling out the author of Pilgrim's Progress as the best and most advanced specimen of popular views. The best of their day in the religious world are but his commentators—some of them literally so. Can there be a better proof how completely the truth of this epistle is ignored? The truth is that in the Red Sea we have Christ dead and risen for us; in Jordan we have our death and resurrection with Him: the one ushering us into the world as the dreary waste of our pilgrimage, the other putting us in view of our heavenly blessing, which we have then to appropriate by victory over Satan. The distinction is as clear as it is important, though both are true of the Christian now. When the glorious day comes for the inheritance to be ours, not by the force of faith which thus in practice defeats the enemy and makes good the land God has given us, we shall not have to wrestle with these principalities and powers in heavenly places: it will be closed for us and forever. The expulsion of the dragon, "that old serpent," (Rev. 12:9) is not our work, but that of Michael and his angels. With overcoming him we have to do, but not with his forcible ejection from heaven. All the time the Church is here below, our conflict goes on with these spiritual wickednesses in heavenly places; when the actual casting out by God's providential power takes place, we shall not be here but above.

After the Passover and the Red Sea there was no return of Israel to the slavery of Pharaoh; their taskmasters were overthrown and gone; "there remained not so much as one of them" (Ex. 14:28). "The Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptian, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the seashore." But circumcision did not characterize the redeemed in the wilderness. No sooner were the children on the Canaanitish side of Jordan than they rolled away the reproach of Egypt at Gilgal. The knife of circumcision was applied to deal with Israel before they draw the sword on the doomed inhabitants of Canaan. They were in Canaan—had nothing to do more to get there: their work was to make the land their own.

Has this no instruction for us? Have we consciously laid hold of our union with Christ on high? Do we know our place is there in Him, and that we have there to stand? Is nature, root and branch, a judged thing in us? Do we render a heavenly testimony—not only righteous and holy, but heavenly? Are we then and thus advancing on the enemy and making good our title by present victory to enjoy the boundless blessings above which we have in Christ? Or are we still, as far as realization goes, ransomed, but in the wilderness, with Jordan uncrossed and the old corn of the land for us untouched food? Are we merely guarding against the flesh breaking out here or there, against worldly temptations overtaking us in this or that? If so, need we wonder that verse 12 sounds mysterious, and that we question what is meant by the wrestling

with the enemies in heavenly places? It was probably the total misapprehension, or nonapprehension, of the truth here revealed, which led our English translators into the unwarrantable change of heavenly into "high" places in this passage only. It behooves ourselves, however, to consider whether our own souls have proved and are proving the panoply of God in this conflict, where, above all, it is plain that "the flesh profiteth nothing" (John 6:63).

Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians, Ephesians 6:1-9, Remarks on

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

LET us briefly look at the relations of children and fathers, as well as of servants and masters. Here, obedience is the grand point pressed on the inferior in each case. As all saints are called to submit themselves one to another in the fear of Christ, and wives especially to their own husbands, subject to them in everything, so children are to obey their parents in the Lord (vs. 1). It is not that the Holy Spirit has not a suited and serious word for their fathers; but, in general, how easy is the flow of a Christian household where the young obey—above all, where they "obey in the Lord" (vs. 1). Natural affection is sweet, and the lack of it is a sign of the perilous last days; but it is not enough; nor is conscience, all-important as it is in its place, an adequate guard, nor can it be a spring of power; but the Lord is. And how blessed, where duty is clothed and absorbed in Him; and this, and nothing less than this, is pressed by the Holy Spirit.

It was so with the Lord Himself when He was here, and knew what it was to be in the place of child. "And the child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him" (Luke 2:40). Nor are we left to a vague, general statement; we are shown a living picture of His ways. "And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" Thus, He, even as a child of twelve, had the consciousness of His own proper relationship. The humanity He had taken, as born of a woman, in no way weakened the sense He had of His Father's love and business, but rather gave a new occasion in which He had to make it good. At the same time, we see what is so beautiful—how His eye, absolutely single, saw that which became Him on the earthly side, in striking contrast with Joseph and even His mother, who "understood not the saying which he spake unto them" (Luke 2:50). Hence we read immediately after that "He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them" (Luke 2:51). Such was Jesus, the Lord of all, during much the larger part of His earthly career.

The same principle is true of the christian child, save that His relationship to the Father was essential, ours to Him and to His Father is, of course, the pure gift of grace. But still we too are children, conferred on us as the title surely is in and through our Lord Jesus. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God Beloved, now are we the sons of God." And this, by the working of the Holy Spirit, is the secret of happy obedience in the earthly relationship. Conscious of what we are to the Lord, we can obey in Him. "In the Lord," is the encouragement, the safeguard, and the limit. The parents might be Jew or heathen, or they might hear unworthily the name of Christ; but Christian children, while thoroughly owning their relation to their parents, whatever they might be, have the sweet privilege of obeying "in the Lord." How it simplifies questions otherwise perplexing! How it determines also where and how far they are to go! For if they are to "obey in the Lord," (vs. 1) such a call cannot rightly be made a reason or excuse for sin.

In the Epistle to the Colossians, where the saints were in danger from a misuse of legal ordinances, the ground urged why children should obey their parents in all things, is "For this is well-pleasing unto the Lord" (Col. 3:20). Here the faithful were free from that snare, and the Holy Spirit could freely use a principle embodied in the law, and hence adds, "for this is right or just." Nay, He can follow it up with a quotation, slightly changed from the Decalogue, drawing attention parenthetically to its special place therein. "Honor thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest be long-lived on the earth" (vss. 2-3). If such was God's estimate of filial piety under law, was it less now that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ unfolds His nature and calls unto the relationship of sons unto Himself? If respect to that word of old found its approval and recompense in the righteous government of God, if He then watched over and prospered such as honored their parents did the revelation of Himself in grace relax the obligation for His children or make the love that prompts and sustains such honor less precious in His own eyes now? No intelligent Christian would contend that it is other than a precept from the law, but so applied as to insinuate, if I mistake not, a kind of a fortiori conclusion to the New Testament believer. Certainly to be well and live long on the earth is not the form in which the proper portion of a saint since the cross of Christ is usually set before him.

To the fathers is the admonition (more needed by such than the mothers, perhaps, though in principle no doubt intended for both,) "Provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (vs. 4). What knowledge of the heart of both old and young! What tender consideration, after the pressure of obedience, lest a too stringent and capricious use of the parental authority might exasperate! The bringing them up, or nourishing, is, on the other hand, to be with the Lord's discipline and admonition. As the Christian knows His ways as they are in exercise toward Himself and others, so is he to train up his children for Him, an all-important principle for the parent's own heart and conscience. Do we desire the Lord alone for them, or the world too?

Next, (ver. 5-8) the christian slaves are exhorted to obey their masters according to the flesh, (such they were, whether converted or not,) to obey them with fear and trembling, in singleness of their heart, as to Christ; not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the soul, with goodwill doing service as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each doeth, this he shall receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. Is it not worthy of all note the extent and depth of the liberty that is in Christ? There is nothing violent nor revolutionary, and yet the change is complete, absolute, final in its principle and character, though one has to grow in the appreciation and manifestation of it. And this growth is important morally, being part and parcel of Christianity practically viewed,

where the very first blessing which God's grace bestows upon us in Christ appears not save to faith, has to be realized all through in the power of the Spirit through self-judgment, and is only ours in actual possession and display when that which is perfect is come in resurrection-glory. Still, how blessed that if in one sense we have nothing, in another and just as real a sense we possess all things. On this truth faith has to lay hold and act; and among the rest, what a boon to the Christian bondman! What a mighty motive for him, who, already consciously free in Christ in a liberty entirely superior to circumstances, has for that very reason such a scope for triumphing over his fetters and serving Christ in obeying the worst of masters if it were the Lord's will so to try him! Doubtless, the master too has his duties; but if he fail, what then? Is the slave absolved from his responsibility? How can this ever be a difficulty, if he obeys in simplicity as unto Christ? Does He fail? What a deliverance from every shade of dishonesty!—"not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, (how honorable the title which one shares with an apostle!) doing the will of God from the soul;" for such is the true word here. More than this: not only is there the call with goodwill to do service as to the Lord and not to men, but they are reminded that the day was coming when each, whether bond or free, should receive of the Lord for whatever good he might do. Ample wages then, be assured; for He at least is not unrighteous.

Then, in turn, (vs. 9) the masters are called to impartial equity, doing as they would be done by, and abstaining from the threats so natural toward a poor slave. They were to know that the Lord of both masters and slaves was in the heavens, and that no respect of persons is with Him, both of them weighty considerations for a master, and with delicate propriety laid before him rather than the slave.

Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians, Ephesians 5:25-33, Remarks on

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

OF course, the death of Christ was essential, in order that the gospel should now be preached to the world. This, too, is the ground on which the heavens and earth will be cleared of all that now pollutes and defiles. Everything for the justification of God in the past, and the outflow of the love of God in the future, is founded upon the death of Christ. Hence the momentous value of His redemption, for earth and heaven; for Jew, Gentile, and Church of God, for time and eternity. But, besides, there is great force in the word, "He gave Himself" (vs. 25). There was nothing in Christ that He did not give. It is not what He did, nor only what He suffered, but He gave Himself. Of course it implies all that was in Him and of Him, but it goes a great deal further, because it is absolute self-renunciation in love for the sake of the object that He loved; the perfect pattern of the very fullness of love which it is quite beyond any human relationship to emulate; justly does the Spirit in addressing the Christian husband, skew us that Christ in all things has the pre-eminence; "He gave Himself for us." What is the consequence of that? The Church is without sin before God—sins are blotted out forever—redemption is effected—Satan is defeated—divine wrath and judgment borne—the ordinances, which were against those that were under them, are nailed to the cross—the enmity is gone—the new man is formed; and all this and much more than this, founded upon Christ's giving Himself. The effect for us is that here we have in unclouded light, without doubt or question, Himself, in love, as the object of our souls to delight in and submit to, and serve, and worship evermore.

I have no more right to believe that Christ gave Himself for me, than I have to believe that my iniquities are completely purged out by His precious blood. If I believe the one, I owe it to God to believe the other; and the ground of my faith is God's testimony to the perfectness of what Christ has done according to the glory of His person. God sets such value upon His work of suffering on the cross, that He can perfectly love me. We are free. We have redemption through His blood. But it is in Him; not only through His blood, but in Him; as it is said in chapter 1. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (ch. 1:7). So that it is of great importance that while we hold redemption, we should not hold it, if I may be allowed so to say, apart from, but in Him. And what will enable me to estimate and hold fast the preciousness of this work, is His person; we must remember not only what was done, but who He was that did it. If you, in self-judgment, cleave to Him and to these two blessed truths in Him, there never can be a cloud upon your soul, as to your own perfect deliverance from all charge before God, but now comes another thought. If Christ has completed this, if it is a past thing, never requiring to be re-touched, we enter upon the second proof of His love, "that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" (vs. 26). I take it that the sanctifying the Church spoken of here, though connected closely with its being cleansed through the word, is a distinct thing. These are two operations, and there is an important difference between sanctifying the Church and cleansing it. This sanctifying does not merely refer to our growth in grace: it is connected with Christ. It is not the Spirit of God merely working in the believer. Men talk as if it were the business of the Son to justify, and of the Spirit to sanctify. But we are washed, we are sanctified, we are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. All that by virtue of which we are washed, and sanctified, and justified, is Christ; and it is by the Spirit of our God. The Spirit of God is the active agent in the justification, no less than in the sanctifying; but it is always by using Christ. Hence there is a great danger in disconnecting Christ from sanctification. Christ gave Himself for the Church "that He might sanctify and cleanse it" (vs. 26). His blood is involved in His giving Himself.

In fact, all that which flows from redemption, properly so called, is involved in verse 25: "He loved the church, and gave Himself for it." This is a past thing. But now comes that which is going on all the time of the Church's existence upon the earth. After this calling comes the death of Christ for us—His giving Himself for the Church. And now you have, founded upon the cross, this sanctifying and cleansing that goes on continually. But how is it wrought? In both cases it is by the washing of water by the word. This shows us the immense importance of the word of God. Of what moment it is for every child of God to value that word and to seek to grow in acquaintance with God through it—to increase in the knowledge of God! So far from our belonging to the Church, or rather to Christ, being the sum and substance of all we have to learn, it is only the foundation; and it is after we know this, that there comes in all this sanctifying and cleansing by the washing of water by the word. So that it is clear we have got three fruits of the love of Christ that are very distinct indeed. The first is, that He gave Himself; (that is, unto death;) the second is, the present work of His life: since the cross, He is occupying Himself in heaven about the Church; He is taking care of His members, working by the Holy Spirit, and applying the word of God, and all connected with Christ Himself, because the whole point of it is Christ's love to the Church. He is sanctifying and cleansing now by the washing of water by the word; but we know that our sins are put away by His blood.

Allow me to say here, a fresh application of the blood of Christ is unknown to Christianity. There are Christians, no doubt, who tell you that you must have fresh recourse to the blood; but they have no scripture for their thought. On the contrary, it weakens the fundamental truth of

the efficacy of Christ's own sacrifice, which it is intended, after a human fashion, to commend and exalt: and that is the effect of forming our own thoughts of the use that is to be made of any truth, instead of simply bowing to the word of God. The moment we take a truth out of His connection for us, it is like rooting up that which has its own due place in the garden of God, where it produces its own proper, abundant, and precious fruit, but which becomes a withered thing when man takes it into his own hands. Repetition as to this would prove imperfectness. This foundation has been laid so completely in the Epistle to the Hebrews that it never requires to be laid again. There is no more the possibility of a fresh sprinkling of Christ's blood, than there is room left for His dying once more to shed His blood. When a soul has found Him and been washed from sin in His blood, there it abides forever. This is what makes the sin of a Christian to be so serious. If you could begin again, what is the effect? Not very different from that which his confession before a priest has upon a Romanist. People soon learn to trifle with sin, and to get hardened by its deceitfulness. Although it is a different thing where Christ is looked to, still the moral effect is much the same, as far as the making light of sin is concerned. If a person can again and again start afresh, as if nothing had happened, and begin over and over again for every fresh downfall, sin is never felt nearly so deeply. But we are bound to bring no stain upon that which is washed in the blood of Christ. Yet we are conscious of constant failure.

Is there, then, no resource? Is there no renewal of access to the cross? It would be a tremendous thing if there were no provision against our failings and falls, no means of dealing with these departures: but there is a resource, and we have it here—"That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" (vs. 26). You have similar truth set forth in its individual application in John 13. There it was on the ground that the disciples were His own; that He loved them, and that whom He loved He loved unto the end: and then we find that being exposed to defile themselves in the world, the Lord would guard them against two things; first, the anxiety lest He should cease to love them because they were unfaithful; secondly, the danger of their using His faithfulness as a reason for trifling with sin. Christ will never cease to love, nor will He trifle with sin, or allow us to trifle with it. He keeps us always resting on His blood. But, then, supposing one is guilty of sin after receiving this remission, what is to be done? Let us go and spread it out before God. The veil is not set up again because you have acted foolishly outside it. You are entitled to draw near and spread out your failure before God—to come to Him on the very ground that you are washed in the blood of Christ. What is the effect of this? And what is this the effect of? It is because Christ is sanctifying and cleansing, keeping up the washing of water by the word. There may be this corporate aspect of it as well as the individual—both are true. It is true for every soul and for the Church at large. Christ is always acting in the presence of God on behalf of the Church; and the consequence is, the need of reproof and of chastening. A man is brought to feel what he has done. Some word of God, either in his own meditation, or through others, flashes upon his soul. He is convinced of his folly; the will has ceased to act; the word of God is brought home with power by the Holy Spirit; the man bows under it.

This is the washing of water by the word. It is the effect of Christ's priesthood at the right hand of God. The application of the word of God to the soul is the effect of the intercession of Christ to put away failure wherever it has been. The work that He is doing at the right hand of God is this intercessional work. A great deal of that which goes on in the soul is not provision for failure, but to guard us against failure. God does not count upon sin—He does not look for failure in His child. On the contrary, there is a most solemn injunction against sin. "My little children, these things write I unto you that ye sin not" (1 John 2:1). He had been telling them, that if any man said he had no sin, he deceives himself, and the truth is not in him. Then the effect of that on the corrupt heart of man would be, that it would be said, Sin is not so much matter after all. "My little children," (Gal. 4:19) he says, "these things write I unto you that ye sin not" (1 John 2:1). We are never free to sin. We are always inexcusable when we do sin. "But," it is added, "if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). There you have what answers to this very thing. It is not that the position of Christ is the same, but the effect, as far as regards the soul, is similar. Christ is carrying on His blessed action of love, and the effect is that there is that in the word of God which applies itself, by the grace of God, to our fault; so that the sanctifying spoken of here is the practical setting us apart according to our proper calling as God's assembly—the making it good in our souls by the word of God. This is done by the revelation of Christ, and of Christ as He now is in the presence of God. And this is what is referred to in 2 Corinthians 3, where it is said, "We all with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18). We find that the Holy Spirit, revealing Christ as He is glorified now before God, separates us from the world which knows nothing of His glory, but is bent upon something connected with present things. God reveals to us Christ's glory, and the effect is that we are weaned from the false glitter of this evil age.

But this being the complete account of what Christ does, there is the cleansing, as well as the sanctifying, the Church. This defilement requires to be removed; and in both cases it is the washing of water by the word which God uses. But there is a third and future fruit of His love—"that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (vs. 27). There we have clearly the complete glory of the Church, when there will be no question of cleansing it any more; when all the love of Christ will have its perfect effect, and when the Church will be glorious according to His own likeness, "That he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (vs. 27). Thus we have the full, blessed account of the love of Christ. But mark, it is not introduced merely in a doctrinal form, but in a most practical way, for the purpose of illustrating the place of the Christian husband towards his wife. The husband can only act properly towards his wife when the relationship is not merely regarded as a natural one. A Christian must act upon heavenly principles, in order to act well in a natural relationship. You might have a husband attached to his wife, and a wife ever so much attached to him; but if that is merely their ground in married life, it will never have the power, blessing, and honor of God. Though it is all quite right, yet more than that is needed; and the something more that is needed is just this—the reminding of our souls how Christ feels and carries Himself toward the Church. There is always blessing and power in believing the word of God. If not using this, we shall not have the strength of it in the natural relationship of this life; yet we ought to have it. If we have it not, are we not doing without that which would give power, and which God would own and honor?

But he applies it, "So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself" (vs. 28). He is now taking up the common instinct that men naturally avoid pain and take care of themselves. He is speaking only of the fact, and says, Look upon your wife as a part of yourself; and that anything that would wrong her is so much wrong done to your own body. It would teach you affectionate care, "for no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church" (vs. 29). A beautiful and sweet addition to the truth that He had already brought out. All the rest had shown redemption, the present practical cleansing the future glorification of the Church. But now he adds, that Christ "nourisheth and cherisheth it" (vs. 29). There is the special entrance of His mind, His careful interest in those that belong to Him. It is a great comfort that we know this about the present state of the Church, when we think of the ruin of all around. Does Christ ever cease to nourish that which belongs to Him? He does not. Spite of all the ruin, He has the same care for His people. We never can pray too much for the Church; but it is another thing to be troubling our minds as if the Lord forgot her, and

were not taking adequate care of the saints in their need and sorrow. The Lord has never failed; and what He here tells us to do in our earthly relationship is no more than what He has perfectly done towards His Church. He loves the Church; He nourishes and cherishes it, and He does this because "we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones" (vs. 30). Just as Eve was a part of Adam, so the Church is of Christ. The Lord took out of Adam's side that which He built into his wife. So we stand in this nearness of relationship to Christ. The verse is sometimes applied to Christ's becoming man; but it is the converse of this. It does not mean Christ taking our flesh and bone, but our being made members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. It is our relationship to Christ risen from the dead, and not Christ's relationship to us as a man upon the earth. I only refer to it to guard souls. There is no allusion to our Lord's taking flesh and blood, which we know He did: that is taught in Hebrews, but not here. We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. We are really a part of Himself, united to Him as He now is in the presence of God. The case of Adam is then quoted and of Eve. "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself, and the wife see that she reverence her husband." Thus we have the subject summed up with this practical word. I need not say that everything contrary to the most entire confidence in such a relationship is excluded by this verse. The husband, if acting in the spirit of it, has no secret from the one that is a part of himself: but as to the wife, let her see that she reverence or (literally) fear her husband. It would not be the mere familiarity of love, which is wrong in a heavenly point of view. Whatever the confidence of a wife in her husband, it is surely a becoming thing for a wife to fear him. Nor is this the least incompatible with love. We are told to hold fast grace; and what is the effect? That we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. There is an immense difference between the thoughts, but it may serve to illustrate. Here it is the fear that fears to offend, and seeks earnestly the husband's honor. This holds true in every case. Supposing you take the case of a stupid husband who has a clever wife; if he shows what he is from day to day, so much the more has the wife to guard her own spirit that she should use what she has to keep her husband without seeming to do so. And now comes in the very important thing, that in these circumstances she should honor God and her husband, instead of a word to himself or to others that would wound or show a want of care. It is in such circumstances that the wisdom and spiritual feeling of a godly woman should shine, and shine by not shining: for the blessing of the married pair supposes that the man should appear and not the woman. Where the heart is simply looking to the Lord, there would be this result: and although it might look unseemly that such should be linked together, and it would make their path more difficult, still there is nothing impossible to God. And if the Christian woman sought the mind of God, honoring Him in the circumstances, God would use her in a very blessed and happy way, for the helping of her husband, and for the covering of that which would be mortifying to him. But the principle always abides. As nothing justifies a husband in not loving his wife, so nothing justifies a wife in not reverencing her husband. The Lord grant that we may bear in mind His holy and gracious admonition.

Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians, Ephesians 5:22-24, Remarks on

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

WE now enter upon the special earthly relations. The general exhortations we have had, which concern the saints of God as such—children of God, and members of Christ's body. But now the Holy Spirit shows that He is not indifferent to the relations which these saints may sustain, either towards one another, or towards others upon the earth. There might be, for instance, husbands and wives, both of them Christians; or there might be only one in this relationship converted, the other being still a Jew or a heathen; and so with the relation of fathers and children, masters and servants. For the present we have only to do with that which pertains to the nearest tie upon earth, that of husband and wife. And we shall find that the Holy Spirit most amply provides for the wants of the children of God bound thus together; so that whatever may be their difficulties, they may find gracious instruction and grave exhortation, and not merely commands in reference to the circumstances in which they stand before God—for this is not strictly the form in which Christian regulation comes before us. Of course, there may be, and are, precepts and commandments throughout the New Testament. Indeed the one who brings out love most presses commandments most; for it is in the gospel and epistles of John, where the greatest stress is laid upon commandments; and yet we all know that there is no part of the Scripture which brings out God's love to us more strikingly and constantly. It is therefore the greatest possible mistake to suppose that there is any inconsistency between God's love, and the strictest injunction that His authority lays upon His children.

Still it is undeniable that as the general character of Christian instruction does not take the shape of commandments as under the law, so we are not set under the Mosaic commandments to form our present thoughts and feelings and course as Christians; nay, we have got nothing analogous to the law: for "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). Commandments we have; but they suppose and regulate life, and are calculated to bring the obedience of Christ into exercise; and there is nothing more beautiful to the soul, nor more glorifying to God. Ordinarily the way in which instruction comes in the New Testament is thus: there is a relationship formed, and according to its character, amply unfolded and enforced in the word, we have to glorify God. As this is true in natural things, so the Spirit of God uses an every-day relationship as the occasion of bringing out the spiritual one that answers to it. And our hearts being occupied with the exceeding grace that has formed the new and eternal tie, we may find not only a motive, but a pattern and power to glorify God in the natural as well as the spiritual one. There is no place where this comes out more strikingly than in the first of these relationships on which the Holy Spirit here expands peculiarly. "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord" (vs. 22). The opening comparison which He uses, before entering into the spiritual relationship which is brought before us after the figure of marriage, the very first thought is to present the headship of the man, as having special force in married life. We all know that, apart from marriage, the man is the head of the woman. That is, if there were no such thing as marriage, man has a place which woman has not, which is entirely independent of character. We may find a man imbecile, and a woman with firmness and wisdom; but nothing can alter God's order. We may find a child endowed with great prudence, and the parents unwise and weak. Still the relationship is altogether independent of the peculiar character, and state, and condition, of those either in the superior place, or in the subordinate. And it is of great importance that we should have the thing settled in our souls, that no circumstances whatever warrant a breach of the order of God. There are trying circumstances which make the difficulty immense in either relationship. But it is of great consequence to remember that the rights of God's order always abide; that nothing ever justifies disobedience of His will. There may be cases where obedience of the natural order of God would be a sin: there are none where disobedience is a duty. You cannot be required to disobey, under any circumstances. But there are crises where you must obey God rather than man. It is an exceeding mercy that the times are few indeed, where obeying God involves an apparent breach of natural order and moral duty. But it may be so. You

will find for instance, in the beginning of the Acts, Peter and John charged by the powers of that day that governed in Israel, not to teach in the name of Jesus. What could they do but fall back upon the authority of God? They could put it to these very rulers that their consciences were bound to God before men. Thus the first great principle remains and is plain, before we enter upon particulars, that obedience is always the part of the Christian.

Hence, flowing out of the general call to submission, in the fear of Christ, (for Christ is the One brought before us with continual honor in this epistle,) the Spirit takes up this first appropriate place for a Christian woman, and lays down the word, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord" (vs. 22). Although that may appear extraordinarily strong language, when we remember what husbands are or may be, still it is a great thing to be always certain that God is right. To human prudence it may seem little guarded. Perhaps you have even to do with an unconverted husband! But only bring in the Lord, and at once you see the power that will make submission easy, and you learn the measure to which submission is to be carried. But more than that; you have the guard against the abuse of the principle: "Submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord" (vs. 22). The Lord is brought in, and this sets everything right. If it is a question of trial or suffering, still the word is, "Submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord" (vs. 22). The Lord may put us through great difficulties and dangers. What is the proper place of the Christian under such circumstances? Unqualified submission. Because I ought to be sure that whatever may be the breaking up and down which these trials may occasion to one's spirit, yet whatever the Lord does is the best and happiest and most strengthening in the end to my soul, the Lord being incapable of any one thing for me that is not for enduring good to the praise of His own name.

In this epistle it is not merely God's control that is brought out, but special relationship. Here it is the Lord loving His own, with a love that has sacrificed everything for their sake. How can I doubt the blessedness and value of submitting myself to the Lord? The Christian wife may have a husband; and it may be very painful and hard to bear all. Perhaps he makes nothing of you, and asks often what is unreasonable. But what will make it to be a light burden? "Submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord" (vs. 22). Let me only see the Lord in the matter, instead of his inconsiderateness and bad temper, and my path is plain. I am to submit unto my husband as unto the Lord. It is made a matter, not of mere duty, but of confidence in the Lord above everything—in His love, care, and government. This is what the Holy Spirit first starts with, and makes to be the basis of all the various instructions that He is about to bring forth. He begins with the grand truth, that the Christian woman is entitled to submit to her husband as unto the Lord. So that it is not made a question simply of affection, which would be human. This is a most necessary thing as a natural element, but it would be true if a person were not a Christian at all. Neither is it a question of that which the husband expects, or of what I might think to be right. All these things belong to the region of proper feeling and morality. But the important thing is that God cannot be with a Christian woman who walks in the habitual slighting of His ground for her in her relationship as a wife. He will not allow a Christian to walk merely on moral conventional grounds. They may be right enough in their place. But if I am a Christian, I have a higher calling; and then, no matter what may be the difficulty—even if the one to whom I owe my subjection be not a Christian—here comes in the blessed guard, "Submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord" (vs. 22). He entitles me to see Himself behind the person of the husband; and I have got to follow Him, and submit myself to Him. In this thought there would be great comfort for the Christian wife who is ever so tried. But then the limit of the trial comes in—for there is a limit in every path—and it is this: that God never puts me in any circumstances where I am free to commit a sin. Therefore, supposing a husband were to command that which would be positively sinful, there at once I learn that I am not bound; because I am told to submit to my husband as unto the Lord. The Lord would never ask what is sinful. He may put me through the sieve, and I may not at first understand the goodness, or the need of it; but faith constantly finds its strength and guidance in the Lord's wisdom; in trusting Him, and not my wisdom in understanding Him. And you will find that we grow in wisdom by being content to take the place of having none. If my confidence is in His wisdom, I shall gather wisdom and grow in it. Our Lord was perfectly man; and although always perfect in every condition of life, yet the great mark of His perfectness lay in this—He was ever the dependent One that looked up to God, and that could say, "Wilt ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" There was at once for man the lowest, but in truth, the highest place. He understood the secret of His own relationship to God the Father. And although that was true of Christ, as of none others, yet it is true of every believer in measure.

But we have most carefully to watch ourselves in this matter. Wherever there is the smallest tendency to slip out of the path of submission, we have to search and see, if we are wise according to God. Nature never likes to be subject. And wherever there is a danger of pleading the truth of God for any act that might seem to be a want of submission to the authority of another, I have need to watch myself with greater jealousy than in any other thing. Where we are found in a path where submission is the word, let us leave room to bring in the Lord. In order to give power and faith to our obedience, and a holy character to it, I should see that it is the Lord I am obeying, even while there is an earthly authority, one that I am subject to. The blessed truth that the Lord was about to introduce begins to open to us. "The husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church, and He is the Saviour of the body" (vs. 23). There we have an allusion to the near relationship, which is intended to skew us how we ought to walk towards one another in this respect. Although He is the Saviour, it is not for the purpose of taking the Church or the saint out of the place of subjection.

"Therefore, as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything." Such is the general principle. But then you will observe there is always a measure and a guard in every such word of Scripture. It is not simply said, "Therefore, let the wives be subject in everything to their own husbands," but "Therefore, as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be" (vs. 24). There I find that Christ's own blessed way of caring for the Church and dealing with the Church in its due subjection to the Lord, is brought in as the pattern of wives towards their own husbands. But it is when we come to the higher of the two relationships, that we have the Holy Spirit bringing out its character more clearly. "Husbands, love your wives" (vs. 25). There we find what the snare of the husband might be. First, the wife is to look to her temper, that she discipline her spirit in thorough submission to her husband. It is not said to her, to love her husband, but to submit herself to him. But Satan might take advantage, and they being in the relationship, the husband might be wanting in tender care and affection. There is the ruling and guiding the wife; but what he is exhorted to here, is that which his circumstances most need, and which would be most for his own soul's good and the comfort of his wife. So that the word is, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it" (vs. 25). What a holy standard! What a most unselfish, considerate, pure, and heavenly Exemplar is brought before us, in order that a relationship which might be easily degraded, should have and keep its due elevation; and that even the poorest saints on earth, so bound together, might have the light and love of heaven shining upon them.

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church and gave himself for it. That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it

should be holy and without blemish" (vss. 25-27). Thus we have the love of Christ to the Church set forth as the model according to which the Christian husband is to seek that his own love to his wife should be conformed. Look at its source and character: "Christ also loved the church" (vs. 25). All flows out of this. Need I, even as a man, say, that love, as it is what ought to precede a marriage, so is the only thing which, in nature, makes the marriage happy when it is formed? The love of Christ that is shown us here is taken in from first to last, as one unbroken whole. It is well to remember it in married life: the love that was true before the tie was formed, is a love that abides when it is formed, and that should grow and never end.

Certainly it was so perfectly in our Lord. He loved the Church. It is a question of a very special affection here on the part of Christ. It is not the general truth of God's love, who loved the world even; but no relationship was formed with the world. The important thing to look at here is that, although it is a love that exists before the relationship, it finds its proper exercise in it, and ever continues its real strength and joy. And if we turn aside from looking at the earthly thing to that which is set forth by it, how great the grace, and how rich the blessing! Once it was a joy for our hearts to realize that God could love sinners, and so love as to spend His Son upon us, sinners as we were. But there is another kind of love that we know now. God has taken the relationship of a Father to us; at any rate He has brought us into that of children by Jesus Christ to Himself. We are "children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26). Accordingly the Father loves us with a Father's heart; it is not only that He loves the creature as God, but He loves us as a Father—yea, as the Father of our Lord Jesus loved, and not only in the measure in which a human parent regards his children. In such a circle there might be complacency and delight; and when we think what and who we are, to think that such an One as God the Father could delight in us now in this world, is most wondrous! that He should infinitely more love us than an earthly father does the child that he loves best, and that this love should extend towards the weakest and most needy of His family! There is also a conditional love towards those that are walking faithfully, and John brings that out in John 14-15. But now I am speaking of the absolute, personal love in the relationship in which God as Father to His children, as such, which does not only pity, but look with pleasure upon, and take delight in them now, spite of everything that is calculated to turn aside or weaken that love. Ought I not, as in Christ, to be as sure of that, as I am of my own existence as a man? yea, to have a better knowledge and certainty of what His love is towards me, than of anything that affects me as one living on the earth? I have that in me which is not proof against the deception of the world outside. But in the things of God, where faith is, it is not so. There is, there ought to be, divine certainty.

Where God clearly reveals Himself, the soul should receive it in humbleness of mind; and the more humble, the more sure, because the ground of the assurance is that God has revealed it to us. It is a question of Himself and not of us at all. If this be so, what a wonderful place it is to be in Christ! It is quite true that Christ loved me, but here it is the Church—"the assembly," and Christ has a special love for His assembly, which I am entitled to appropriate and count on. This makes the union together of the children of God as the assembly to be so precious, and shows the all-importance of not reducing it to a voluntary society, small or great. The moment you bring in the will of man, you virtually and at once destroy the divine ground, which Scripture assumes. Whereas, if you see that God has formed a certain bond in the Holy Spirit for the glory of His Son among those who belong to Him on the earth now, and that Christ regards those who were within that bond with a perfect and most peculiar love; then it is the greatest possible joy that our own souls should enter into this love, and next that we should seek to act by His word upon the other members of the body of Christ, that they may believe and enjoy it also. It is not a part only, but He "loved the assembly" (vs. 25). The reason why I use the word "assembly" is that people often have a very vague notion about the Church. The word is usually and completely misapplied in the present day. It is said of a religious building, or of a particular party, in particular of such as are dominant anywhere; whereas, bring in "the assembly," and understand by that the whole body of those that God calls out from this world, by the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven; and there you learn the special love that God has revealed in Christ, not merely to the soul, but to the assembly which is His body on earth:

Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians, Ephesians 5:8-21, Remarks on

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

THE eighth verse of our chapter gives another ground of appeal. The exhortation to walk is neither in view of the calling wherewith we are called (ch. 4:1), nor specially in contrast with other Gentiles, alienated from the life of God (ch. 4:17-18), nor yet in love only (ch. 5:27), but "as children of light" (vs. 8). "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord." The change being thus complete, the word is "walk as children of light" (vs. 8). Be consistent with what you are, not merely with what you ought to be. We are light, yea, light in the Lord—at once the ground, and character, and measure: let us walk accordingly. How comforting is the call of grace to holy ways! The most solemn appeal reminds us of our blessing, and its security, even when urging us on with ever such closeness. How holy is our standing in Christ that God Himself should be able to say of us, "Ye are light in the Lord" (vs. 8). If He does, should we not say it of ourselves, both in Privilege and responsibility! Let us look to Him that, thus set outside all taint, (for there is nothing purer than light,) we may go forward, showing that light which we are now in the Lord. It is in the light we walk and by it should we judge all, for light we are. God would repudiate a lower standard or an atmosphere less pure. He is light, and in Him is no darkness at all; if we are His children, we are children of light.

"For the fruit of the light is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth" (vs. 9). No doubt these are the characteristics of the gracious operation of the Spirit; and this may have led to the substitution of "the Spirit" for light in the common text. But there can be no reasonable question that the true thought and word in verse 9 is "the light," which is not more borne out by external evidence than by the scope of the context. In Galatians 5 it is the fruit, not of the light, but of the Spirit, because in contrast with the works of the flesh—ways of uncleanness, violence against God and man; whereas the Spirit's fruit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, against which, as the apostle emphatically says to the law-at-Meters, there is no law. Here it is in contrast, not with legal proclivities and the workings of flesh which the law alike provokes and condemns, but with the darkness which we once were when without the Lord. But now we are called to walk as children of light, which is our very nature in Him, and we are reminded that its fruit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth. God's exceeding riches and grace in no way weakens, but rather confirms, the display of His moral principles, and makes them good even in us His children, whatever we may have been and are naturally. The new life He has given us in Christ answers to His own goodness and righteousness and truth. It could not be—it ought not to be—otherwise; nor would the renewed heart calmly bear that He should be dishonored or even misrepresented in the objects of His favor. He implants in us the desire of pleasing Himself,

and He watches over us that this desire should be neither vague nor uninfluential, but bear fruit—the fruit of the light, “proving,” as it is added, “what is acceptable unto the Lord” (vs. 10).

Again, it is not enough for our souls to refuse to be partakers with the children of disobedience (vss. 6-7). We must have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather even expose them. It is all a part of our marvelous place and responsibility as being children of light. It is not law, simply condemning as by an applied outward standard, but an inward and most searching divine capacity, which, whatever the love that is the source and end, spares evil even less, but brings in good by the Holy Spirit in Christ. “For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret; (that is, the doers of the fruitless works of darkness); but all things that are reprov’d (or exposed) are made manifest by the light; for whatsoever doth make manifest is light” (vss. 12-13). It is the property of light to manifest itself and all things else; and this is quite as true spiritually as in nature.

But there is more in the Lord’s mind here concerning us. He would have us in the full enjoyment of the blessing, and not content to possess it only. There are dead things and persons around us, and their influence when allowed is most injurious. “Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead and Christ shall enlighten thee” (vs. 14). It is not giving us life as if we were dead, nor even light as if we were not light already, but rather shining upon us who are light in Him, yet slumbering carelessly in the midst of that which is dead and deadening. How vigilant His love that thus thinks of us, that our cup of blessing may run over and our souls may be delivered from that which degrades Him and even us in Him, that we may be full of that which we are as His own! How every word of His, how every circumstance of ours, calls us to walk circumspectly (vs. 15), not as fools but as wise, redeeming the fit opportunity because the days are evil! We are furnished indeed; but constant watching and dependence are needed. The due season must be looked at and sought, let it be ever so costly, if, in these evil days, we would not be unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. Worldly excitement must be avoided, and those incentives to nature which jaded man craves, wherein is excess. Yet we may and should be absorbed with a power above nature, which excludes present things. “Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God” (vss. 18-21). This is true and holy joy. May we cultivate it in simplicity. In truth, we have a goodly portion. What can we not thank Him for, who is our God and Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus? What else makes us so happily submit to one another in His fear?

Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians, Ephesians 5:1-7, Remarks on

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

WHAT a mighty principle opens here on the saints! “Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children” (vs. 1). What limits can there be if we are exhorted to imitate God Himself! Nor is it in any way now an assertion of claim, as the law was, on man, standing on his own responsibility before God as a creature. God has revealed Himself in grace; still He is God and none other; and if He has communicated to us His own nature, a lesser, lower standard there could not be. It would dishonor Himself and the very grace He has shown us, and nowhere more fully than in the earlier parts of this Epistle. It would be, too, the most grievous loss to His children beloved, whom He would train and bless yet more and more even in this scene of evil and sorrow, turning the most adverse circumstances into an occasion of teaching us what He is in the depths of His grace and filling ourselves with the sense of it so as to form our hearts and fashion our ways, as we forget ourselves and live above our own habits and the conventionalities of men in the truth of Christ.

Neither law nor even promise ever opened such a field as this. The very call so to imitate God supposes the perfect grace in which we stand: indeed it would be insupportable otherwise. No doubt, it is most humbling to reflect how little we have answered to His call; but even the sense of our previous shortcomings where it is deep, without losing sight of this grace, is turned to precious account, and we are growing and going on with Him when we may little think it. The law demanded what man ought to render to God: to love Him and our neighbor is no more than our plain and bounden duty. The promise held out the hope of a seed of blessing, not to Israel Only, but to all families of the earth. But now after promise was despised and law was broken, God has displayed Himself in Christ, and while accomplishing all in Christ, has brought out higher counsels in infinite grace to us in such sort that His own character, thus displayed, becomes the only suitable pattern to which He would conform His children even now. “Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children; and walk in love as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor” (vss. 1-2).

To forgive one another, even as God in Christ forgave, is blessed; but this, though after His own heart and ways, is not enough. It is surely divine in its source, and impossible in its full character and extent to flesh; but it is in view of man and man’s failure, and the outbreaks of an evil nature. He would cherish this in us. It is the fruit of His grace, and most needful, in such a world as this; most needful for His saints in their intercourse and dealing with each other. But it is far from being the expression of all He is and would have us enjoy and reflect. There is the outgoing of good according to His heart, where there is no question of evil to be forgiven, which is in a certain sense only negative, however real and sweet it may be. Here all is positive, flowing fresh as it were and above human thought. Hence the word is, “Walk in love, as Christ also loved us and hath given Himself for us” (vs. 2). To be forgiven was our abject, urgent need, if we were indeed to have the smallest comfort from God or hope of deliverance from wrath and of blessedness hereafter. It was grace, of course, the grace of God, but addressed to, if not bounded by, man’s need. But now we stand on the new ground of the excellency of Christ and the exercise of that which is proper to God in the activity of His own nature. Hence it is not the sin-offering that is here alluded to, nor is it simply the blood or the suffering of our blessed Lord, but His delivering Himself for us, in matchless love, “an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor” (vs. 2).

One would not be mistaken on such a theme, nor weaken for a moment the certainty that in the Lord’s sufferings on the cross there are depths found there only; but these are not and could not be put before us as a pattern, seeing that they pertain exclusively to Him who bore our sins in His own body and was made sin for us, meeting that judgment of God, which no man, nor angel, nor creature, nor new creature could share with Him, however blessed through it, and filled with thankful, adoring delight in Him who was thus alone, not only for us, but for God’s glory, the object of the wrath God felt and must execute against sin. But here it is a question of that which sets forth the admirable love

of Christ in all its positive fragrance and beauty; and this in order to call out, in the energy of the Holy Spirit, the answering ways of the new nature in the saints; for indeed Christ is our life, and what bounds are there to the power of the Spirit who dwells in us? Love leads to service in self-abnegation, whether in Him perfectly, or in us according to our measure; but surely it gives and forms the spirit of service, as we see in our blessed Lord. (Phil. 2)

Nevertheless, the more sweet and blessed, the nearer it is to evil, unless it is maintained in divine power and self-judgment. It brings together; it awakens spiritual affections; and what is begun in the Spirit may end in fleshly corruption, as we see at Corinth, no less than seek a fleshly perfection of a religious form, as we see in Galatia. Accordingly the apostle proceeds to warn the Ephesian saints against the dangers to which free, familiar converse might expose, unless sustained by the Holy Spirit. "But fornication and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints" (vs. 3). These lusts of the flesh were not only not to be allowed, but not even named. They were God's holy ones, saints; and the question now was of that which becomes, not mere men, but saints.

Nor does he confine his warning to unbridled licentiousness or the covetous desire of that which might gratify man, but extends it to unholiness of language too, whether openly shameful or under the veil of refinement—"neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient, but rather giving of thanks" (vs. 4). Here again the positive side is brought in and the heart's reference to God's goodness, which breaks out in thanksgiving. "For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (vs. 5). It is most important to remember, that let sovereign grace do what it will, let it go out to the vilest, let it cleanse the most defiled, the moral ways of God remain inflexible. His nature does not change. He hates and never can tolerate iniquity. His love may find, and has found, a glorious solution of the difficulty in the cross of Christ; but God and sin never can walk nor dwell together.

The children of God have opposite dangers as to this, and need to watch against their feelings. They may be quick to exclaim in some flagrant case that there can be no life there; they may be too precipitate in giving their confidence where there is a fair show in flesh. Some of the most solemn departures into the world have been where few, if any, doubted; as on the other hand, who has not known the comfort of seeing the painful appearances which repelled one fade away so as to let the grace of Christ shine out more and more, or flesh was judged by the truth in the sight of God; and those of whom most doubted because of untoward looks, at last won the confidence of all? Sometimes it may have needed a serious dealing of God: severe sickness, reverses of fortune, domestic sorrow, before the soul was set right; still it was though late in the day. Both these extremes teach us the need of waiting on God, instead of trusting our own impressions, that we may judge with righteous judgment. The natural heart may take advantage of grace, but before long will manifest its unremoved evil. Perverse men may rise up, wolves may enter, and sheep may for a while be deceived. But God abides, and the word of His grace: why should we be disquieted? Let us have faith in God, imitate Him as children beloved, and walk in love, not only because, but as Christ loved us; and, whatever the result, we shall have the comfort of pleasing God, meanwhile kept from haste one way or another. Watching for evil is very far from "giving of thanks," (vs. 4) and indeed incompatible with it. But then let us never lower the standard of the ways which God looks for in His children. If no corrupt person has an inheritance in His kingdom, never treat such sin lightly now. "Let no man deceive you with vain words; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them" (vss. 6-7). To be partners with such in any way is grave for a saint. Let us take heed.

Bible Treasury: Volume 5, Spirit, There Is One Body and One: Ephesians 4:4

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

The Lord Jesus, both before His death and after His resurrection, had told His disciples of the promise of the Father—that other Comforter who should come, given of the Father and sent of the Son. (John 14 xv. xvi.) "It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." For Jesus they had forsaken all; and more, far more than all had Jesus been to them. He was now about to go. What could turn a loss so grievous into positive gain? The presence thereon of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. It is clearly impossible to understand these and kindred Scriptures, of anything short of His personal presence. Effects and manifestations are enlarged on elsewhere; but such is not the theme here; nor could any conceivable spiritual power outweigh the comfort of having Jesus with them. But the Spirit was promised personally; not comfort only, but the Comforter Himself; One who could be described as a teacher, remembrances, testifier, and convicter; One thenceforth and forever acting in and with the disciples, who left heaven after the Savior ascended, and who takes His place, on the ground of accomplished redemption, in the midst of those who confess the name of Jesus and wait for His return. When here below, Jesus alone could speak of His body as the temple of God. (John 2) But now, having borne the wrath of God, and annulled by death the power of Satan, He could righteously send down from the right hand of God the promised Holy Ghost to dwell in the faithful on earth. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16.)

In principle, then, the coming of the promised Spirit was contingent on the departure of Jesus, and, in fact, it was when He took His seat, as the glorified man in heaven, that the Spirit was sent down. Assembled together with the disciples, previous to His ascension, He "commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me; for John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence." (Acts 1:4, 5.) The next chapter records the accomplishment of the promise on the day of Pentecost. The Comforter was given; the third person of the Trinity was now, permanently, present in them, as truly as the second person had been with them before He ascended to heaven. The Holy Ghost was the grand witness, as His presence in the disciples was the new and wondrous fruit—of the glorification of Jesus in heaven.

Are the operations of the Spirit of God from the beginning denied? In nowise. Creation, providence, and redemption all speak of Him. His energy declares itself in, and pervades every sphere of, God's dealings. Who moved upon the face of the waters? Who strove with man before the deluge? Who filled Bezaleel with understanding, and all manner of workmanship? Who enabled Moses to bear the burden of Israel, or others to share it? By whom wrought Samson? By whom prophesied Saul? It was by the Spirit of the Lord. And, as in their early national history, His good Spirit instructed the people, even so could the prophet assure the poor returned remnant, "According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my Spirit remaineth among you." Were any regenerate? They were born of the Spirit;

and the blessed and holy actings of faith in the elders who obtained a good report, were, beyond controversy, the results of His operation. So far, the way of God is still, and necessarily, the same. Jesus set not aside in the least the need of the Spirit's intervention. He proclaimed its necessity as a fixed, irreversible truth "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." But life, peace, and sonship (while all are communicated and known by the effectual working of the Holy Ghost,) are in no sense the presence of the Comforter. The disciples possessed these privileges before the Lord Jesus ascended. They are, therefore, entirely distinct from the promise of the Father, which the disciples did not possess, and which none ever did or could possess till Jesus was glorified. (John 7:39.) The presence of the Comforter is clearly the distinctive blessing since Pentecost. It was never enjoyed before, though the Spirit had wrought, and wrought savingly, as regards believers at all times.

But when Jesus took His seat in heaven as the exalted Head, the Holy Ghost was sent down, not merely for the blessing of individual believers, but for the purpose of gathering them into one body here below. This and this only is called in Scripture "the Church of God;" and its unity, hanging upon the baptism of the Holy Ghost, is "the unity of the Spirit." Matt. 16:18, is the first occurrence of the word "Church" (i.e. assembly) in the New Testament. It is there spoken of as a thing not merely unmanifested and unordered, but as not yet existing. It was not built, nor being built yet.¹ "Upon this rock I will build my Church;" which Church, be it observed, is mentioned as altogether distinct from the kingdom of heaven, the keys of which (not of His Church) the Lord promised to give to Peter.

But, although the unity of the Church, as Christ's body, will only be displayed perfectly in the dispensation of the fullness of times, when God will gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, (Eph. 1:10,) yet it was intended that there should be a testimony to it, produced and manifested by the power of the Holy Ghost in the one body on earth. When the apostle spoke of the saints being "builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit," this was not an ideal or future thing only to be achieved in heaven. It was an actual, present fact, made good here below by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Hence we read, "to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known, by the Church, the manifold wisdom of God." (Eph. 3:10.) And the "unity of the Spirit," which the saints should endeavor to keep, where was it if not on earth? The saints were there, and there too the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers given of Christ Himself ascended up far above all heavens. There go on the perfecting of the saints, the work of the ministry, and the edifying of the body of Christ. It is on earth that we meet with "sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Eph. 4:14); and it is there that we "grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." (Eph. 4:16.) It is in this world, and in this world alone, that "all the body, by joints and bands, having nourishment administered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God," (Col. 2:19,) as it is assuredly here that the Spirit would have the peace of Christ to rule in our hearts, "to the which also we are called in one body." (Col. 3:15.)

So, in Rom. 12:4, 5, the apostle writes to saints, who, like the Colossians, had never been visited by him, and therefore, as man might judge, were in no peculiar way connected with him: "As we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." Evidently, it is not a tie which was going to be established, but a relationship already existing. Membership is not with a local church, but with the Church, the body of Christ, (Acts 2:47); though, on the other hand, if one be not in fellowship with the assembly of the members of Christ where one resides, there can be for him no fellowship with them anywhere else.

Nor can language be more explicit than that of 1 Cor. 12 "But all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit dividing to every man severally as He will. For as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of that one body being many are one body, so also is Christ; for by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." The composition of that one body depends upon the baptism of the Holy Ghost. By Him are we baptized into the body of Christ, Jews, Gentiles, bond or free; it matters not. Jesus exercises His heavenly rights. He baptizes with the Holy Ghost; and those who are thus baptized become the immediate and the especial field of His presence and operations—the body of Christ. The diversities of gifts, of administrations and of operations, will not be in heaven. Their province is the Church on earth. It is here that the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man (i.e. in the Church) to profit withal. It is the one and the self-same Spirit who works all these gifts, distributing to each member as He will. For the many members constitute but one body—"by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body." The importance of these last words will be better estimated, on comparing with them Acts 1:4, 5, and particularly the clause, "Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." The disciples were believers at the time this was spoken. They had life, and life more abundantly. Jesus, the quickening Spirit, had breathed upon them and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." (John 20) He had also opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures. (Luke 24) But none of these things is the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Pentecost first beheld the accomplishment of the promise of the Father. Then and not before, were believers baptized with the Spirit. But it is this baptism which introduces into and forms the "one body." It is the Spirit thus present and baptizing, who began, organized, and recruits the body of Christ. Hence is it that, coincident with the baptism of the Holy Ghost, we first hear, in the Word of God, of this new body and of membership therein. Whatever the privileges, (and they were many,) which existed before, that which is distinctively called in the Bible "the Church of God," appeared here below, as the consequence of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, dwelling in the disciples and baptizing them, Jews or Gentiles, into one body.

The apostle addresses, no doubt, the Church of God that was at Corinth, and it is very clear that the New Testament frequently speaks of assemblies in this or that locality, i.e., churches, (compare Rom. 16:1, 5; Gal. 1:2, 22; Col. 4:15, 16 1 Thess. 1:1; 2:14, &c.) But beside this, Acts 2:47 Cor. 10:32; 12:28; 15:9; Eph. 1; 2; 3, &c.; Col. 1; 1 Tim. 3:15, are instances of another sense of the most important bearing, as may be seen in the epistles of Paul, i.e. the Church, as a body here below, in a breadth as extensive as the baptism of the Spirit. Thus, to take a single text referred to, that entire society or corporation, wherein He dwelt and wrought, was the assembly in which God set apostles, prophets, teachers, &c. Certainly, it was impossible to say that He had set all these in the Corinthian assembly; nor will it be maintained that He is to set them in the Church universal, gathered on high. There is, then, a large sense of "the Church," in which unity is predicated of all the members of Christ existing at one time in the world, whatever might be the distances separating their bodies; and that, in virtue of one Spirit baptizing them into one body. The body of Christ, like the natural body, is susceptible of increase; but, as in the natural body, the identity subsists when the old particles have given place to new, so the body of Christ is the body still, whatever the changes in the members in particular. He who, by His presence, imparted unity at its beginning, conserves unity by His own faithful presence. He was given to abide

with the disciples forever.

In fine, by "the Church" is meant not the aggregate of various co-ordinate (much less conflicting) societies, but a body, the one body of Christ, possessing the same privileges, and calling, and responsibility on earth, and looking for the same glory in heaven as the Bride of Christ. If a man was baptized by the Spirit, he was thereby made a member of the Church of God; if he had a gift, it was to be exercised according to the proportion of faith, for the good of the whole: not ministry, nor membership, pertaining to a church, but to the Church; each joint belonging to the entire body, and the entire body to each joint.

As Israel of old was untrue to its calling, so is Christendom now. The Gentile has not continued in the goodness of God, and has therefore no other prospect than to be cut off, when the due moment comes in the wisdom of God. (Rom. 11) But as once the godly clave to the ancient oracles revealed to the Jews, precisely analogous is the joy and obligation of the believer now. If Catholics and Protestants have, in various ways and measures, been unfaithful to the Word and Holy Spirit; if the scriptural ground of the Church of God has been everywhere lost sight of in principle and renounced in practice, the more incumbent it is for the glory of the Lord, that those who fear Him and love His name, should seek at once, and in all respects, to eschew the prevalent evils they know, and to submit themselves unreservedly to the revealed will of God. Nothing can justify perseverance in known sin. And if God has given the name of the Lord Jesus, not only for salvation, but as the center of His assembly on earth, through the recognition of the Spirit's presence and operation therein, what is any other point of union but a rival and a rebel, which every Christian is bound to disown? What is our resource, then, and what His provision for us? "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matt. 18:20.)

The Unity of the Spirit, Unity of the Spirit, The: Part 3

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

The lesser excommunication was not yet invented, that is, the "declaring out," se, stretched as to take in brethren who had no intention of going out: a convenient, but unscriptural, way of getting rid of such as gave umbrage. Surely whatever is done ought to be according to the plain positive teaching of God's word. It is for the Lord to command—the church has only to obey. I take for granted that I address Christians who believe not more in the sufficiency of the written word than in the supreme authority of Him who wrote it for our guidance by the Spirit of God. Development is of man's will, and unbelief. God has left nothing to be added. The church is under the orders of the Lord. If the church recognize any one, it is because the Lord has already received him; and if the church put away, it is simply as doing the Lord's will. The church has no independent authority to legislate, but is called to believe, pronounce, and execute His word. Consequently, in all things the church has to remember that she is subject and He the Lord. He is to order, she to obey—her one place, privilege, and duty. The moment the church lays down an extra-scriptural test, she takes the place of the Lord, and there is a practical assumption, yea, a virtual denial, of His authority. The result is to form a sect in departure from the unity of the Spirit.

The apostles, though set first in the church, were patterns of Christian humility. Who was so remarkable for patience as he who was not a whit behind the very chiefest, to whom a unique place was given by the will of God and the authority of the Lord Jesus? How much then should every true servant of Christ cultivate lowliness in these days! If a man think himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things written are the commandments of the Lord. Let his very subjection to the word of the Lord prove the reality of his mission from Him. This is of the last moment for our souls now; for perils and perplexities are constantly springing up, which affect the saints wherever they may be, and not least those who are gathered to the name of Christ.

Let none fancy this is to disparage those admirable men whom the Lord used in days gone by. Cherish unfeigned respect for such as Luther, Calvin, Farel, and Zwingle, though quite allowing the infirmities of every one of them. It is childish to find fault with Tyndale and Cranmer, whilst idolizing Melancthou or John Knox. They were all of like passions as ourselves; and if disposed to study their lives and labors, there are ample materials not far to seek for criticism; and so with other men of God in our day. But is it of Christ to be on the watch for that which may not be of Christ? Faults are easily seen; it needs to-day the power of the Spirit to walk, not in their traditions, but in the like faith. Rarely has there been a time when faith has sunk to a lower ebb among those who might be supposed long inured to it than the present. It is most common to find saints who groan over a course as utterly wrong, and yet persevere in it for the sake of company, &c. How often they have to others insisted on the ancient oracle: "Cease to do evil; learn to do well." They believe it doubtless: why not, giving all diligence, add to their faith virtue? Have they lost all courage in Christ and for Christ? I speak of what is now going on to our common shame all over the world. The compromise which you would hardly expect in new-born babes of God characterizes men who have long known the Lord, and even suffered not a little at one time or another for the truth's sake.

Beloved friends, it is of the greatest moment that we should try our ways, whether we deceive ourselves, or are in deed and in truth keeping the unity of the Spirit. Do not set against that duty the sad fact that the church is now a ruin. The question is, Are we not always to be obedient? It is not the point, how many or how few of Christ's members may act together according to the word of the Lord. Do we own, ourselves, the obligation to be thus faithful? The unity of the Spirit is a constant responsibility for the children of God to keep with diligence as long as they are upon the earth. He abides with us forever. To keep it therefore is always a paramount duty.

Take a practical illustration. There is assembled in this room a company of members of Christ's body, who can allow neither the broad ways of nationalism nor the narrow alleys of sectarianism. They desire above all things to walk together so as to please the Lord Christ. What then must be their stand? What position ecclesiastically ought they to take, if they would act with spiritual intelligence and fidelity?

If any in this city be already gathered to His name on the ground of the one body, they should not be ignored. It would be independence, not the unity of the Spirit, to take no account of such a gathering. The member of Christ's body who sought fellowship would ask, as he ought, if and where saints were gathered to His name. He finds, we will suppose, there are some meeting in this room, and prefers his desire to be with them on the same blessed ground of Christ. If they challenge his faith, it is not from lack of love to him, but from care for Christ's glory. They do not receive him because he says that he is a member of Christ's body. They require adequate testimony, where they have no

personal knowledge. Nobody ought to be recognized on his own bare word; even the apostle Paul was not at the first. God took care to give an extraordinary witness through a certain disciple named Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews that dwelt in Damascus; as in Jerusalem subsequently through Barnabas. The word is so plainly thus, and the danger so great otherwise, that no saint, who duly reflects with a heart and conscience true towards God, would wish to be accredited merely on his own word. Souls may deceive themselves, even if upright; but if you or I were to be so accredited, where is it to end?

Again, a Christian is brought before them, who desires to remember the Lord along with them. Perhaps he belongs, as they say, to the national establishment, or to a dissenting society. But he is well known as a child of God, walking according to the measure of light already possessed. What is to be done? To refuse this member of Christ, without the strongest ground of known sin, would put shame not on him only but on the Lord. It were to deny our title, nay, the true center of gathering. Membership of Christ attested by a godly life is the sufficient and only right ground on which a Christian should ask to be received. If one understood all mysteries and all knowledge,—if one had all faith so as to remove mountains, one ought to plead His name alone.

Are there then no exceptions? May there not be valid reasons to forbid even an accredited member of Christ's body? Certainly there are, as Scripture shows. Leaven of malice and wickedness is intolerable (1 Cor. 5); leaven of heterodoxy as to the foundations (Gal. 5) is yet worse; and the word is, "Purge out the old leaven that ye may be a new lump." Here are unquestionable barriers reared in the word of God, and due to the Lord Jesus. If any man that is named a brother be unclean in deed or in word, in ways or in manifested spirit, we are commanded not so much as to eat with him. And it were a far graver sin, if one did not bring the doctrine of Christ, or even denied everlasting punishment for the lost. God assuredly will never allow the profession of Christ to be a passport for him that dishonors Christ. Here, and here most of all, is the Holy Ghost jealous, if the word of God is to be our rule.

All truth is no doubt important in its place and season; but it is worse than ignorance to put the body on the same level as the Head. Ecclesiastical error, even if real and grave, never approaches the denial of the doctrine of Christ. Weigh how the apostle of love, the elder, solemnly warns us to be on our guard in such a case. We are not free to receive even privately, much less publicly, those who bring not the doctrine of Christ. We are unequivocally bound not only to disallow heterodoxy in general, but in particular to reject that which is, and those who are, a lie against Christ, yea, to treat those who receive such as partakers of the same evil deeds. But we are not entitled to equalize the church with Christ, like a Romanist, or to put ecclesiastical error along with evil against Christ's person. This is not faith, but fanaticism: what can we think of such as conceive, or of those that circulate, this trash as the truth?

Still, in keeping the unity of the Spirit, we must accept the scriptural responsibility of purging out leaven. And, as we have seen, the Spirit of God writes direct to an elect lady and her children, because on such a question as Christ the duty is immediate and peremptory. Years ago, in having to do with such an one, that Epistle stood us in good stead. For on her pleading that she was but a sister, and it was not her responsibility to do this or that, she was at once reminded that it was not to an assembly, nor even to a Timothy or Titus, but to a lady and her children that the Holy Ghost wrote, insisting on her own personal and unavoidable responsibility. We may be sure that the Spirit of God did not thus inspire a letter to a lady and her children, without the most urgent necessity, and in order to meet lust such an excuse for shirking what is due to Christ at any time.

All know that women are liable to err on the side of their affections, being naturally more disposed to act through feeling than with calm judgment. The word of God recognizes this in repressing them ordinarily (1 Timothy and in the special warning of 2 John. Their activity is always to be dreaded in cases short of Christ, a dishonor to themselves and to the men whom they mislead. The truth may not be always pleasant, though ever wholesome and good; and it is the truth that one desires to press upon souls, and that we ought to welcome. We are bound to see to it that the church of God be not made a cover for any known evil, and above all not to admit or screen knowingly that which sullies Christ's glory. But women are bad leaders, or even instruments save as Scripture warrants.

Let us distinguish things that differ. The English Establishment, in spite of many and grave drawbacks, had a holy object in its rise, turning its back as it did on an abominable and over swelling imposture. Though much hindered, especially by the king, in its work of clearing itself from many inveterate superstitions, it honestly set its face against what was known to be evil. But it retrograded afterward, until its ritualistic observances being made a test forced out many pious nonconformists, whose origin thus was morally respectable and godly. For it was no mean struggle in those days to keep a good conscience, and to stand opposed to those who were dragging them down into formalism. We need not speak of the Wesley and Whitfield movement, which was in main missionary, not ecclesiastical. We know later on, how powerfully God wrought in awakening His children fifty years ago to a sense of the departure that had taken place from the original ground of keeping the unity of the Spirit. In such days it was no small thing to recognize that there is such a reality on earth as the presence of the Holy Ghost, and consequently the body of Christ. Hence, if members of that body, it is our inalienable duty to keep that unity in its true character, whilst subject to the conditions which the Lord has laid down in His word, and to none other. The Spirit has created that unity, a unity which takes in all members of Christ's body, excepting those whom discipline according to the word requires us to reject.

It may interest all to know that not the least weighty testimony that was ever given of late on this momentous subject was written in the year 1828 ("Considerations on the Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ"). The point was to show how impossible it is for saints who would honor the Lord to go on with the world, instead of walking (were they but two or three) in that unity which is of God; that in denominations the bond is not their unity but in fact their differences, and in no case therefore the communion of God's church at all, in faith contemplating, as every true assembly does and must, all God's children. Those who call this looseness do not know divine ground, and have unwittingly slipped into a seat.

Far from looking for or valuing ecclesiastical intelligence before souls take their place at the Lord's table, it is quite a mistake for us to expect it, and a shame rather than an honor to the few who may possess it. For how did they as members of Christ acquire such knowledge? In manifest unfaithfulness; either still continuing in their denominational enclosures and activities with a bad conscience; or in the anomalous state of mere hearers outside, seeking to attain a more familiar acquaintance with that truth in which their outside position declared them to have neither part nor lot, as if their heart were not right with God. Yet all the while they were members of the body of Christ; and as such they should have been within, learning more soundly and happily the truth they were acting on in their simplicity, a truer and better sort of intelligence than that intellectual insight into the church, which has been so erroneously over-rated by some in our midst.

The fact is that we are apt to forget our own beginnings and the gracious dealings of the Lord with us when we ourselves first broke bread, knowing as little perhaps as any. How many brethren are now among the firmest and most intelligent in fellowship, who saw but dimly not the church only but even the gospel of salvation, and revealed truth in general, when they found in the Lord's name an immediate passport to His supper! They were by no means clear as to their future course, though attracted by the grace which saluted them as brethren, and enjoying the simple faith which bowed to the word of the Lord in a way and measure beyond their previous experience. How unwise and unbecoming for such now to exact from inquiring brethren a knowledge of the church far beyond their own standard at their start, and in fact not to be got save within the assembly, and in the path of obedience where the Spirit guides into all the truth! To those thus growing up and led, catholicism or denominationalism is judged by the word, and felt to be altogether unsatisfying and distasteful, as being evidently of man and not of God. What gives these new and strong convictions? Neither influence nor prejudice, neither argument nor imagination, but the truth appreciated by the power of God's Spirit.

Are we then to play fast and loose with divine truth? Nay, but it is a question of the Lord's way with those who are His and have yet to learn: is it to be in liberty or in bondage? Doubtless every Christian ought to keep the unity of the Spirit, as gathered to the name of the Lord and to none other. A saint cannot legitimately have two communions. Is not the communion of Christ's body in principle exclusive? Follow with all your soul the Lord Jesus, own the one body and one Spirit, receive every godly member of His in His name. In this there is neither looseness nor sectarianism. As the word of God is plain, so does the presence of the Spirit abide; nor do I allow that keeping the unity of that Spirit is a vain show. As He abides, so does His unity; and those who have received the Holy Spirit are bound to walk in that unity, and in none other. They are added of the Lord together, members of the assembly which God has formed for Himself in this world; and I deny the title of anyone to set up either rival or substitute. If you have His Spirit, you already belong to this one body, and are called to carry it out to the exclusion of all others.

Thus it is no voluntary society we have to do with. It is no question of framing something better than either nationalism or dissent, nor an alliance which really condemns, while ostensibly it sanctions, the existing institutions of orthodox Protestantism. The truth however is that, before all these essays, God had Himself formed. His church on earth; and such as have His Spirit are thereby constituted members, responsible to act accordingly. In His church leaven of doctrine or of practice is intolerable, if we bow to Scripture. Every Christian is bound to reject falsehood and unholiness, and this corporately as well as individually. For the ruin of the church does not shut us up to individuality. If we follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, it may and should be with those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Isolation it is a sin to seek, as being a denial of fellowship. The church of God means the assembly of those that are His. But if over so many, we are one bread, one body. As the Lord's Supper is the outward expression of this unity, it is unworthy of believers to complain that too much is made of His Supper and Table; for it is God who calls them His, not we who only cleave to His word and confide in His will. Doubtless we need to keep Christ in this before our eyes; if not, we are in danger of molding His Supper according to our will or caprice. If by the grace of God we have the Lord Jesus before us, our hearts will go out towards all that are His walking after a godly sort.

For a long time Satan has been endeavoring to falsify the testimony of Christ amongst those professedly gathered to His name. One of his wiles has been, under pretense of light and righteousness, to undermine grace and truth in recognizing freely the members of Christ's body. Utterly misconceiving the stand against neutrality, they would make no Christian welcome to the Lord's Table who did not judge his old position by more or less intelligence of the one body and one Spirit; that is, without a virtual pledge never again to enter their so-called church or chapel. This is, to my mind, not unbelief only but a bad and base principle. It is in an underhand way to make a sect of those that know the church, but really to prove how little they themselves appreciate the one body: else they could not let knowledge override relationship to Christ, as they do. Never is the church rightly or truly learned save within, according to the word, where you must leave room for growth in the truth by faith and God's grace.

There is then the danger of virtually denying Christ's membership by looking for an antecedent intelligence about His body which it is as unscriptural as unwise to expect, and the more wrong as it exists but feebly in many who have for years been in fellowship. But besides, there may be no less difficulty and danger among those already received, where the claim of truth or righteousness is pressed without grace. And those who are most wrong are apt to talk most loudly of that which they really imperil or unwittingly annul.

There are not many who remember the Plymouth division in 1845-6. Moral charges were not wanting either, but it mainly turned on an effort of a large and influential party which lost faith in the Lord's presence and the Holy Spirit's free action in the assembly, seeking independency with its leaders. It is needless to say that the heavenly character and the unity of the church had faded away, as well as waiting for the Lord Jesus as an immediate hope. God would not suffer in our midst such lack of faith and of faithfulness. But the mass of the saints were beguiled by the error, and deaf to the warning; and but few separated, branded as schismatics by those who boasted of their numbers, gifts, and happiness.

What was the relation of those who for the Lord's and the truth's sake were forced in conscience to stand apart? The high-minded majority utterly refused humiliation and rejoiced that those were outside from whom they had been long and with increasing bitterness alienated. The then minority met at first in private houses only to humble themselves and pray, as after a little to break bread. But they never thought of rejecting the poor famished sheep who occasionally sought to break bread with them, without severing their connection with Ebrington Street. For indeed they were not only bound there by many ties, but under great fear through the swelling words and persecuting deeds of their old leaders and friends, not least of sisters who played an unenviable part in that sad history. They had of course this moral safeguard that none committed in will to the Plymouth defection, especially no chief, but scorned the seceders. Only the simple came, and, because they came, were cut off by the Ebrington Street party. But we received them freely in the Lord's name, even though they might be weak enough to wish fellowship still with their old friends.

But the moment that the blasphemous heterodoxy as to Christ appeared, there was an end of all this forbearance. The door was closed on all that continued with an anti-Christian faction. As long as it was an ecclesiastical error, however firmly we refused it and came out from it, there was patience with those who failed to discern it or to judge it practically. Such known saints of Ebrington Street as came were cordially received; and who ever heard of even one in these circumstances refused? But on the contrary, when the false doctrine against Christ was known, an uncompromising stand was made from the first; and no soul was received thenceforward who did not clear himself from association with so deadly an insult to the Father and the Son. With partisans of that evil Bethesda identified itself, and necessitated the

world-wide division which ensued in 1848.

What then can be judged of those who confound these two things so fundamentally distinct? the ecclesiastical error, and the false doctrine as to Christ's person and relationship to God? or the ways to be pursued in each case?

The divisionist party of today seems to me as guilty of independency and clericalism as that of Ebrington Street in 1845. And, believing them to be thus false to the truth of the one Spirit and one body, I cannot but feel thankful for God's overruling grace in the midst of overwhelming sorrow. For their intolerance of others has taken the initiative; and they have either gone out from, or driven out (too often by unworthy maneuvers), their brethren whose one desire is to abide gathered, as we have so long been, to Christ's name. But they have proved their ignorance in the plainest way and to a surprising degree by prating malicious words about Bethesdaism, when they might know, if not blinded by haste and ill-feeling, that there is not allowed a shade of that evil for which Bethesda and the so-called neutrals were judged.

Let them beware lest, beginning with ecclesiastical error like Ebrington Street, they themselves fall ere long into like heterodoxy. I pray that in God's mercy our brethren may be spared such further sin and dishonor of the Lord. But detraction and neglect of Scripture and of facts, as well as inconsistency with all we have hitherto learned and done before God, are a slippery by-path; from which it would be joy indeed and great grace from the Lord to see them recede.

Courtesy of BibleTruthPublishers.com. Most likely this text has not been proofread. Any suggestions for spelling or punctuation corrections would be warmly received. Please email them to: BTPmail@bibletruthpublishers.com.

The Unity of the Spirit, Unity of the Spirit, The: Part 2

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

Eph. 4:3

Behind these public and settled aberrations from the will of God about His children, it will be found that there lie predisposing causes that grieve the Holy Ghost and hinder the true and spiritual perception of the saint. The most personal and perhaps most common hindrances flow from the state of the soul, through ignorance of a full delivering gospel. Sin in these circumstances has never been thoroughly judged as before God, and consequently deliverance (Rom. 8:2) is but partially, if at all, known even in principle. Still less is there the power of the Spirit in unsparing application of death with Christ to self practically. Perhaps even the forgiveness of sins as a complete thing has been but feebly apprehended, as made apparent by the notion of the need of a fresh recurrence to the blood of Christ, or (as others would put it) of a constant process of cleansing going on, which they ground on a misunderstanding of the present tense in 1 John 1:7, ignorantly reducing it from its moral import to mere actual time. Others again have a wholly superficial and even fallacious view of the world, as if it were now all consecrated to the Christian by that cross of Christ, whereby on the contrary the Christian is crucified to the world, and the world is crucified to him.

The flesh and the world being thus inadequately judged according to God's word in the light of the risen Christ, the heart is not in communion with God touching all within and without. Though there may be the utmost zeal for souls as far as their danger and God's pardoning grace are understood, and true and burning love that Christ should be honored in their blessing, nature still has a large place, and the word and Spirit of God do not absolutely govern the heart separate to Him who is dead, risen, and on high. In such a condition how can souls be expected to form a sound or spiritual judgment on the church, complicated as the question now is by its ruined state? They value science, letters, philosophy, which exalt the flesh, as well as associations which allow of ease and honor in the world. From lack of intelligence in the word, and feeble sense of fellowship with the Father and the Son, they fail to judge the present evil age and are absorbed in "their own things," if not ever seeking greater. They are consequently in danger of being the victims of prejudice and prepossession. They do not give to Christ His due and supreme place in a practical way; nor do they freely rise above brotherly kindness into the purer atmosphere of love according to God, so as to care for the church unselfishly as Christ's body. They are not prepared to break fully through the vain conversation which tradition has generated as much in Christendom as of old in Judaism. They shrink from the trying consequences which unhesitating and thorough obedience of the truth must entail on every one who is subject to the Lord. The eye is not single, and therefore the body is not full of light; the path looks uncertain, the word seems difficult, and danger appears to lie in the faith that follows the Lord at all cost.

Are we then to fall back on prudence and require a certain measure of intelligence before reception? This is just one main mischief that has to be ever assiduously avoided, and treated as a mistake in principle, yea, a sin against Christ and the church. Nor could anything more directly tend to make the most sectarian of all sects than to exact, from the souls who seek to come in, a right judgment as to truth least known by the saints, the mystery of Christ, or in particular the one body for them made harder still, as it is apt to be in practice, by sections growing out of the actual fallen condition of Christendom.

Never was such a requirement heard of, even when the church began and the presence of the Holy Spirit was a wholly new thing. Saints were received on the confession of Christ's name, God having given to all the like gift, His seal and passport. The intelligence was on the part of those who recognized the worth of that Name and the gift of the Spirit as to themselves at the beginning. Had they claimed intelligence of the church as a condition of fellowship, it would have really proved their own lack of intelligence, and counteracted that for which Christ died—the gathering together in one of God's scattered children.

Has the present ruin of the church altered this primary principle? The firm foundation of God stands, but with this seal: The Lord knows them that are His; and, Let every one that names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity. What bears His name is like a great house with vessels of honor, and vessels of dishonor, from which last a man has to purge himself, if he would himself be a vessel of honor, sanctified, meet for the Master's use, prepared unto every good work. If the public state be evil, individual fidelity to Christ is imperative: unity is not to overbear it, nor bind the Christian to unite the Lord's name with unrighteousness. Personal purity is to be followed also; and this not in isolation but

with those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Not a word about requiring ecclesiastical or doctrinal intelligence, but "with those that call" &c., i.e., with real saints in a day of lax and hollow profession.

At a later day, "the last hour" of John, we see how strongly the Spirit of God insists on first principles. "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" In presence of many antichrists, Christ abides the touchstone. The Spirit holds to His person unhesitatingly. To add ought is to take from Him, to dishonor His name.

Is then knowledge of truth or growth in spiritual intelligence to be slighted? In no way; but it is false and vain to require either as a preliminary condition from saints who seek fellowship according to God. Help them, instruct them, lead them on in both. This is a time service, but arduous withal. The other is sectarian, and wrong.

If there are any who plead for so great a departure from Scripture and more especially from the characteristic truth of God's assembly, let them betray their new invention in opposition to the Lord, that others also may fear. Christ ever abides the one test, the only center, to whom the Holy Spirit gathers. What the Lord declared just before the church began remains even more manifestly true, now that He is dishonored in the house of His new friends no less than in that of His old. "He that is not with Me is against Me, and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad." (Matt. 12:30.) It is imperative to be with Christ for one's soul, in order to please God and not dishonor His Son; but there is now the privilege and duty of gathering, as well as of individual allegiance; and he who does not gather with Him only scatters, whatever appearances may say to the contrary. It is the once rejected and dead, the now risen and glorified, Christ, who is the attractive center; and hence the sign of His death in the breaking of bread is equally the sign of the one body, which they in effect deny and contemn who would restrain it to their few, refusing "the many," that is, all whom Christ contemplates and welcomes. He has not asked this at their hands; nor does He sanction such action in His word. And if not warranted of Him, what is it but party and arbitrary restriction, which does not refuse the vile only but the precious, unless they fall in with their unauthorized course whether they think it right or not?

Thus the direct tendency is to coerce and demoralize; for what is sought is not conviction on ground of Scripture, but, where there is no conviction, a blindfold subjection, a bare and often reluctant and unhappy acquiescence, an appearance of fellowship which is no longer living but dead. For the Spirit we have received is assuredly a spirit, not of fear, but of power and love and a sound mind; and in no way does He endorse what is thus formal in character, under human pressure or influence. The consequence is terrible: a premium to the more vaulting and turbulent spirits, who now more than ever would "hold the reins;" the comparative retirement, from their just and grace-given place, of those who care not to rule save in the fear of the Lord and by His word; the destruction of moral principle in such (and they are very many) as seek to silence their disapproval of the movement as a whole and in detail, either by attachment to leaders, or in holding to the greater number, which they fondly call unity. Protest (say some), but stay within; that is, protest but only in word! This we used to regard as the painful compromise of place-loving evangelicals; now do we not see it standing where it ought not? It is anything but truth and right; and this unity!

But there is all the difference of truth and error, on the one hand, between consistency with the unity of the Spirit for Christ's glory, carried out in holiness and grace according to His word, and, on the other, the self-deceived and misleading abuse of unity to cry up a party bent on division with violence, which refused humiliation and prayer to arrest the evil, and declared Scripture needless for its, demands or its justification.

No intelligent saint would ask for a positive letter of commandment, like a Jew; no one expects a modern place or passing circumstance to be named in the Scripture: to speak as if anything of the sort were sought is to evade and condemn oneself yet more. Where is the scriptural principle for turning a local difference into a wedge of universal division? Beyond controversy, when a question is raised with a world-wide scattering of the saints as the penalty, all who love the church are bound to be assured that the test is of God according to His Word.

Some of us remember such a test more than thirty years ago. But then it was whether we could consent to make a true or a false Christ an open question. This we rejected with horror, when a large company of saints adhered to their leaders (even while they ignored the judgment of the assembly where the evil occurred), who let in the known partisans of a proved anti-Christian teacher, and denied formally their responsibility to judge it solemnly for themselves.

This was no test of man. It is the certain distinct requirement of the Lord. We are divinely commanded to reject any who bring not the doctrine of Christ. (2 John.) This goes far beyond the dealing due to those who act independently or make a sect. No ecclesiastical error, however real or grave, could justify such rigor. The foundation truth of Christ demands it. We owe it to Him who is our Lord, who died for us, whose glory the word guards as nothing else. To say that then it was a question of the Head, now of the body, in order to put the two as much as possible on a level, is both want of faith in Him and want of intelligence in the word. It is an undue and even unholy exalting of the church, and so not only an unspiritual blunder but an evident excuse for yielding to sectarianism. We should never have been warranted to have acted as we did in 1848-9, if Christ had not been blasphemed. As a test it is absolutely unscriptural to equalize the church with Him, even if it had been true, which it was not of late, that the one body was at stake, for the meeting wrongly begun was nowhere recognized.

The comparison is a sophism. For the question of old was not about Christ as Head at all, but about His person and relationship to God as such. An antichrist was taught; it was not a mere failure, bad as this may be, in holding His headship. And so far now from maintaining the unity of the Spirit, so far from acting faithfully on the ground of the one body, the object has been and is to force on us the recognition of a meeting which had deliberately gone out and set up in self-will as a party, a meeting that never yet adequately and honestly owned these public sins to those against whom they sinned, not to say to all saints. The aim, of course, really was division, for no sober Christian thought such ways right; but certain were resolved, cost what it might, to sever between those prepared to accept as of God a meeting guilty of unjudged party work, and those who cannot but reject such independency for Christ's and the church's sake.

If this is not a human test, and as the result a sect, it would be hard to find either; for the ground is not even a difference of doctrine, still less as to Christ, but at most a question of discipline, even if the discipline were right. But I will go further. Take the hope of the return of the Lord

Jesus. You know how very important it is for Christians to be waiting in truth and heart for Christ from heaven; but would you require that those who seek fellowship in the name of the Lord should understand and confess that hope before you receive them in the Lord? Would not this be a sect? Be it that your assertion of the Christian hope is ever so right, and that the person in quest of fellowship is ever so ignorant on that subject; but who authorizes you or others to stand at the door and forbid his entrance? Perhaps by entertaining some wrong thought, he may fancy that the Christian, like the Jew, or the Gentile in Rev. 7, has to go through the great final tribulation. Granted that he little understands the place of the Christian from not seeing his union with Christ in heaven, which is made known by the Holy Spirit in this day. Hence he is in confusion and knows not that the Lord will come and take His own before the days of that terrible retribution which is coming upon the world. He may even share the thoughts of men as unwise as any in Thessalonica and fall into the delusion of trying to escape the great tribulation, as some did forty years ago by going to Canada. Too much occupied with prophecy, they had lost or never known the true hope of Christ's coming; and whenever we get absorbed with anything, whether prophecy, or the church, or the gospel, rather than with Christ, what but grace can hinder us from going farther astray?

And this brings me to the main point I would now press. The unity of the Spirit embraces not only the intelligent but the simplest of God's children; it contemplates the body of Christ, and all the members in particular. For those who believe the gospel of salvation have the Holy Ghost dwelling in them and are Christ's members. They are therefore responsible to walk, as we are to own Him, in that relationship which grace has given to all. As members of Christ's body, they are bound diligently to keep the unity of the Spirit. There are national bodies and dissenting societies which have within them many, if not the mass, of God's children; and these systems, by claiming to be churches, prove a great perplexity to the believer. The evil of party, which showed itself in the early days, not only repeats itself, but works now with very great aggravation. Notwithstanding, grace would strengthen those who seek to do Christ's will according to their true relationship. It is man, and man pushed on by the enemy, that makes stumbling-blocks and difficulties great, yea in appearance insuperable, so that the children of God may be tempted to give up true unity. Of course every faithful servant of the Lord has to seek, if not the removal of these obstacles, at least to help God's children in surmounting them. In a day of growing confusion, the constant effort of the enemy is to deceive and baffle and make it seem hopeless to keep the unity of the Spirit.

It is for us to consider whether we are using diligence to keep that unity in peace. No doubt there are internal dispositions or conditions requisite to do it aright. Some say the mystery must be known. Of such intelligence I do not doubt the importance in its place and time; but of this the apostle hints not a word here. What does he say? "With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love." Such are the declared and worthy qualities which the apostle seeks in those who would keep the unity of the Spirit.

And is it not well for us to challenge our souls, whether our confidence is in the apostle's word or in man's theories? O that we might cultivate such ways of grace as these in ourselves, and urge them on others, in order to a walk worthy of our calling! Can we doubt that it is in this condition only that we can duly keep that unity: not in haste, or harshness, not in impatience of others or self-confidence, but with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love? There was need of all this then: is it less indispensable in our greater difficulties now?

For then there was no perplexity through open rivals, no competitors for the claim of God's assembly on earth. The main hindrance was from within. Now there are those and other obstacles. Am I connected with any association which ignores the One body and one Spirit? Am I attached to anything that systematically opposes this unity? It is not a question merely of wrong persons coming in unawares; for the fatal thing is not that evil should enter, but that it is known and allowed. What evil things did not effect an entrance into the assembly even in apostolic days? But God owns the unity as of the Spirit so long as there is the true-hearted purpose, in dependence on the Lord and according to His word, to keep or purge out evil. It is not the entrance or amount or even character of evil that destroys the assembly, but the continued acceptance of it under the Lord's name, even when, it is known.

But God will not sanction in His assembly the allowance of any real evil whatever; and evil, no matter what its shape or measure, must be judged as inconsistent with His presence who dwells there. The assembly is the pillar and ground of the truth: how then can falsehood be a matter of indifference in the house of the living God? Christ is the truth; and, without controversy, great is the mystery of piety. Hence the church's intolerance of that which undermines Christ. There must be the disallowance of all leaven where the feast of Christ the paschal Lamb is kept. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump; and none can be tolerated, be it moral, as in 1 Cor. 5, or doctrinal, as in Gal. 5. If one called a brother be characterized by corruption or violence, by ways wholly opposed to the truth and character of Christ and to the very nature of God, he must be excluded from His assembly.

What then is to be done if we find views, judgments, and principles at work which trench on and narrow, and so really counteract, the Spirit's unity? What if unscriptural tests be pressed so as to shut out deliberately souls at least as godly as themselves? What if conscience toward God be not respected, if there be no longer room for liberty in the Spirit and responsibility to the Lord Jesus? Were it merely an opinion of one or more, which was held without forcing it on others, there would be in this no sufficient ground for resistance. It would be sad to see saints preoccupied with their little theories in presence of Christ and that word which lives and abides forever. Ordinarily it would suffice to express regret at, and protest against, what one might believe unsuitable among Christians; for we are called to peace and forbearance as well as fidelity. If you find in others what you cannot approve of, does not Scripture amply forewarn you of this, and call for patience, whilst looking to the Lord?

The children of God, called though they be to the enjoyment and expression of Christ, habitually demand the exercise of long-suffering and grace, as beyond doubt you yourself draw largely on the forbearance of your brethren. It cannot seriously be expected that those who compose the church of God should forego the character of a family, with its fathers, young men, and babes, to imitate an army under martial law. Regimental order is as far as possible from that which the written word prescribes to God's church, where, instead of a regulation standard, the utmost variety prevails, high and low, strong and weak, or even uncomely. 1 Cor. 12.

Scripture lays down the rule by which foreign elements, if they enter, are to be tried; and as there are manifold evils that may seek a footing, so there are distinct scriptures that apply to each case, from private rebuke to public censure, or in the last resort putting away. Those who cause divisions and stumblings are to be avoided; the factious, after a first and second admonition, to be refused; the disorderly, to be withdrawn from; those that sin, to be reprovved before all; the wicked, to be put away. Reserve and rebid e have their application, no less than

the extreme sentence of excision.

Nor would one deny the just practice of declaring outside these who have either gone away, willfully refusing all admonition, or who audaciously despise and deny the unquestioned assembly by setting up another meeting, and so render admonition to be scarce more than a form.

The Unity of the Spirit, Unity of the Spirit, The: Part 1

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

Eph. 4:3

It is needless for one to insist at length on that which is sufficiently plain to every Christian reader—the importance which God attaches to keeping the unity of the Spirit. It is true that “endeavoring” fails to give the real force of the word employed by the Spirit of God. “Endeavoring” is an expression which in the ordinary language of the day is habitually applied to that which men essay or seek after, even if they have not a hope of accomplishing. They feel that they may fail, but at any rate they try or “endeavor” to do this or that. Such is not the meaning of the word here, but rather zeal in heeding and carrying out what is already true, giving diligence “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” This, however, shows that not mere effort to attain, but earnestness to maintain, is the exhortation intended.

For the unity of the Spirit is to faith a subsisting fact; and the keeping it is no less our present duty. It is not that we have unity of ours to make, or that God is to make it for us in heaven by and by. It is here, and now that the Spirit has formed this unity the keeping of which is clearly our responsibility on earth. No doubt there is much to learn from the fact that it really is, as it is called, “the unity of the Spirit.” It is not at all mere unity on our part, nor is it the unity of the body, though this is one result, but of the Holy Ghost who baptized into one body all who believe, whether Jews or Gentiles, bond or free. It puts forward the Divine agent, the efficient source and power of unity, the Holy Spirit; but it supposes and includes the one body, which itself is so positive and permanent a reality that expressions often used about it are proved thereby incorrect. Of rending the body we hear in man's language or writings, never in God's word. Just as a bone of Christ was not to be broken, so the body of Christ, the church, cannot be rent. “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as there is one hope of our calling.” These are the vital, abiding, and unchangeable truths in that new relationship. As surely as one Spirit has been sent down from heaven, there is but one body on earth; but that which the members of the body are called to keep is the unity of the Spirit.

It is not, as many interpret it, the unity of our spirits where the Lord guides one and all in communion with the Father and the Son, which is no doubt a very desirable, right, and blessed thing in its place, but provided for rather in John 17:21, 22, than here. “That all might be one,” in the Gospel of John, refers to our rising by grace above all that would set or keep us apart, one in the Father and the Son. So the Lord asked for us of the Father, that we might be characterized by unity. But in the scripture before us, as in the writings of Paul generally, at least where the “body” is introduced, it is another truth attaching to the same objects, yet not at all a contingent or changeable condition of soul, but the permanent and blessed fact, that God has established unity for His own glory by the presence of His Spirit, who has united us to Christ our exalted Head in heaven.

There is since Pentecost a divine unity on the earth; not the mere aggregate of the individuals evermore called by grace, but those now made one by the Spirit of God. There is thus a divine corporation on the earth, if one may be allowed to use so familiar an expression. This divine society here below is not formed by the will of the persons who compose it, although it is to be supposed that their hearts if right and intelligent thoroughly go along with the grace that so united them. But the church or assembly of God is formed by God's will; as it was purposed by His grace, so is it made good livingly by His power, the Holy Ghost being the effectuator of this blessed unity. Hence the Spirit of God for that very reason has the deepest and the most intimate interest in carrying out this unity for Christ's glory according to the counsels of the Father. It is called the unity of the Spirit; yet let none imagine that he can intelligently keep the unity of the Spirit and forget for a moment in principle or practice the one body of Christ.

There are, of course, various ways in which the saints may fail to keep this unity; but there are two general though opposite directions in which the failure may work, which are as prevalent as they are manifest. The first is by setting up a unity larger than that of the Spirit; the second by making it less. There may be a worldly looseness on the one hand, or mere partyism on the other; and the danger is so great that only God's Spirit can keep us looking to Christ by the word. Whatever may be the object or excuse, the will of man himself of course is at bottom the motive at work in opposition to God's will.

In the first case men are prone to enlarge the unity. They insist on taking in multitudes beyond the members of the body of Christ, souls recognized as of Christ without adequate ground for it. Oh what dishonor to that excellent Name! I speak not of infirmity in accrediting any supposed to be true, but of the deliberate intention to accept, and treat as belonging to Christ's body, persons who do not themselves even profess to be His members, and have evidently never passed from death unto life. Rome, it is true, had so done in its medieval sway over the west; and the Eastern bodies, the Greeks, Nestorians, &c., were no better, any more than the Catholic church before that great rent which set them at variance. They had all sought and received the world by means of fleshly ordinances, apart from faith and the reception of the Spirit. The Reformation, much as it did, in no adequate way rectified this radical error. Protestantism rejected the woman ruling over the nations, and if possible all nations; but, ignorant of the unity of the Spirit, it set up in each realm, where its influence extended, its own independent religion as by law established.

Such is the well-known principle of nationalistic bodies, wherever found, whether in England or in Scotland, in Germany or in Holland. They profess to receive all decent people in the districts or parishes. It is avowedly a religion for every body, and in no way the intention or the desire to incorporate none that are not living members of Christ. Birth or local connections are allowed unless there be open scandal. There is no demand of life or faith, still less of the gift of the Holy Ghost, as of old (Acts 11:16, 17). It is rather such a pattern as Israel affords, not the church wherein is neither Jew nor Greek but all are one in Christ Jesus. It is a question of family life and of geographical limits, and people are

not Israelites or heathen but own the Christian religion, being in what is commonly called a national church; yet is it not clear that in a national church the unity of the Spirit cannot possibly be kept? One may be a true Christian, or child of God, but there is neither, the thought nor the possibility for a member of a national church to keep therein "the unity of the Spirit." Hence they speak of the Church of England, not of the church of God in England: still less do they contemplate all that are Christ's on the earth.

The fact is that, in escaping from Babylon, they have come to acknowledge a unity wholly different from, and opposed, to that of the Spirit. They have set up a unity which, if carried out with complete success, would comprehend the whole nation, saving perhaps those who eschew all show of religion. For I do not forget that the Rubric provides against heinous or manifest scandal. Notoriously, however, in every quarter, and almost in every family, there may be persons of more or less respectability, moral and amiable men, who know they are not born of God, and would shrink from pretending to be members of Christ, if they were not misled to claim the place on ritual ground. Most of these would shrink from being called "saints," and hesitate not to apply the word as a cant term of reproach to God's children who are not ashamed to call themselves what they are.

Clearly then such as disclaim the name thus are not saints, unless you can honestly conceive of a believer so sunk or dark as to make a scorn of God's designation for His children. And you may rest assured without a doubt that he who thinks and talks so does not walk as becomes a saint. Now if a man is not what scripture calls a saint, he is certainly not a Christian, except for God's judgment of his hollow profession. Is it not plain that a Christian is a saint, and a good deal more? There were saints in Old Testament times; there were saints before the cross of Christ; but were they really Christians so called? A Christian is a saint since redemption, one who is separated to God by faith of the gospel, in the power of the Holy Ghost, on the ground of the work of Christ. Whatever he may have been naturally before, God has quickened him together with Christ, having forgiven all his offenses; and now, brought nigh by the blood of Christ, he draws near to God as a child. He is also a member of Christ's body.

Now these are the persons who are called in the bond of peace to keep with diligence the unity of the Spirit, setting their faces against everything which might falsify that unity. It is not merely that the spirit inwardly, and the personal conduct outwardly, must be suitable to it, which of course is true; but if the affections and walk were ever so excellent, it would be a serious thing for the Christian to annul or overlook the expression of that unity. Yet does not every, believer dishonor it who owns any unity whatever that is not of the Holy Ghost? If he owns the fellowship of nationalism in this or any other country, is it not clear that he is off the ground on which scripture places all the saints? As a nationalist, how can he be keeping the unity of the Spirit? He may behave as a true child of God otherwise; he may in general walk worthy of all respect and love; and certainly he ought to be an object of tender concern to any who are zealous in keeping the unity of the Spirit. For if true to their calling they must pray for the deliverance of all the children of God who are not in this following the will and word of the Lord Jesus.

Unquestionably those who own a unity which takes in the flesh, on the basis of rites open to all the world, are on ground far wider than that of the Spirit, and cannot be walking in accordance with it. True unity is exclusive of every other; as you cannot serve two masters, you cannot share a twofold communion. The unity of the Spirit admits of no rival.

But there is another, form of departure from the truth which may hinder God's children from keeping the unity of the Spirit. They may by misuse of doctrine or discipline form a unity not only in fact but in principle and design narrower than Christ's body. Are such on God's ground? I trow not. They may openly draw up their own form of government, or they may privily have an understood, though unwritten, system of rules which exclude saints as godly as themselves who cannot accept these rules. Here we have a sect. Their decrees are not the commandments of the Lord, yet they become practically as authoritative as His word, or (as is usual) yet more so. What is it for men to pretend that they have no human rules, when they introduce some unheard of conditions of fellowship, here rigidly, there loosely, according to varying policy or the caprice of their rulers on those who come within their range? Anything of this nature takes the shape, not exactly of nationalism, but of sectarianism, which (instead of too wide or loose borders) rather seeks to split up those who should be together, making their communion express their difference from their brethren, and in no way standing together on that unity which is of God. It is in principle sectarianism; and if they know better, they are more guilty than ordinary dissenters.

Under this head we find God's children often scattered through the pressure of questionable and even wrong discipline, or of unduly urged if not false doctrine. Some prefer a communion which is distinctively Arminian, or decidedly Calvinistic. Some might press particular views as to the coming and kingdom of Christ; others as to ministry, bishops, elders, &c.; others again as to baptism, the mode or the subjects. These ecclesiastical legislators seem not at all aware that their abuse of these doctrines or practices is incompatible with keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, they themselves being wrong, if not in their views, at least in the way they are pressed.

One Body and One Spirit, One Body and One Spirit: Part 3

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

The case of Paul in Acts 13, which is sometimes referred to in proof of the necessity of a human commission, proves in fact the contrary. It would be strange indeed if it did, seeing that in Gal. 1:1 he takes such pains to insist that he was an apostle, "not of men" (i.e., as the source), "nor by man" (as the channel). He had been preaching for years, before this separation by the Spirit to the special work recorded in Acts 13; 14 Further, those who fasted and prayed and laid their hands on him and Barnabas had been cherished and taught by them, as by those who were over them in the Lord. To such an imposition of hands I know of no objection. It pretends to confer neither gift nor authority, but is a simple commendation to the grace of God, which it would seem might be repeated (Acts 15:40). Is there one feature in common with the ordination of our day and for ages? Is it possible that Christians, in order more thoroughly to justify a modern ordination by Acts 13, have pretended that Paul was only an inferior apostle, a messenger of the church—like Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25)? But see Acts 14:4; Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 9:1-6; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; Gal. 1:2; 1 and 2 Tim. 1:1; Titus 1:1; where, if we may so say, the highest form of the apostolate is claimed, and its entire independence of man.

It is too often forgotten that Matthias was chosen Jewishly, by lot, before the Holy Ghost was sent down from heaven to baptize the believers. The church, properly speaking, was not yet manifested. His election therefore can furnish no precedent for a state of things which was changed and governed by the presence of the Spirit. Nor do we read of the use of lots ever afterward. The Moravian system, with its usual and blind servility, has tried to copy this and other forms which were peculiar to Jerusalem.

In the instance of Timothy, there were prophecies going before (1 Tim. 1:18), and an actual gift imparted by prophecy, with the imposition of the hands of the presbyters (4:14), and by the imposition of Paul's hands (2 Tim. 1:6) a case which it is not only impracticable to imitate without an apostle and duly chosen presbytery, not to speak of prophecy, but which is a mischievous pretension, unless there is the power to bestow the gift which was bestowed then. May God deliver His people from saying, "I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing!"

Lastly, in 2 Tim. 2:2 it is evident that the question is one, not of authority to appoint successors, but of communicating the things which Timothy had heard of the apostle by many witnesses. It was not to consecrate a clergy, but to commit sound doctrine to faithful men who should be able to teach others also.

On the other hand the dissenting principle of electing a pastor is purely human, derived not even from Judaism, much less from Christianity. Hear the testimony of one who was himself thus chosen, the author of "Spiritual Despotism" (p. 153). "It is not without some amazement that we find a congregational church, on the modern scheme, proceeding in the momentous act of creating or electing to itself a pastor and teacher, without being able to allege from the New Testament any law or license to that effect, or any one example, satisfactory or unsatisfactory On secular principles nothing can be more simple or reasonable than that those who pay should command; and in the present temper of mankind, especially in certain circles, it may be nearly impracticable to secure submission to any other law. Nevertheless this serious question returns upon us, Is this the law or this the principle recognized as the basis of church polity in the New Testament? We are compelled to answer, It is not."

Yet some have professed to see it in Acts 14:23; "When they had ordained (or chosen, as seems better) them elders in every church." But this proves not that the church, but that they (i.e., Paul and Barnabas) chose the elders. Some argue from the etymology; but usage, not etymology, is the only safe guide. The word (χειροτονέω) meant originally to stretch out the hand. Hence, it was applied to voting in this manner, and by an easy transition to choosing without reference to the manner. Thus in Acts 10:41 the same word, compounded with a preposition, is applied to God's choice, where the notion of the church's voting is of course excluded. When it was a question of a gracious and prudent use of tables, or the like, as in Acts 6 and 2 Cor. 8:19, the assembly, or assemblies, did choose; though even in Acts, if the multitude of the disciples looked out seven faithful men, it was the apostles who appointed them over their business. In short, when God imparts a gift, He chooses; when the church gives what she can, she may employ what instrument seems to her fitting. As she cannot bestow a ministerial gift, neither ought she to choose, but to receive all those whom God has given for her good.

As to elders, then, an apostle chooses (Acts 14:23) or leaves a delegate for a season during his own life to appoint them (Titus 1:5-9), or describes to another the requisite qualities (1 Tim. 3:2-7). In no case is the church invited to select them. The saints had no such authority, even in their brightest days. No epistle addressed to a church touches the question, and fitly so. It was not their mission. Titus was left in Crete expressly to set in order what the apostle had left undone, and to appoint elders in every city, as the apostle had appointed him and none else. Afterward he was to come to the apostle in Nicopolis (Titus 3:12). You cannot have the one without the other. This is the sum of what scripture states, unless we add the "angels" of the seven churches in the Book of Revelation. But "angel" is neither a gift nor a charge, but a moral representative of each church, and only introduced for special purpose in this great prophecy. Hence all systems with almost equal unreality try to fit in the "angel" to suit their aim. It applies in fact to no such thing, but to the introduction of a judicial book. The apostle looked, and taught the church to look, for the coming of the Lord as their immediate hope. This of course stimulated and in no way hindered present care for the sheep; but it was inconsistent with perpetuating official organs for ages to come. Accordingly we find no such arrangements in the Epistles.

But as for gifts they rest on quite another ground; not upon apostles who might be removed, but upon Christ, who never ceases to be the head and source of nourishment, and cannot but love and cherish His body the church. These gifts never needed man's sanction, even when apostles lived. Christ dealt them without the intervention of any; so that what Paul said of his own apostolate might be said in principle of them all, "Not of men, nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead." I speak of course of the manner and source of the gifts, not of their measure.

As regards discipline, it is of the utmost importance to bear in mind that it does not depend on gifts, offices, or any other thing than the blessed fact that the body, the church, is Christ's body, is gathered in His name, and has the Holy Ghost present to guide and energize its movements. He is, we may say, the soul of this holy and heavenly body. Hence the fullest directions respecting discipline, either in putting away or in restoring, were given to the Corinthian church, where it would seem there were at the time no elders. That there might be and were churches without elders is manifest from Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5. The churches existed before any such charges were appointed. Elders were desirable no doubt for the administration of a church, but by no means indispensable to its being. Certain it is that at Corinth elders are not alluded to, and the disorders which broke out there are pressed home on the entire body. Nor does the Spirit, in correcting the abuses, suspend their functions as a church until elders were duly appointed. On the contrary, whether it be the extreme and solemn act of excision, or the worthy celebration of the Lord's Supper, it is the body which is addressed, rebuked, and charged with ceasing to do evil, and learning to do well, in all these grave particulars. And this is the more striking, as it is clear that there were among them those who came behind in no gift (1 Cor. 1:7); that, at any rate, the household of Stephanas addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints, and that the believers in general are besought to submit themselves to such. It is not the laborers, I repeat, but the body which is appealed to in matters which the common consent of a fallen church has made the peculiar and distinguishing province of the clerical or ministerial order.

Doubtless where overseers were, as at Philippi or Ephesus, they in their exercise of a godly care would naturally and justly have a large share of the practical details; and the more so as an appeal to the church is the last and most painful resort (Matt. 18:15-17), the urgent object being to restore the soul, if so it may be in the Lord. But the known sin of a Christian affects the conscience of the body, for it is one body; and if not judged, a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. If the offender mourn and depart from the evil after a godly sort, he is restored,

and all rejoice; if he continue in that which dishonors Christ, the body must be cleared at all cost. "Purge out, therefore, the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us; therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth,... For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Put away from among yourselves the wicked person." Further, scripture even more sternly deals with false doctrine; because it is subtle, more poisonous in its effects, and touches the Lord Himself more directly than a bad walk. It is ever a work of the flesh, and may be emphatically of Satan far more than a mere carnal spirit of action. (See Gal. 5: 9-21; Rom. 16:17, 18; 1 Tim. 1:18, 20; 6:3-5; 2 Tim. 2:23-26; 3:6; 4:3, 4; Titus 3:9-11; 1 John 4:1-6; 2 John 10, 11; Rev. 2:14, 15, 23, 24).

As it is the body which puts away, so it is equally for the body, under His direction Who dwells therein, to restore. God may use the instruments He sees fit to rouse the body to a remembrance of Christ's holiness in excluding a wicked person (1 Cor. 5), and of Christ's grace in forgiving and restoring a repentant brother (2 Cor. 2). In either case it is the conscientious action of the body which the Lord expects. If everything fail to awaken—if, in spite of patient testimony, the assembly persist in doing or cloaking evil, and so in tarnishing the Lord's name, the claim to be His body becomes null and void. It is an entirely corrupt lump, from which the Spirit, who loves Christ, would have us to separate, instead of wasting our energies in the effort to amend that which is irremediable, and only waiting for the judgment of the Lord.

There remains but one more difficulty for us to state and seek to remove. It has been supposed that the assertion of the failure of the church forces us to say that we in these last days cannot have recourse to the Epistles to the Corinthians, etc.; and so to fall back upon the promise—"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst." The present pamphlet of itself is a sufficient answer to as hardy a charge as could well be made. It has been proved that nationalism and dissent cannot defend the principles of their membership or of their ministry by such scriptures as 1 Cor. 10; 11; 12; 14; 16.; Eph. 4, etc. The great truth of the church as being God's habitation through the Spirit, Who is the sole energy and distributor of the gifts of Christ in the unity of the whole body, is recognized by neither; it could not be practically owned for one moment without condemning both in all their varieties. Are all our brethren responsible to own this truth whatever may be the results of their confession? If they are not, let it be openly said.

But if the church once lived, rejoiced, suffered, in realizing the blessedness of such a place, where and what are we? Are we not to feel, are we not to confess, are we not to have done with, all the evil known to us, which has overspread the professing body and made it a witness against Christ, not for Him? If I find myself honoring as the church of God a society or system whose laws are inconsistent with the leading scriptural principles of that church, am I not to confess my sin, and come out from the unclean thing? or am I to abide and sin on, that grace may abound? This is the true question.

It is now admitted by almost every Christian of moderate spirituality and intelligence, that the existing ecclesiastical condition, national or dissenting, is not to be defended, if we compare it with the word of God. Not merely in the detail is it wrong, but in its fundamental principles. Hence it is that some eminent names in the religious world boldly avow that the word of God, though perfect as regards individual justification, leaves men to their own discretion in the formation and government of churches: virtually they say we ought not to have recourse to such Epistles as 1 Corinthians etc. for the present direction. One party is satisfied with things as they are; another yearns for a church of the future, wherein man may have things on a grander scale.

But if the saint of God shrinks from so fearful a principle as casting away the word of God which displays and demonstrates the infidelity of the church to its calling, what is he to do? Can a Christian hesitate? Is he not at once to cease from the evil he feels, and to humble himself before God for the failure of himself and the church? And if he knows two or three disciples meeting in Christ's name and opening the door wide that the Holy Ghost may act holily and fully, according to the blessed word He has written and by whom He will, will he not gladly find himself there? Instead of using Matt. 18:20 as a license to do what is right in their own eyes, will they not thus gathered, learn to their joy that Jesus is ever faithful? Will they not bless God for the authority and sufficiency of His blessed word? And, if there be any difference, for the proved comfort and living applicability of the very scriptures, which their adversaries say they cannot have recourse to? Will they not afresh thank Him for the Holy Ghost, Who loves to act in the body as well as in the members, to the glory of the Lord Jesus?

It is God we need, it is the living God we have to do with, and not principles merely. His presence only can give power and blessing, even when the principles are right in themselves. This is what we seek, knowing that the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

W. K.

Courtesy of BibleTruthPublishers.com. Most likely this text has not been proofread. Any suggestions for spelling or punctuation corrections would be warmly received. Please email them to: BTPmail@bibletruthpublishers.com.

One Body and One Spirit, One Body and One Spirit: Part 2

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

As is the ground of membership, so it is of ministry. It is of God's Spirit. If not, it is nothing or worse, and ought to be so treated by all those who honor God rather than man. If a Christian be an evangelist, he is so everywhere, and not restricted to this or that district, congregation, or chapel. If he be a teacher or a pastor, or both, he of course exercises his gift where he usually resides. But then he is not the teacher, but a teacher:1 and he is a teacher in the church, and not in a church. "We," says the apostle, writing to far distant saints whom as yet he had not seen—"we, being many are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." He is not speaking of what was to be in heaven, but of what actually was on earth, the unity of Christ's body here below. "Having then gifts differing," etc.

So (1 Cor. 3) in meeting the carnal, because exclusive, preference of one servant of Christ above another, the apostle presses the broad and blessed truth, "All things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas," etc. It was a sectarian spirit in respect of those who ministered that

Paul rebuked.

It is the same principle in 1 Cor. 12:18-28: "But now God set the members each one of them in the body, as it pleased [him]. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of you. Nor, again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: and those members of the body, which we think to be less honorable, upon these we bestow more abundant honor: and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness; but our comely parts have no need. But God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honor to that part which lacked that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church; first, apostles; secondarily, prophets; thirdly, teachers; after that, miracles; then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." "God set some in the church," not in a church. Viewed as churches, apostles could be in but few. There were none in the church at Corinth when Paul wrote. Teachers stand clearly on the same base: apostles in the church, teachers in the church.

Again, in Eph. 4:11-16, whether apostles, or prophets, whether evangelists, or pastors and teachers, they are given of Christ, not to be the solitary officials of a denomination, but "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come," etc. Verse 16 tells us that it is "the whole body fitly joined together," not broken into sects; the whole body "compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part": a practical thing, and not a mere theory, a thing meant to be in the church while on earth, and not at all referring to heaven. We shall not need such ministration there. In this passage there is also, I would notice, a warrant to faith for expecting the continuance of the gifts of Christ till His body be completed. And of a truth He has never failed during all the long years of ruin in which His gifts were well-nigh smothered, as they were too really and painfully misused.

For I fully recognize that there have been even in popery, in her clergy and laity, those who had gifts of God's grace to build up His own people, and to spread Christ's name among sinners. But, at the same time, I as utterly deny that they were Christ's gifts in virtue of the commission which popery conferred, any more than that others were not His gifts for the want of such a commission. The same remark, I need hardly add, extends still more widely to modern Protestantism. Would to God that the tender love of Christ, in thus cherishing the church as His own flesh, might touch a chord in all His members, that together we might weep over our common sin, and that together we might rejoice, extolling the grace that has abounded but the more!

There is, however, a distinction to be observed, which cannot be forgotten without injury. When the body came together as such, the assembly was under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. It would have trenched upon the right of Christ for any individual, however gifted he might be, to absorb the regulation of it into his own hands. The Giver is there, and He is looked to, not the gifts merely. The order of such an assembly is definitely laid down in scripture (1 Cor. 14.). "Ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted." "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things I write unto you are the commandment of the Lord. But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant. Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order."

It is quite a different principle which governs a servant of the Lord in the exercise of whatever talent has been entrusted to him He owes an immediate and individual responsibility to Christ to trade with it. He may preach to the unconverted, or he may instruct more perfectly the children of God, or both if he possess both gifts. He owes it to his Master to exercise all he has received for the good of souls, hindering and hindered by no one else. Every servant, be his gift great or small, has the same liberty and the same responsibility. Two or more may see it good to associate in the ministry; but let us remember that if Paul chose Silas, recommended to the grace of God, Barnabas took Mark; and we do not read that he was thus honored of God in confirming the churches (Acts 15:36-41). Liberty is not license. The servant is free of man, but bound to obey the Lord; and his brethren are no less bound to judge his disobedience.

These gifts, let it be borne in mind, must be kept distinct from local charges, such as the elders² or presbyters of scripture, which are ever regarded there as the same with the bishops, or overseers, as indeed Cranmer and others allow, whose practice was totally different. The charges had to do with some one church, and were appointed by an apostle, or by a delegate possessed of a direct and special commission from an apostle to that end. Such a delegate was Titus. But scripture nowhere intimates that authority for appointing elders was meant to continue. We have seen that the gifts of Christ were to be "till we all come," etc. But scripture never confounds them with local charges, although both clearly might co-exist in the same individual. We know this to have been Philip's case, who was one of "the seven," and an evangelist besides.

Pastorship, to come still closer, is a gift (Eph. 4:11), eldership is a charge; but the gift of feeding the flock of God, so far from being incompatible with the office of an elder or bishop, was evidently one of the most important qualifications sought in those who desired that good work. Thus Paul (Acts 20:28) exhorts the Ephesian elders to take heed to themselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers (bishops, ἐπισκόπους), to feed the church of God which He had purchased with His own blood. "Feed the flock of God," said another apostle, "which is among you, taking the oversight thereof (ἐπισκοποῦντες) not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over their allotments,³ but being ensamples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:2, 3).

In the First Epistle to Timothy (3) we find aptness to teach and ability to take care of the church of God among other requisites. Titus too (1:5-9) was told to ordain such as held fast the faithful word, as he had been taught, that he might be able by sound doctrine to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. But it would be too much to draw thence that all the elders necessarily labored in the public ministration of the word. They were appointed to exercise a godly fatherly care over the church; but laboring in the word and doctrine was not an indispensable adjunct. Hence the apostle says, in 1 Tim. 5:17, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine." In one way or another, all elders were assumed to feed the flock; but there might be elders who did not serve, at least publicly, in the word: a principle recognized in the Presbyterian system.

Another remark is to be made on the question of rulers. Paul, in writing to the saints at Rome, exhorts "him that ruleth" to do it with simplicity. Now all the evidence we have goes to show that there was no official nomination as yet, if ever at Rome. Peter's primacy there is a dream, scripture affirming in a positive way that he was distinctively the apostle of the circumcision, as Paul was of the uncircumcision. Now

the latter had not yet visited the faithful in the Gentile metropolis. Accordingly there is not a word which supposes elders to have been appointed there. Nevertheless it is evident that those at Rome, like the rest of the church, had gifts of grace in their midst—prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhorting, ruling, etc. These they might possess, and they are exhorted to use diligently; but not a word is said about elders. It has already been observed that at Corinth no elders are even implied, and yet the brethren were besought to submit themselves to such as addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints, and to every one co-working and laboring.

Again, in 1 Thess. 5:12, 13 “We beseech you, brethren, to know them that labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake.” Do not the exhortations “to know” them which labor and rule and preside (the same word as in Rom. 12:8), suggest the thought that it was not a class officially appointed? Office must have been self-evident, and therefore would render needless an exhortation to recognize such laborers. The esteem and love was for their work’s sake. An official place was not alluded to. In Heb. 13:7, 17, 24, certain chief men are named (οἱ ἡγούμενοι, leaders or guides); but there is nothing indicative of exterior appointment. It is probable that they were persons whose age, character, and gifts, gave them a certain place. See Acts 15:22.

Now if any one in our day could give satisfactory (i.e. scriptural) proof that he was an apostolic delegate, his appointment of elders ought to be respected; and respected I have no doubt it would be by all (at any rate) whose eye was single to the Lord in the matter. If such proof be wanting, they ought to be as decidedly disowned. If then in scripture we see not elders appointed by any save apostles or their delegates, can nationalism or dissent justify their respective appointments by the word of God? Apostolic succession seems to be the only consistent plea in its pretensions as to this: in its pretensions, I say, for reality it has none—it is Christianity Judaized, or rather it is Judaism Christianized (see Bingham’s Ecclesiastes Antiq. b. i. ch. 5.).

(To be continued)

Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians, Ephesians 4:31-32, Remarks on

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit’s presence in the individual believer, sealing him for redemption-day, has been already seen, and seems to be bound up in the closest way with practical holiness, as a motive and a guard, no less than as the power. For what more solemnly affecting than the remembrance of such an inhabitant ever dwelling in the believer’s body? And what more certain than that He is the Spirit not of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind? We may be utter weakness, and the natural heart deceitful and treacherous beyond human conception. But this is not the only truth. The Christian is characterized by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Is He weak? Or if all might is His, is He in the believer the passive, inactive witness of every fault and infirmity? Is He not, on the contrary, within him to associate his affections with Christ, to glorify Christ, taking of the things of Christ and showing them to him? Doubtless, He may be and is grieved by allowed folly, and carelessness, and evil, and as to this we have just been seriously cautioned; but it would be well for such as speak incessantly of the good-for-nothingness of the flesh (which is most clear and certain) to bear in mind that the believer, the Christian, is no longer in the flesh but in the Spirit, seeing that the Spirit of God dwells in him. Meet it is, therefore, that sin, all and every sin, should be confessed and judged; but it is neither genuine humility nor the faith of God’s elect to ignore the blessed and encouraging as well as serious fact, that the Spirit of God is in us to give all strength in revealing Christ to our souls. It may be wholesome, unquestionably, to learn the painful lesson of Romans 7:7 and following verses; but to rest there is to prove that it has been ill learned. For the proper place of the Christian is, as to this, the end of the chapter, ushering him into the still deeper exercises and the more unselfish sufferings of chapter 8, with the liberty, and power, and hope, and security which it so abundantly shows to be our portion through grace. The redemption of our body and of creation outside is not yet come; but, He who is its earnest is within us.

This being so, “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil-speaking be put away from you with all malice” (vs. 31). The very nearness into which the family of God is brought may become a snare unless there be watchfulness and a simple looking to Christ. But the Holy Spirit gives quarter to no evil feeling whatever. These are the breaches of our nearness; in the next chapter (vs. 3 and following verses) we shall find the abuses of it.

If we come to particulars, “all bitterness;” I think, denotes every form of the sharp, unsparing mood which repels instead of winning souls, and makes the most of the real or imagined faults of others. The “wrath and anger,” (vs. 31) next following, refer to the outburst of passion and the more settled, vindictive resentment, to which the indulgence of acrimony gives rise, as “clamor and evil speaking” (vs. 31) are their respective counterparts in words: all flowing from the deep-seated fountain of “all malice,” which is finally condemned in our verse. Thus, as we were warned against dishonesty in word and deed, before the allusion to the Holy Spirit’s seal, so now, after it, hatred in its various parts and expressions is denounced. It is alas! natural to the first man Adam—the same corruption and violence which brought the flood on the world of old but renewed itself, spite of God’s judgment, and will, till Christ deal with man and Satan in person.

But, as was observed in the previous verses, barb abstinence from the mind and workings of the flesh suffices not. There is the activity of good in Christ, the Second Man, and this the Spirit produces, as well as demands in the Christian. Hence He adds, “Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ hath forgiven you.” Clearly, therefore, it is a question of showing grace; and the pattern of it all is God in Christ, not in the law, holy, just and good as the commandment is. But good as the law was and is, Christ is the best of all, the genuine and only full and perfect expression of what God is. And leaving the law to deal with the wicked, (1 Tim. 1.) as the Apostle expressly declares is its lawful use, we who are dead with Christ are not under law but grace, which, by the power of the Spirit, Strengthens us according to its own character and gives communion with Him who is its source.

The reader will notice that there is a departure from the Authorized Version of verse 32. It is done advisedly. Why King James’ translators deserted the Greek, followed by Wycliffe, Coverdale, and even the Blemish, it is hard to say, especially as Beza, who influenced them, is here accurate. The erroneous rendering obscures the very grace of God which is set before us as our spring and pattern, and tends to countenance the error that Christ was the procuring cause of His love, instead of being the blessed and infinite channel of its communication

to us, the only possible means in which even His love could holily and justly avail for us. It is a part of the same error to think of God as "our reconciled Father," or to say that Christ "died to reconcile Him to us." Atonement was necessary beyond a doubt, the expiation of our sins by the blood of Christ. "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities" (Isa. 53:5). But God was in Christ reconciling; it is we (not He) "who have now received the reconciliation." "And you, that were sometimes alienated, and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled." Such is the uniform doctrine of Scripture. How blessedly all is put and kept in its place! The atonement is that aspect of Christ's work, which is toward God, to put away sin by suffering the divine judgment of it in His own person; reconciliation, contrariwise, is toward us, to bring us back in Christ unto God. Both are most true: to confound them is to weaken and lose much; and what is more serious, it is more or less to misrepresent the character of God, as if he were turned by Christ from an angry judge into a loving Father.

Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians, Ephesians 4:28-30, Remarks on

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

In these exhortations, as in the doctrine of the epistle, there is no notion of bettering the nature of man. A new nature is shown to belong to the Christian—Christ is his life. The practical aim follows that this should be exercised and manifested.

Nevertheless, there is a serious hindrance, for the old man remains, the flesh is still in the Christian; and as the new creature is in no way the result of improving the old, so the old nature is incapable of being absorbed or exalted into the new. They are irreconcilably opposed. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). The only course, and comfort, and duty open to the faithful, is to deny and mortify the flesh, so that the new man may be left free to do the will of God.

On the last portion which occupied us, we saw the danger of yielding to anger; it easily degenerates into hatred, and this gives occasion for the devil to enter. We have now another exhortation, which to some might seem hardly called for among Christians. "Let him that stole steal no more." It is not exactly "him that stole," but "the stealer." "Thief" would be too strong; and "he that stole" is too weak. The apostle was led to choose a term so large as to take in every shade of such dishonesty. Do you think the caution needless? Beware lest your self-confidence, and the slight of any word God has written, ensnare you. There can be no doubt that the Spirit who inspired the epistle judged the admonition necessary for us all, as well as for the Ephesian saints; yet nowhere do we find an Assembly more happy, flourishing, and blessed of God, than the Church in Ephesus. Yet even for them, quickened and raised with Christ, and seated in Him in heavenly places, the Holy Spirit saw its suitability. God knows us better than we know ourselves; and let saints be ever so instructed, devoted, or earnest, in none of these things, apart from the enjoyment of present communion, apart from actual dependence on God, is there any adequate safeguard. Besides, if a soul through unwatchfulness had slipped aside into that which is so degrading even in human eyes, we can readily conceive the force of such a word to the heartbroken and ashamed, in danger of being swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. How little the heart felt its perils or knew either its own weakness or the power of Satan! Now, restored to judge itself according to God, it owns the value of words like these, which it had once deemed well-nigh useless for the saint. Now, too, it feels how exceeding broad is the Spirit's appeal, comprehending every kind of worldly, professional, or trade custom (no matter how respectable) that is fraudulent, as well as the grosser forms of dishonesty. God is training the new man according to His own thoughts.

How strikingly also such a precept shows that the Christian is on larger, higher, firmer ground than that on which Israel after the flesh stood or rather fell. Never do you hear the law say, "Let the stealer steal no more;" (vs. 28) its voice must rather be, "Let him die." The law is good if a man use it lawfully; and its lawful application is expressly not to form, guide, and govern the walk of the righteous, but to deal with the lawless and disobedient, ungodly and sinful, unholy and profane, and, in short, with whatever is contrary to sound doctrine. Sin, we are told in Romans 6, shall not have dominion over Christians, "for ye are not under the law, but under grace;" (Rom. 6:14) and this in a chapter where the question is the holy walk of the saint, not his justification. Yet in the face of this, the clear and uniform teaching of the New Testament, the tendency of most in Christendom habitually is to go back to law, especially where there is feeble separation from the world. But it is easily understood. For the world does not receive or understand the grace of God, whereas it can appreciate in the letter the righteous law of God. Hence, where the world and the saints are mixed together, the will of man soon takes the upper hand; and as the saint cannot elevate the world to his standing, he must sink to that which he holds in common with the world; and thus both meet once more on Jewish ground, as if the cross of Christ had never been, and the Holy Spirit were not sent down from heaven to gather believers out of this mixed condition into the assembly of God apart from the world. Even for the individual Christian, as well as for the Church, and most of all for God's truth, grace, and glory, the loss has been incalculable. For the ordinary walk has been reduced to a string of negatives, save in public acts of philanthropy, religious activity, or ritual observances, which the Christian shares with any and everybody that will join him. It is not occupation with good according to God's will; still less is it suffering for the sake of Christ and of righteousness from a world which knows them not. This is not Christianity, though it is the state and the system of most Christians. Did Christ ever obey from the fear of judgment? Was not His life a surrender of Himself to the holy will and pleasure of His Father? So our souls must be occupied with God's grace in Christ, if we are to find strength in pleasing Him. The mere avoidance of evil, the not doing this or that, is below our calling. Do we indeed desire to know and to do His will as His children? Are we zealous in learning to do well, no less than careful to cease from each evil way? If not, the day will come when we may begin to do evil again, and with a conscience the less sensitive, because we have learned truth which we do not carry out.

Very beautiful is the apostolic exhortation on the positive side. "But rather let him labor, [idleness is neither right nor safe,] working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to distribute to him that needeth." Thus does the Spirit cheer and direct the man whose hands were once put forth in unworthy ways; thus does He open a happy path where grace can vindicate its power, spite of a dishonest nature and habit; and he who was the stealer before he knew the Saviour's name, may now have fellowship with the spirit and practice of the great apostle (Acts 20:33-35), yea, and of the Master Himself, remembering His words, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. To live is the worldly man's object in labor; to give is the Christian motive. It is not a mere question of chance surplus, but an express object, especially for him who has the consciousness of the mercy that delivered him from covetous sin and its shame and judgment. Only the toil must be about what is good and honest. In vain will you plead a benevolent or religious use of ill-gotten gain. No employment that is contrary to God's will is good for the Christian, but should be given up at once. The covenant of Sinai never enunciated such a motive for toil

as this. To talk about the ten commandments as the rule for the Christian's walk now, is to go back from the sun which rules the day to the moon which rules the night; it is to eclipse Christ by Moses under the delusive profession of doing God service. In general, what the law exacted from those under it on the principle of right, the Christian is responsible on the principle of grace to exceed in every possible way. The scope of obedience is immensely increased; the inward motives are searched out and laid bare; the very tendency to violence, corruption, and falsehood is judged in its roots, and suffering wrongfully and withal in love takes the place of earthly righteousness for the disciples. Such is the unquestionable teaching of our Lord and of His apostles; it is darkened, undermined, and denied, by those who insist on Judaizing the Church by putting the Christian under the law as his rule of life. Truly they "understand not what they say nor whereof they affirm."

Next, it is not our deeds only that have to be considered, but our words. "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers" (vs. 29). Worthless language is to be eschewed as one rejects good-for-nothing fruit; if it were on the tongue, let the unprofitable word proceed no farther. Unclean allusion we shall find specified and forbidden in the chapter following. Here I conceive the circle is more comprehensive. Many who would neither utter nor hear impure conversation may often have to bemoan the utterance and the sanction of unsavory discourse. Better to be silent if there be not (such is the force) something good for needful edification. The need measures the service, and love builds instead of puffing up as knowledge does. It is equally true that "in the multitude of words there wanteth not sin," (Prov. 10:19) and that "the lips of the righteous feed many;" (Prov. 10:21) they "know what is acceptable," (Prov. 10:32) and those who hear are refreshed and blessed.

Hitherto we have had grounds of holy action, as well as guards against sin, found in the features of the new man. But this we know does not give us the full character and power of the Christian man. The holy Spirit of God dwells in him. This blessed but solemn truth is now pressed in its practical bearing. We are said (ch. 2:22) to be built together for an habitation of God in Spirit; and therefore do the apostles exhort us (ch. 4) to walk worthy of the calling wherewith we have been called. But there is an individual indwelling of the Holy Spirit, as well as His relation to the house of God. We have been sealed by the Spirit, appropriated thereby to God on the ground of accomplished redemption. The precious blood of Christ has washed away our sins; in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of offenses, according to the riches of God's grace. Thus, His sacrifice has effaced before God and to faith all our evil, and a new nature is ours in Christ; so that the Holy Spirit can come and dwell in us, and seal us for the day of redemption, when our body shall be transformed into the likeness of the glory of Christ, as surely as our souls are now quickened into His life. In presence of this infinite present privilege and pledge of glory forever the apostle adds, "And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (vs. 30). He is the spring of energy to strengthen the saint unto all that is well-pleasing to God. But this supposes that there is self-judgment and dependence on God. Otherwise we grieve Him, and are made to feel, not His power, but our own wretched unfaithfulness.

Again, it seems strange that any Christian should be so unintelligent as to confound the word here with "quench not the Spirit" (1 Thess. 5:19) in 1 Thessalonians 5:19. The context (vs. 20) there shows plainly that it is a warning not to hinder the smallest real manifestation of the Holy Spirit in a saint, no matter how feeble he might be; and the history of Christendom to the present hour proves how much the precept was needed, and how little the apostolic injunction has been attended to. But the passage in Ephesians 4 is a personal concern for every saint and his own conversation every day.

Another thing to be noted is the difference from the language of Psalm 51: "Take not thy Holy Spirit from me." But the apostle, even when he presses that we should not grieve the Holy Spirit, never hints at His being taken away. On the contrary, he in the same breath assures us that we were sealed by Him for the day of redemption; and there can be no fuller way of intimating our personal security than such a sentence. To what are we to attribute this difference? Not, I need hardly say, to a higher inspiration in Paul the apostle, than in David the king; but to the necessary and revealed modification of the Spirit's relation to the saint, since Jesus died and rose and went to heaven. Till then there was no such thing as the Spirit given to abide with the believer forever. He blessed souls then, wrought in and by them, filled with joy and power betimes; but indwelling as the Christian has and knows now, there was and could not be till the glorification of Jesus, because of sin put away by His blood. Hence we are told not to grieve the Spirit, but are never, since He was given, supposed to deprecate His departure. Unquestionably, this aggravates the sin of a Christian and imparts poignancy and bitterness to his self-reproach in that case; but even this is intended of God for the graver warning of His child. The verse, therefore, clearly proves, on the one hand, the danger of sinning and thus of grieving the Spirit; and, on the other, the security of the saint even in and spite of such sorrowful circumstances. He is brought to God, reconciled, washed, sanctified, justified; he has eternal life and shall never perish; he is sealed of the Spirit, and that seal who can break? If he fall into sin, assuredly God will see to it and chasten, yea, unto death; for He will neither make light of his evil nor condemn himself with the world. So Peter exhorts the godly to walk in holy obedience, and while they called on Him as Father who, without respect of persons, judges according to each one's work, to pass their time of sojourn in fear; at the same time, far from weakening their confidence, he proceeds, "forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold ... but with the precious blood of Christ." Thus, the truth of God has the effect of attracting and strengthening the affections, even when it sets us with our faces in the dust; while human error, as it weakens the full grace of God, so it fails thoroughly to humble the soul. But what a truth it is for the believer, that he has within the constant presence of a divine person, the Holy Spirit, the witness of all that passes there! How careful should we be that we grieve Him not! But it is not a truth for conscience only, but pregnant with consolation; for He dwells in us evermore, not because we are worthy of such a heavenly denizen, but in virtue of the worth of Jesus and the perfectness with which His work has cleansed us in God's sight from our sins; and He is in us for our joy, and strength, and blessing evermore, through and in Christ the Lord. May we be enabled, always confident, always to pray, and not to faint!

Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians, Ephesians 4:17-27, Remarks on

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

The reader now enters upon the general walk of Christian men, as suitable to, and connected with, the doctrine of our epistle. Indeed there was already an exhortation in the beginning of chapter 5 to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called. But the apostle here

descends to particulars. And, first of all, there is a solemn injunction to the saints that they should not henceforth walk, as other Gentiles walked, in the vanity of their mind. The Spirit of God guards us against what we perhaps might think needless—the walk of those who surround us—the walk that was our own before we were brought to Christ. And yet, the moment that we reflect, the wisdom of such an exhortation is apparent; for Christians are ordinarily liable to be much influenced by the tone of thought and feeling current in the world outside. The ruling passion that carries the world on for the time being, is always apt to be a snare to those at least who shrink from the cross day by day, and so much the more because they do not suspect themselves. Whatever be that which occupies its energies, especially if philanthropy, moral progress, or religion be the form that it takes, there is always a liability to be thrown off our guard. Besides, and this is the immediate point here, old habit is strong; so that the apostle does not hesitate to warn these saints who stood out, not only in the fresh joy of faith, but also in outward position, very separate from the world, and, the lines were at that time strongly defined; and yet, in this opening word of exhortation, the Holy Spirit very solemnly guards the saints against being drawn into the ways and practices of the Gentiles. There is often a danger of this with Christians, because they do not like to be singular. There may be peculiar people among the children of God. But the apostle does not speak of eccentric individuals, to whom it would be no difficulty, but a pleasure, to differ from everybody else. They affect originality in word and deed, and in their strain after it are only odd. But he is guarding against the common moral danger, when faith has lost somewhat of its simplicity and freshness.

On the other hand the apostle has shown elsewhere—and we should always endeavor to remember it—that it is a wise and important thing to meet souls in grace as far as possible, not to impose upon others what they have not strength to bear. In writing to the Corinthians, the apostle had insisted on this, as his ministry exemplified it. He had become a Jew to the Jews that he might gain the Jews. He was made all things to all men that he might by all means save some. There was no kind of pressing points. There was the hearty desire for the good of souls; for we may have this without the pressure of our own particular thoughts and feelings, however right they may be. It is the elasticity of the Christian if established in grace. We rarely can pull the cord too tightly in dealing with our own souls, or be too stringent in our vigilance and prayer against slipping here and there. But it is a totally different thing in having to do with others. We have to bear their infirmities, if, in truth, we are strong; it is for their good that the Lord lays them upon our hearts. We find that, even with His own disciples, He did not go beyond what they were able at that time to bear. But the very desire to meet souls, and not to raise questions that would gender strife, would expose a gracious Christian to be taking the color of those outside himself, and giving up his own principles.

There is no doubt, then, of the forbearance in which we are called to walk with one another; nevertheless, we need to beware of turning grace into levity or licentiousness. “This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their minds, having their understanding darkened; being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” Here he begins with the inner thing. You will find that our tendency is to occupy ourselves and others with something outward. But the apostle goes to the root of the evil walk of the Gentiles. Their minds were vain and empty, as all must be, who have not God distinctly and positively, and intelligently before them in any matter, whatever it may be. As to these Gentiles in nothing had they God before them; they were “without God in the world” (ch. 2:12). Consequently, there was nothing but the empty vamping mind and mouth of man, imagining one thing and expressing another. What was the effect? The understanding was darkened. “They were alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that was in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” These are various descriptions, not of the outward walk, but of the root of all the evil fruit they bore. God was not in all their thoughts. They were “alienated from the life of God” (vs. 18). How indeed could it be otherwise? The life of God is only found in His Son and Him; and, consequently, if they had not. Far from having relish, or a just sense of need, they were alienated from good; and this on account of the blindness or hardness of their hearts. So far is the evident tracing of what the evil walk of these Gentiles sprang from; the sum and substance is that it arose from their ignorance. And their ignorance was because their hearts were hardened and blinded. What a solemn and practical truth for every soul of man, converted or not! Our conduct flows from our judgment, and our judgment from our affections. Thus, the state of our heart becomes so important in practice. We find here that all the outward man finds its source in the inner man, and the inner man is formed by that which governs the heart.

Hence the all-importance of having Christ for the heart's object—yea, exclusive object. For nothing is more common than to have divided affections. Indeed, it is the great thing against which we all have to watch. Had we an eye more single, and a heart more thoroughly and self-judgingly devoted to Christ, what would be the consequence? The heart always gives direction, color, and energy to the judgment. There never would be a waver individually, and there would be nothing but peaceful walking together in the light of God, without slip or stumble of any kind. And this is the theory of a Christian. (Compare Philippians 1 and Colossians 1.) Practically there are difficulties. Who of us has not had to confess grievous failure and sin? Who has not had to say, I do not know what the mind of God is as to this or that? In a word, the understanding has been too often darkened, and the walk unlike Him whose we are. Of course they differ from what we have described here. But is it not a solemn thing that the Christian has to watch against the very same evil which denies and outrages the character and will of God, in souls that know Him not? And yet this is what we all have to feel and confess as to ourselves. How often we have been without divine light! This ought never to be in a saint. It never was so with Christ. He was the light; so that it would utterly fall short of His glory to say that He was always not only walking in the light, but according to the light. Consequently He never knew what it was to have a shade of doubt. If He waited, it was never doubt, but further knowledge of His Father's will, as in John 11 It may be our path to wait; and it is well to do so, when we have no such assurance. The development that follows is a description of the awful depravity of the Gentiles; as he says in the next verse, “Who, being past feeling, have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness” (vs. 19). No doubt it is the lowest moral degradation of which the life of man is capable. But the wholesome thing for us to see, and to apply for our own souls' help, and guidance and guard too, is that all the excesses of this outward evil were the result of the heart being darkened, and this because it was without God. There was nothing but what Satan drew from a man's own mind, and the consequence was the falsifying of his judgments and feelings. Hence men became a prey to every kind of evil. They had given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

But now comes the Christian in contrast. He says, (although we are in danger of all this, and the very sense of our danger is what God uses to keep us from falling into the danger) “Ye have not so learned Christ” (vs. 20). As all the practical evil of the Gentiles arose from their ignorance of God, the heart, the mind, the walk, all wrong, and increasingly evil; so now God's deliverance from all evil, root, branch, and fruit, is Christ. And what a blessed, simple, holy, God-glorifying deliverance it is! It is not that He enters into anything of the various processes He may use in leading to this result. Besides, Christ is the way, as well as the truth. The one grand means that applies to every case, and that gives the surest deliverance, is Christ Himself. “Ye have not so learned Christ” (vs. 20). He purposely makes Him to be the person who has to

do directly with the soul. It is a remarkable way of connecting us with our Lord, though common in John, "My sheep hear my voice" (John 10:27). But here, where the union of the members with the Head and not life only, is the point insisted upon, we approach closely to the teaching of the elder; it is as if we listened to Christ ourselves. "If so be that ye have heard Him" (vs. 21)—not about Him; they were taught by Him "as the truth is in Jesus" (vs. 21). Is there not great emphasis in this expression? It is not as the truth is in Christ. We all know that Jesus is Christ, and Christ is Jesus. But God never uses one word in vain. And I think that the difference is the greater because both are used. He first of all puts the word Christ—"Ye have not so learned Christ," (vs. 20) because there he brings the whole mass of my privilege before the soul. Christ is the special name, when I look at Him as the risen, exalted Man. In Him I have got my blessing. The word conveys to my mind the thought of One in whom all is concentrated as dead and crucified in heaven. Jesus is the personal name that He bears upon earth. The Spirit had been revealing, in previous chapters, the great name brought before us in Christ. But when he is about to speak of the practical knowledge which would apply to the duties of their walk here below he says, "If so be ye have heard Him and been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus" (vs. 21). There, I apprehend, he is more speaking of Him as that person who, in the eyes of men, as well as before God, was the blessed example of all light and purity in His ways here below. Thus, I conceive, any spiritual mind will at once appreciate what a blessed way it is of bringing it before our souls. He brings us to the living presentation of all that we have in Him; but we see it in the ways of that blessed Man, Jesus, here below. By the "truth that is in Jesus," does he not mean the truth that we see and hear and know carried out in every word He said, in all His ways and obedience, and service, in every kind of suffering that He passed through on the earth; in His patience, in His earnestness, in His zeal for the glory of God, His tender care for those that belonged to God, and in His compassion for perishing sinners? And yet, look where you will, behold His intolerance of that which is contrary to God. All these, and infinitely more, we find in Jesus, and no where else in perfection.

It is only in the person of Jesus that you get all truth fully out. I may learn truth through the Holy Spirit, and He is the only power of my knowing the truth, and is therefore, I suppose, called "truth" in 1 John 5:6. Neither God, as such, nor the Father is ever called the truth; nor could it be. When you speak of the truth, you do not mean merely either the divine nature in its perfectness nor His person, "from whom cometh down every good gift." But why is it that Jesus should be emphatically the truth? Jesus is the One who objectively has presented to me that which shows me the bearing and relationship of everything to God as well as to man. If I want to test any one thing, I never can arrive at its full character till I view it in connection with the person of Christ. The Holy Spirit is the truth subjectively, because no man can behold Jesus, to find the truth in Jesus, without Himself. The Holy Spirit is the revealer of Jesus; our own mind cannot see Him. Even the new man cannot of itself understand Jesus, or enter into the things of God. And you will observe how strikingly this was shown when the disciples themselves, already born of God, had to wait till the Lord opened their understandings to understand the Scriptures, and after that for power to act on them. After they were converted, they needed the power of the Spirit to enable them to apprehend the Scriptures. After that again they must wait for power to testify the truth from the Scriptures to others. They needed to have the power of the Spirit, distinct from the new nature, for the purpose of entering into the things of God. Mere human nature never understands the things of God, the new man does. But in order to do it, it must be led of the Spirit. The new man is characterized by dependence. The Holy Spirit acts in His own power. So that we do not merely need dependence upon God, but power from God in order to enter into the truth. I am not now speaking of being converted merely, but of the practical entering into the mind of Christ, and the ways of God as brought out in the ways of Jesus. Let me illustrate the value of the truth as it is in Jesus. Take any truth you like, as, for example, man. Where shall I learn the truth about man? Shall I look for it in Adam? a man that listened to his wife after she had listened to the devil? a man who, when God came down, ran away from Him, and even dared to insult God by laying the blame upon Him? Shall I look at his sons? at Cain, his firstborn, or at Abel whom Cain slew? What was so beautiful in Abel was what was of God, not what was of himself. If you pursue the history of man as such, you only find evil and pride and presumption increasing upon him, till you give up the whole tale in shame and disgust. And so it would all end, but for the Second Adam. I find here in every step that He took, in every word that He said, in everything that flowed from His heart and was reflected in His ways, One that never did His own will. Now I learn the beauty and the wonder of a man subject to God upon the earth—the only One who ever walked in perfect, moral dignity, though He was despised of all, and most of all hated by the religious leaders of the world of that day. But how did not God delight in Him? Here, then, the humbling truth is told. Man has shown himself thoroughly out. Jesus, the cross, tells the tale.

But supposing another instance: if I look up and think of God, where shall I, of a surety, find Him? In creation? It is all ruined; besides, to read Him only in the book of nature, is but to have glimpses of power and beneficence. But in the midst of all these large and shining characters of divine majesty, and wisdom, and goodness, scattered up and down through everything that He has made upon the earth, I should also have to face other characteristics of weakness, decay, suffering, death. The question arises, whence do these come? They are as crooked as the others were straight; the latter as full of misery as the former wore the impress of wisdom and power. The result of all is that for the mere reasoner in the vanity of man's mind, the understanding gets darkened; and all that can thus be learned even from the consideration of that which comes from the hand of God, completely fails to give the knowledge of Himself. I see the effects of another hand there as well as His own—the hand of a destroyer and liar; and instead of rising up from nature to nature's God, as poets vainly sing, you are apt to sink from nature to the devil that has ruined it all; you fall into the snares of the enemy by the effort to find out God in your own strength. I want some other way wherein to learn what God is. To gather an evidence of His being is one thing; to know Him is another. I can delight in anything that He has made, but what are His thoughts, feelings and ways, especially to a sinner?

If you talk about providence, Is there not an Abel suffering, and a Cain prosperous? Great deeds were done in the family of the proud murderer; while those who had whatever there was of the light of God, were disliked and scorned by the world; often weak in their own eyes too, but suffering and cast out wherever there was faith, by those who had it not. This is an impenetrable enigma to man. How can he, in the face of such facts, discern the superintending power of a God as conscience tells there is? Constant difficulties arise; and the reason is very plain;—it is not in circumstances around, any more than in my own mind, that I can get the truth. Not that there are not traces and indications in providence as in creation; but I want the truth and cannot find it in either.

Then I may come down to the law. Does it give me the truth? In no way. It is not that the law was not good and holy, but it is never called, nor in itself could it be, the truth. Its design was more for making the discovery of man than of God. Its operation was that man might thereby learn what he is himself. It runs like a plowshare, when directed by the Spirit, into the heart, and lays bare many furrows, and discovers what man never knew was there before. But none of these things show what God is to man in grace. Not even the law can give the truth as to this. I cannot at all learn by it what a Saviour God is, nor even fully what man is. At the best it shows what a man ought to be, as well as do; but this is not the truth. What I ought to be is not God's truth but my duty. It was the standard for man in the flesh; and hence it never was given till man was a sinful man. The law was given by Moses, and not to or by Adam. The commandment laid upon Adam is never called the law,

though, of course, it was a law.

Further, you will never find truth, even in the Bible, if you sever it from Jesus. But the moment the same blessed One, who has shown me in His own life and death, what man is, has also shown me in the very same what God is, then all the clouds break and the difficulties vanish. Now I know God, beholding Him in Jesus. New thoughts of God dawn on the soul, and, submitting to Him, I am made perfectly happy; perhaps not all at once, but as surely as my soul has received Jesus, and learned what the true God is in Jesus, I have eternal life, and shall find unbroken peace; but in Him I receive all that I want, all that God intends for my soul, because the truth is in Jesus. Thus, then, as a believer, I know God; I know that which the heathen never did nor could reach. Their understanding was darkened. Having no knowledge of Jesus, they had no full or saving means of knowing God. But this is precisely what the gospel brings close to every poor, needy soul that hears it now. And what is it then that I learn of God, when I look at the truth as it is in Jesus? I learn first this—a God that comes down to me, a God that seeks my soul to do me good, a God that can follow me with love, selfish as I am, and pity my ignorance, and not this only, but One that can instruct me, and is willing to do it, spite of my wilfulness and stupidity; in short, a most gracious and faithful God. He makes Himself known in Jesus. I find One who, after using other means, spent Himself in love upon me, that I might know Him; One who undertook to bear the judgment of my sins. For Jesus came and took all sins upon Himself for every soul that believes upon Him. I learn now that even the hateful self which has so refused and slighted Him, for this He has suffered, and completely dealt with it. It has been judged in the cross of Christ; and if my soul believes that God is good enough to do all this for me, to suffer all this for me, to take and bear the whole consequence upon Himself in the person of His beloved Son; if I see this and bow to it, and receive it from God, what can shake or harass my soul more? My sins? Certainly if anything ought to trouble my soul, they most of all. But what is the cross for? What has God done there? What has He told me in the gospel? If it was God revealing Himself in His beloved Son, if it was Jesus the Son of God that was made sin there, why should I have a single doubt or anxiety upon that score? All depends upon this: Have I bowed to what God has wrought and given me in the cross of Christ? If I am despairing about sin, it is in effect making the cross of Christ of none effect, and the work of Christ a vain thing. He has perfectly done His task, and I am entitled so to rest upon it, as to know that my sins never can come up against me more. Ought I not to be a happy man, and to rest in the most perfect peace because of what Jesus has done and suffered? Here faith can repose. Christ's death has such value in the mind of God that He loves to give this peace in consequence. Such is the truth as it is in Jesus. What a wonderful depth and breadth of truth there is, if you look at it thus! What a poor thing my own experience is, compared with the truth as it is in Jesus! Spiritual power is much more proved by discerning Jesus in others, than by measuring or comparing what people are in themselves, which, indeed, is far from wise. But yet what a disappointing thing it is to see Him merely as He is reflected in others! I must look at the truth as it is in Jesus: in what He was here below, as One who has shown me all through His life and up to His death what God is and man too, Himself the model-man.

In the same person of Jesus I alone see the full truth about anything at all. And you will find the value of this not merely in the great lessons of what God or man is, but if you have to do with any particular trial or difficulty, what is the one test of anything right or wrong? The truth as it is in Jesus. It is the power of using Jesus to meet that difficulty, and of seeing how His name bears upon it. He has expressed His will about it—where I am to be quiet, where I am to act, how I am to walk, and how to bear. He has given me an example that I should follow in His steps. And the greatest power of being like Jesus, depends upon the measure of spirituality we have in applying His name. I am still assuming that there is honesty of purpose, and that we desire to walk before one another as we are walking in truth before God ourselves. It is in proportion as we turn to Jesus and use Him, and view things in Him: this is the rule and spring of real spiritual power. It is this which constitutes a man a father in Christ. It was not the amount of zeal or of overcoming the world, or any great knowledge of this thing or that, but it is found in knowing Him. "I have written unto you fathers, because you have known Him that is from the beginning." Who is that? Jesus. The knowledge of Jesus, then, is the practical power, strength, and wisdom of the Christian, and that which shows advance in the things of God. This, then, was what they had to learn, more or less. But to know it deeply, and so as to apply it and bring it out, was what specially characterized the fathers. Everybody talks in his own tongue. The dullest soul can use intelligibly the words of his vernacular language. But there is an immense difference between the capacities of different persons wielding their own tongue. It is not every one who can speak according to what the subject calls for. A man who has a mastery of the language proves it by applying it appropriately to all variety of subjects. So all saints must have laid bold more or less of the truth in Jesus, but then the power to use it well, to use it rightly, to bring it out on fitting occasions and turn it to profit for ourselves and others—this is the true secret of our progress in the things of God, and what tends to the blessing of souls and the helping on of the cause of God; so that the importance of it cannot be over-estimated.

Then we have stated to us the practical object of this: "That ye put off concerning the former conversation, the old man which is corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts" (vs. 22). It is not a question of improvement. There is no bettering our old man. The heart may be purified by faith, but in itself it is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9). Faith may work the new life, and the Spirit; but the flesh never can be changed or renewed. And here we find what is to be done with our old nature: "That ye put off" (vs. 22). The apostle is speaking to Christians. They have the old man, and need practically to put it off. I must beware, remembering that I have still this incurably evil thing; accustomed to indulge its bad ways before conversion, and still tending to drag one, if unwatchful, into evil.

But now begins the positive part. "And that ye put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness" (vs. 24). There is, first, the putting off the old man, the moral judgment of it, grounded on God's judgment in the cross of Christ definitively done with. Then comes the renewing of the mind, which we cannot have unless there is the judgment of the old. "And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; that ye put on the new man which, after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." They had the new man of course; but it is the putting on the new man practically, the outward manifestation of the new man that was already within them. It is well to bear in mind that this is righteousness and holiness of the truth. It is the truth that produces it again. That is the full meaning of the expression.

Righteousness and holiness differ in this respect. Righteousness is the true perception and, of course, the walking in our relative duties as men of God; holiness is rather the rejection in heart and way, according to God's nature, of what is contrary to Him. Holiness, therefore, is a far more absolute thing than righteousness, which takes up what we owe relatively to God and man. It is in contrast with the first man. Adam was good as a creature, but there was no perception of what God was, and what evil was according to God. He did not then know sin; there was no evil to know. If you had talked about lust to Adam in the Garden of Eden, he must, I believe, have avowed his ignorance of what it meant. Therefore if the law had been given to Adam, "Thou shalt not covet," (Rom. 13:9) he would not have comprehended its meaning, having no experience of it till afterward. We have hearts which like what we have not got, but Adam had not He was just a sample of creature—goodness in a man. It was not after God, created in the righteousness and holiness of the truth. God made man upright; but

uprightness is a different thing from being created in holiness. Upright he was created, and innocent; but the new man is much more, knows right well, through the Spirit's teaching, what evil is and what God is. Adam only learned what good and evil are when he fell, never before; that is, he became conscious of a good that he lost, and that he was not; and of an evil that he had fallen into, which God hated and must judge. So when a man is brought to the truth as it is in Jesus, he knew good and evil before with a bad conscience, but now he knows it with a good (that is, purged) conscience. There is nothing that could make a conscience so good as the sacrifice of Jesus. Supposing that any of us were able to live without iniquity to the end of our days, would this make our conscience good? Not in the least. There would be always a bad conscience, because of the consciousness of past, unremoved, unforgiven sin. No human process, no giving us a new nature, can get rid of the evil we have done. The sacrifice of Christ has done it perfectly. My evil is there judged according to God. The evil of the old man is dealt with and gone before God. Christ rises from the dead and gives me His life, which is the new man. Christ in resurrection is the very source of the new man in my soul. If this be so, we must put off the old man. It is to faith a thing done with. Jesus has shown me it as a judged thing in His cross, and I must judge it, and must not allow my old pride and vanity and folly. I have it still within me, but I must not allow it, else I shall grieve the Lord, and bring myself under His hand. We have each of us to watch earnestly against the former conversation; but then it might be that a person might be enticed by an evil never fallen into before, because he imagined it was impossible for him so to fall. There is nothing so exposes one to fall, as the notion one could not so turn aside. It has often been the ruin of a Christian Man, as far as God's glory is concerned.

Thus, the new man is spoken of so as to bring out its contrast with what man was even in his best estate. Yea, Adam, when he came from the hand of God, could not be described in the terms of blessing which are true of every believer now. There is no such thing as restoring to an Adamic condition. A soul when converted now has the place of the Second man; and as He, the Lord, cannot fall, so the Christian has a life that never can be touched. It is as impossible for a Christian to be lost, as for Christ to be removed from the right hand of God; because He is the life of the Christian. If you say that people can fall away from grace, nothing is more certain than that they may. But if you mean by this, that the life of the Christian can perish, you flatly contradict the Word of God. It is a question, then, of understanding the Scriptures.

Christ Himself is the life of the Christian: can He fall? Thus it is a virtual denial of Christ Himself, that there should be a doubt allowed about it. All these exhortations are based upon this; that they had learned Christ, and knew the truth as it is in Jesus. They were already in this relationship, and upon this ground all Christian exhortations come. Is it even or ever a reasonable thing to talk about fruit till the plant has thoroughly taken root? It would be no use to talk to a baby about the duties of a man. The man must be there, as such, before you can expect to see the discharge of the duties of a man. And so with the Christian, before you can rightly insist on the duties of a Christian. But, now that the truth as it is in Jesus is known, you must not allow the old man. He is speaking of practical fruit and walk, because of already being in Christ, and knowing the truth in Him. This ought always to be a great encouragement to a soul. Even if God is exhorting me to self-judgment, it always supposes my previous blessing as a possessor of life everlasting. It is on this ground that God, as it were, thus addresses us; Is it possible that when I have done so much for you, you can be so careless of My will? It is to touch the spring of grace in the soul, in order that we may go on with Him and do His will.

Now He presses upon them some of the results. "Wherefore, putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another" (vs. 25). As they had learned the truth in Jesus, the shame of falsehood was the more manifest. What is the ground that we have here? We are too apt to take falsehood rather upon the human basis of honor. Many a man would not do it on moral grounds; or he would be too proud to tell a lie; and he that had a certain sense of the fear of God before his eyes, would not do it, because it was a practical denial of God. It is as good as saying that God does not hear. So that whether you look at a mere man in his natural pride, or at a godly man, like a Jew, there you have the ground on which each would act. But this is not enough for a Christian. It is of great importance for our souls, not only that we should walk well and righteously, but that the motive, character, and extent, should be according to God too. Not only is this exhortation necessary, but there is that coupled with it which we rarely think of in our intercourse one with another: we are here exhorted to speak truth every man with his neighbor, "for we are members one of another" (vs. 25). It is looking at Christians only. None but such are members evidently. He wants to connect with Christ the most common duty, which we are in danger of putting upon a lower basis, and the ground he takes is this:—that it is as preposterous and uncomely for a Christian not to tell the plain simple truth to a brother Christian, as for a man to deceive himself. They are part of ourselves. "We are members one of another" (vs. 25). Do we realize this? If we did, what would be the effects? Assuredly, one would be perfect plainness in dealing with that which is wrong; another would be a real, hearty desire to set right those who are wrong. It is evident that we could not wish to injure ourselves. And if I regard another as a part of myself, I ought to act towards them accordingly. In the same way, also, we ought to feel what is contrary to God in another. And as one would greatly desire, if awakened to feel one's own sin, to go to God about it, and have our souls set right there, so it should be in having to do one with another. The deeper realizing of this truth would give a stronger desire for the well-being of our fellow Christians. And yet if it is to be in accordance with God's glory, it is not merely that we should judge what is wrong, but that we should seek to get what is right and according to God. We are apt, where persons have been, for instance, put away from fellowship, to think only of getting rid of the evil; but I do not find this where the membership one of another is felt and owned in the presence of God. Even where it comes to the extreme degree of so dealing with one whom we had believed to be a member of the body of Christ, the end of all discipline is to remove the evil, in order that that which is of Christ may shine forth.

"Be ye angry and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath" (vs. 26). I take this to be a most important and holy intimation for our souls. There is a notion often that it is wrong for a Christian ever to feel displeased or angry. This and other Scriptures show it may be right. But we must take care what the source, as well as the character, of the anger is. If it is merely about something that affects self, and it therefore takes the form of vindictiveness, this is, of course, beyond a doubt, contrary to all that is of Christ. We find in Him, (Mark 3,) that He looked round about upon certain persons with anger, and showed clearly He had the strongest feeling of that which was contrary to God. It was not merely that He denounced the thing, but the people who were guilty of it. I find the same analogy in the epistles. We are told not only to cleave to that which is good, but to abhor that which is evil. Man's thought is that it is not for a Christian to judge and to be angry with what is wrong. The word of God tells us there are certain things we ought to judge and others we ought not. I am not to judge what is unseen; I am to judge positive, known evil. There we have plainly and clearly the line drawn by God. You will find that men say, if you speak strongly about the wrong of this thing or that, you are uncharitable. But not so; it is real charity to denounce it, not to let it pass. True love as to this consists in always having the feelings of God about what comes before us. That is the one question. What God has fellowship with, we can have fellowship with; and what God hates, we are not to love or allow. But we must take care that we are in the intelligence of God's mind. "Be ye angry and sin not" (vs. 26). There is the greatest possible danger of sinning if you are angry, and therefore is this added. The simple

emotion of anger toward one who has sinned, may and ought to be a holy feeling, provided it rests there. And so it is if felt in God's presence.

But how am I to know that I am not sinning in my anger? "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath" (vs. 26). If there is irritation kept up in the spirit, impatience, dislike or scorn betrayed, who cannot see that it is not of God? When the sun goes down, it is a time either for your peaceful communion with God, or your indulgence of resentment away from Him. Therefore it is added, "Neither give place to the devil" (vs. 27). Where there is the nursing of wrath, the keeping up of grievances in the mind, Satan easily comes in, and is not easily dislodged.

Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians, Ephesians 4:12-16, Remarks on

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

Although we have already dwelt upon the more remarkable forms in which the grace of Christ has displayed itself in the way of gift,—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers,—we have not yet touched upon the object that our Lord had in view, that is, the general aim of ministry. This is said in verse 12, to be "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." Now you will observe, in the very first expression of the Spirit of God, that which corrects one of the most prevalent fallacies of Christendom at this moment: and not merely of Christendom in its darkest forms, (for I am not speaking so much of Latins or Greeks,) but where there is the orthodox light of Protestantism and even strong evangelical sentiments. No one who is acquainted with the state of feeling, that is now so general, will doubt but that, even among Christians, the prominent notion of ministry is the bare calling in of souls to the knowledge of their own salvation in Christ.

But this is not the Lord's ultimate design in ministry. The winning of sinners to the Saviour is a necessary part, but is only a part of the blessing. Evangelists, like the rest, are given for "the perfecting of the saints," (vs. 12) which goes much farther. It is clear that they must first become saints; but that which the Holy Spirit makes to be the proper end in view is the forming the saints according to Christ; adjusting them according to the Lord's call and sovereign will touching them; the bringing them out adequately and rightly and freely, so as to find their proper action toward God and one another. This seems what is implied in the perfecting of the saints. Then we have rather the mediate forms which this great end assumes, "unto the work of the ministry, unto the edifying of the body of Christ."

God always makes of prime moment His saints individually considered—their right condition before Him, their being thoroughly fashioned according to His standard. Their being gathered together and working as an assembly, important as it is, comes after. Thus, the subject of the body, the Church, does not appear till the close of chapter 1. What is the early part of that chapter filled with? That which is necessary for the perfecting of the saints. God Himself reveals His truth precisely in the same order, and to the same primary end. Here again the gifts of Christ are found to be just after the pattern of His own dealings. The perfecting of the saints is the nearest object to His heart; and then follows the means used to bring into the knowledge of common privileges, and the working of the Spirit in the assembly, which is bound up with His glory in the earth. Thus, whatever may be the condition of the Church, whatever the blessed ways of God in dealing with the Church, whatever the affections of Christ towards His body, after all God makes His saints of most immediate account, makes their perfecting to be the first and most prominent object. And this He always holds to. Whatever the fluctuations of the work, whatever the character of His testimony at any given moment upon the earth may be, the perfecting of the saints is the unceasing object before Him.

There is something exceedingly sweet in this. Come what may, God will accomplish the perfecting of His saints, and turn even the things that are sorrowful and afflicting into a means of blessing for them, if not always to their credit. Where we need humbling, it is plain we are not humble; where we are not low in our own eyes, God must Himself make us so. The process does not give room for our importance; but God keeps His own blessed end in view, and never fails to accomplish it. So that we may always adore Him for His goodness; though it may be in that which is distressing for the time, still God never fails; He is bent upon the perfecting of the saints; He is faithful and will do it. He puts this forward before His saints as the practical object of Christ. There we have ministry taking these different forms according to His own sovereign disposition.

But the Lord has to do with ministry, directly and immediately without the intervention of the assembly. There is no such thing in Scripture as a ministry flowing from the Church, though there is ministry directed to the Church. Paul speaks of himself as a minister of the Church: that is, not as derived from that as serving it: for the Church is formed by ministry instead of ministry flowing out of the Church. The gifts are for the perfecting of the saints. The ministry may fail, but the Lord never fails in accomplishing His end. It may be in a slower way, and there may be that which is utterly weak and even afflicting, but He accomplishes His purposes. He gives these gifts "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (vs. 12). These two later clauses come in as subordinate to the first. It is most blessed to see the saints acting together; but however the work of the ministry may fail or be impaired in man's hands, the great end to which the Lord commits Himself, and for which He has given these gifts, is carried through spite of all. And more, this is true, "till we all come the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (vs. 13). The "perfect man" here does not refer to resurrection, but to our being thoroughly grown up into the knowledge of Christ.

This is observable in Paul. Although his great work was unfolding the redemption of Christ and the counsels of God's glory founded on redemption, yet he cannot but bring in this full growth of the saints in connection with the deepening knowledge of the Son of God. It is the person of Christ that rises up before the soul; and this is very much more a test of spirituality than any acquaintance with His work. It is with Himself as a divine person that we become more and more intimate through the truth that God ministers to our souls. This is what He puts before us—"Till we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, at a perfect man." Knowledge of the past ways of God would not do now. The Old Testament saints did look to the Messiah in the way of hope; but the present form in which the Spirit of God presents the object to us is the knowledge of His person, as the Son now revealed for our joy, and praise and worship. So that we have here the great Christian object and form of knowledge that God has in view with all His saints now. The comparison with verse 14, gives the force of the expression "a perfect man;" it is in contrast with being children, "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we henceforth be no more babes, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine." What God designs for us is that we should be full-grown, and this "in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature

of the fullness of Christ." It is in contrast with this condition of weakness and exposure to all the craft of men and their changing, scheming tactics of error.

Then we have the opposite, practical way in which our growth is carried on. "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (vs. 15). The expression seems deeper than what we have here. It is "being truthful in love," not merely "speaking the truth in love," (vs. 15) though, of course, this is a very important part of being truthful, but it is not everything; and we all know that it is very possible not to be truthful in thought and feeling, where the words are quite correct. "Being truthful in love," implies truth in the inward parts.

We find here the two essential features of godliness of course were found in Christ in infinite perfection. He was the light. Whatever He might say, He exactly reflected the full truth from God Himself; nay, He was it. We find a remarkable expression when our Lord was dealing with the Jews and bringing Himself out as the light of the world, in John 8. They asked Him what He was, and He says, (according to the English Version,) "Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning" (John 8:25). But the true meaning is, "Absolutely what I speak unto you." There should be neither "at the beginning," (ch. 3:9) but "absolutely," nor "what I said," but "what I am speaking." If these words are weighed you will find the force of them. Our Lord is exactly and absolutely what He utters; His words convey with infallible certainty what He is. He certainly was truthful in love. Our Lord's words so completely gave out the inner man, He was so perfectly transparent, that not one thing in Him deflected from the truth; nothing seemed to be but exactly what He was. And this because there was no sin in Him, neither was guile found in His mouth. There was no object but God before His soul, as He says Himself: "I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29). And you may rely upon it, that it is having Christ before us as the object of our souls in everything practically, which alone gives us power of truth. The moment we have anything of our own as an object, so far we slip aside, and there is that which is not the full truth, for Christ alone is the truth, and He alone gives us the truth in perfect love; and it is only in proportion as we are filled with Him, and have Him to the exclusion of all our own evil, that we ourselves walk in the truth. Let us have our hearts fixed on any one thing or person save Christ, evil slips out, and it is good for us to know and own this. It was never so with our Lord. He could say, "I have set the Lord always before me" (Psa. 16:8). And He has given us Himself always to set before us.

Our Lord's meat and His drink was to do the will of His Father; still there was the meeting God about our sins in a manner that we are not called upon to do. We start upon a redemption accomplished by Christ, which has brought us into the presence of God, and which calls upon us to walk according to the grace which has brought us there, and which keeps us there. We may not all realize it, but we have done with ourselves by virtue of the work of Christ; we are brought near to God, brought to be at home with God, and from that place we are called upon to take up everything that becomes us here below; and here we have to judge what is the will of God, for we are absolute weakness if we are not doing His will distinctly. It is not only that God will have us conformed to Christ by and by, but that is what He has in view now. And in spite of all, wherever the heart is true and Christ is before the soul, though there may be immense differences, yet this is God's delight with His children. The child does not remain always a child, but becomes a man: and so should it be with the family of God. He would have them grow.

This then is the object in the gifts of Christ. He is bent upon blessing souls even now in the world, and that is the object of all ministry. It is not something left for our thoughts and arrangements, but it is all in the hands of the Lord. It is He who loves His saints, who will bless them, and who makes His individual servants, that have to do with the saints, to be immediately connected with Himself, and to have His objects before their eyes in that which they have to discharge to Him and not to them. For directly the Church becomes the great object before the soul, the blessing is of a lower character altogether, inferior in all its spiritual lineaments. There may be right feelings toward one another, but there is that which is much higher than loving one's brethren, divine though it be; and if you know nothing above brotherly love as the object, you will not walk in love. God is higher than love, and that is precisely the point of difference so much needed for this moment. One of the main things that we have to guard against is, Satan's endeavoring to persuade people that, because God is love, therefore love is God. But it is not so. If I say that, God is love, I bring out what He is in the active energy of His holy nature. But this is not all that God is. He is light as much as He is love; and I must own His love without the denial of His light. What prevails among many now, is the deifying of love in order to strip God of His light. But where we have it clearly before us, not that love "is God," but that "God is love," love will not be the less, but in fact more true and pure. While it will be the active spring of our own hearts, it will not be found at issue with His character, but will leave room for God to display Himself according to all that He is. God is truthful in love. Take it in the case of His dealings with my soul when He is converting me. Is faith the only thing produced by the Holy Spirit? What is the first effect of His breaking in upon a sinner? It is making nothing of him. Is not this love? Yes; but it is God's love that deals with me in the truth of what He is, and of what the sinner's awful condition is. So the effect produced on the heart of him that is renewed is not merely faith in Christ, but repentance toward God; it is the judgment of his whole moral condition in His sight. And as you find it connected with God's dealings with a soul from the first, and in the moral answer produced in the soul of the saint, so it is true all through. Where there is the healthful action of a saint in the presence of God, the room will not be less full for divine love, yet there will be the maintenance of the holiness and majesty of God. We would not wish to be spared pain for the purpose of slipping through at God's expense. There never has been one trial of heart gone through with God, but we have been blessed by it. We might have the blessing in a still fuller way without so much failure or letting out of what we are. But supposing we do not so lay hold of Christ as to be lifted above ourselves, then we must learn painfully what we are. But God turns it all for blessing. This is the great thought of the chapter. He has brought us into this blessed place. First of all, we are in Christ before God, and, next, God is dwelling in us: the one is our great privilege, the other is our solemn responsibility, which flows from the fact that God has made us His dwelling-place.

At once all contracted ecclesiastical notions are shut out by the truth of His dwelling-place. If we merely meet as a Church, such a connection with God disappears. But if it were only two or three, I must meet on the ground of the Church or it has no truth in it before God; and two or three Christians thus gathered would be with God and would have God dwelling in them. There Christ is, and there God dwells in a special way. God can bless where He does not sanction; He can bless in Popery. The grace of God is so rich and free, and above all the wicked ways of men, that He can use the name of sanctification in the most untoward circumstances; but that is very different from God's putting His seal to what we are about. In order that He may Himself be associated in it, we must be in the truth of things, and acting according to the divine mind. I believe that only in our own days has this great truth been brought out by the Holy Spirit so as to bear upon souls according to God. I am not aware of any adequate testimony to it since the ruin of Christendom. There were in abundance efforts of men to improve the present and imitate the past; but either is a very different thing from God's provision in the Word for saints in a fallen state. If you see a man who is striving simply and ever so earnestly to get better, you say justly, he is under law, and does not understand the gospel. Just so, when a

number of Christians are trying to ameliorate Christendom by new plans and efforts, I should say that if they understood the nature of the Church of God, and the Holy Spirit's relation to it, they would feel that mere union is a poor substitute for unity; they would humble themselves in the sight of God because of the state of the Church, and would fall back upon the word of God to see whether there is not a real and lowly but divine direction for the actual state of things in the Church. May God deliver His saints from the unholy as well as unbelieving but very general notion, that we are obliged on account of present circumstances to go on in sin! To men of spiritual discernment, the thought is just making God such a one as us. If I give up His holiness in one thing, how can I stand up for it or trust Him in another? Contrariwise, let us maintain that there is no emergency as to which God can lower His holiness, or sanction the lack of it in us; and if His will be perfect in other things, is it less in that which so deeply and nearly concerns the glory and name of Christ as the Church? People argue from the fact that things are not in order and beauty now; they go so far as to deny the responsibility of saints, as if Christians were not in one way or another connected with these public departures from God. Will it be urged that they are to be adhered to because they themselves or their fathers have been brought up in them? Surely the one question for us is this: Do we desire to learn and do the will of God? Is that our great object? Or is it merely, Where can I get enough comfort or blessing to keep my head above water? Of this, too, I am fully assured that if you are found doing the will of God, you will get the most and best blessing; but it is not the true Christian motive, and it is an unsafe one. We may go here and get a little blessing, and then go there hoping to get a little more. But, as it is said here, growth is "that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (vs. 14). He would guard us from all the cunning craftiness of men whereby they lie in wait to deceive.

Is there, then, no means of having certainty in the midst of the confusion that reigns? Assuredly there is; and where the soul is sufficiently broken down to feel what is due to God, He will make all plain. We never ought to join in a single thing that we know to be wrong, whether privately or publicly. Of course, there may be everywhere things done or said that one may not be able to approve of, but this individual failure is different from joining in public acts of worship, the order of which is known beforehand to be systematically unscriptural. There I am identified with the guilt of what is done contrary to the word of God and so fixed by human authority. But this shows us the importance of nothing being done in the assembly but what will carry the weight of the whole assembly along with it. Hence, too, the evident desirableness of keeping out of the assembly all debatable questions. We may speak of them to a servant of God or a brother; but even that which I may individually enjoy is not a thing that I am entitled to involve the assembly of God in, unless I believe God would have me say it, especially when I know there is room for a just doubt on the mind of the simplest believer there. Minor matters of discipline never ought to be brought into the assembly. When there is anything of fundamental false doctrine or of a grossly immoral character, let it be what it may, there it is plain that all saints must be assumed to have the very same judgment. All would feel that they could have no fellowship with blasphemy or drunkenness, or any fatal manifestation of evil of one kind or another. Then we have cases which claim the united judgment of the whole assembly. Supposing a saint were what is called a Churchman, or a Dissenter, and little versed in Scriptural thought or action ecclesiastically, still, if he were really born of God, there could be no material difference of judgment about such matters. The power of the Spirit is mighty; the Lord knows how to work; and the common spiritual instincts of all the children of God, guided by His word as to such matters, find their expression in the renouncing and judgment of all such evil. But public discipline in the Church is so serious a matter, that it ought never to be resorted to till the evil rises up to such a height that all unbiased believers would be united about it. There is a tendency among righteous and active minds to make, out of every matter of difference, questions for the Church to decide on and deal with. This is a grave mistake, fraught with ill for all concerned, and to be resisted with all possible earnestness. Even saints are apt to be prejudiced or prepossessed in what concerns one another, especially in small things which can at all admit of party-feeling. Besides it would become an instrument of torture for many souls, if every private matter were liable to be brought into public. Thanks be to God, He has made His own landmarks for our guidance, and has shown us clearly that to bring anything into the open arena of Church discipline, ought never to be till every means has been taken to hinder it. The desire of our hearts ought to be the glory of the Lord in the blessing of one another's souls; and we all know that needless publicity must add largely to the shame, pain, and difficulty. But when it is needful, let it be done, so that it be to the Lord, with the utmost gravity and real love. The destroying the true notion of the Church, and of its action, has tended to reduce it to the level of a mere club.

But when we lay hold of the truth that the Lord has that on earth with which He links His name, although only two or three souls may have gathered unto that name, renouncing their connection with what is of the world and of man; when we have come to learn from God that He who saved our souls is the only One competent to form and keep and guide the Church—if we know that He has made us members of His own Church, all we have to do is to act upon the ground of the Church that God has made. If we now belong to God at all, we belong to His assembly, and we are bound to follow it out practically. If I know ever so few that act upon the word of God which applies to this, I am free, yea, bound in the liberty of Christ to meet with them. Of course, it would be matter of thankfulness, if there were hundreds of thousands meeting thus, though this might in other ways entail more sorrow and trial; but the trial will not be mere trouble of flesh; it will be, if we walk with God, the exercise of grace and patience; it will call out the real love to Christ that seeks the good of others, and that is always drawn out into intercession by the pressure of evil on all sides.

Supposing then, two or three come to this point:—that they cannot acknowledge a human church, any more than a human salvation; are they to sit still, dishonoring God and ruining their conscience by persisting in known evil; or are they not in faith to meet in the Lord's name? By all means let them come together, following the word and trusting the Spirit of God. They will find trial, but true liberty and the Holy Spirit working in their midst. He is given to abide with them forever; let them believe it and not fail to count upon it. They may be very weak, but the Holy Spirit is not weak. On coming together, perhaps there is no one to speak at length, with profit, to them; but the assembly of God does not come together for sermons. Much or little speaking, their object is to do the will of God, to remember Christ, to act scripturally on the faith of God's objects in His own Church. If there were twenty thousand Christians round about them, meeting on human principles, what believer can maintain that these two or three would not have the special presence of God among them in a way the others would not? The more we have the sense of the ruin of the Church, the fuller our confidence that God's principles always remain intact and as obligatory now as on the day of Pentecost; the more happy the soul in the Lord, the more it will be drawn out in love to all saints. May it be ours thus by grace to "grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ!" (vs. 15). This does not depend on the number of communicants, nor on the form and means of ministerial power, but far more on our own souls being with God, and doing His will, not only in individual service and life, but also as His assembly, which ought to come together according to His word.

There are, then, these three things:—first and prominently, the perfecting of the saints individually; next, subordinately, the work of the ministry, where other persons act upon me; and, lastly, the building up of the body of Christ. The full aim and desired result of it all is the

growing up into a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; "that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (vss. 14-15). Allow me to show a practical proof of it. You are aware that at an early date, false doctrines and heresies of all kinds came in. What was the resource of good men in those days? They invented creeds and confessions by which they endeavored to try suspected persons. But where was the authority for this course? Was it found that these bulwarks kept the evil out? In no wise, time or place. There is only one power of maintaining truth and love—even Christ; and where Christ is really held up and to, without the devices of men, there may be weakness, and ignorance at first, but the result will be that Christ's strength will be made perfect in their weakness. The power of Christ will rest upon those who, feeling their own weakness, cleave to Him alone. On the other hand, while you often stumble weak consciences, in good men, by imposing creeds, you can rarely, if ever, thereby shut out bad men; nor would spiritual men, alive to the honor of God's word, and aroused to see their unscriptural character, if ever so correct, deem it right to own them. Thus you hamper the weak and you exclude the strong among the children of God. You have a crowd of thoughtless or bigoted subscribers; and as to dangerous men, what thief or robber cannot leap over a creed? Human restraints are able to dishonor the work of God, but avail not to hinder the evil of man or Satan. What you find in Scripture is the saints led on, and the body knit together by the different joints and bands, and thus having nourishment ministered. This is the exercise and fruit of ministry exercised in all its extent; but there may be the Spirit of God giving a word by one who has not a permanent gift. God ordinarily makes a man an evangelist or a teacher; so that a stated ministry is a truth of God.

But exclusive ministry, I am bold to say, is an interference with the rights of Christ, and with the action of the Holy Spirit. God has caused to be felt in these last days the ruin of the Church more than at any epoch known to me in its past history; but He has also made souls learn and feel that no ruin of the Church destroys a divine principle. What was the truth for the Church is the truth for the Church. The original principle of ministry ever abides the only principle which He sanctions or we ought to follow. If there was nothing like modern practice in apostolic times, it is a human thing (and why should a saint bold to or justify it?) in our days. It is absolutely due to the Lord, that the Church should not interfere with those who are scripturally doing His work; and also, that all should leave room for Him to raise up others as He pleases. No workman, skilled or blessed as he may be, has all gifts in his person. There might be some member of Christ in the congregation qualified of God to edify by a word of wisdom occasionally, or able to preach the gospel, to exhort, or to minister in some mode and measure, according to the word of God. What we find in Scripture is the door kept open in principle and practice for all that God gives. Surely this is not to disparage ministry; it is, on the contrary, to assert it, and the rights of the Lord in it. But the ground on which ministry is exercised at the present time is so wholly, certainly, and transparently human, that the effect is inevitably to discredit a number of persons as ministers who are not even Christians, and to discredit all real ministers, who for the Lord's sake refuse their unscriptural forms. This is an evil that no godly saint, who desires to be obedient, ought to tolerate, or even make light of, for an instant. For my own part, it is one reason why it is wrong to become a minister of any denomination that follows (as all do) these baseless traditions. If you are a minister at all, you are a minister of Christ, and of no body else. This the word of God makes as plain as light. The action of the assembly, as such, is entirely distinct. While the minister is of course a part or member of the assembly, yet must he act, if he act rightly, from Christ, and from Christ alone. He may seek to edify believers by discourses, exhortations and so forth, addressed to them; he may seek earnestly the conversion of unbelievers; but ministry or no ministry, (in which last case there would, of course, be loss, yet) the assembly goes on, competent and bound to perform its own functions in subjection to the Lord. Again, not ministry but the presence and operation of the Spirit constitute the power of the assembly. This is as important for the assembly to bear in mind, as it is for the servants to remember that they have immediately to do with Christ as their Lord. Of course, abuse of ministry, like any other sin, necessarily brings him who is guilty under the judgment of the assembly. No man can ever be beyond the Church's judgment, where he gives occasion for it by the allowance of evil in his conduct. But the Church's interference never ought to appear, save in the case of known evil doctrine or practice.

This may help to show the practical bearing of the passage. What God does and Christ gives, the mutual service of the various members of the body, joints and bands,—all is that we should "grow up into Christ in all things; from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." There we have the theory of the Church, because God, in laying down these blessed principles, does not bring in the mere accidents of evil. There is no such thought as a screw being loose here, or something else being wrong there. All is supposed to be moving on harmoniously for the great end for which the Lord has established it.

There is a difficulty that people often bring forward—that you cannot have a perfect church on earth. What do they mean? If it be a church where there will not be a soul ever doing or saying anything but what is quite according to God, they are asserting, doubtless, a mere truism, if it be not rather, mere foolishness. But what is insinuated is, that you cannot, on earth, get any association of saints according to the will of God. I deny this, believing that you can readily find the path of His will, and that every believer ought to find that path. You are responsible to learn the will of God about His Church if you are a member of it, and to be doing nothing else. If I know two or three Christians in a place, seeking to walk according to the Scriptures, there should be my lot. One may be a forward man naturally, another might have strange notions and ways. There might be something faulty in each of the individuals. All this is not to deter me for an instant, because my owning them as being that part of the Church which is acting where they are according to God, does not depend upon an immaculate ideal in this or that. The question is—are they doing the will of God according to His word? God's will at least is perfect, and he who does it, abides forever. Is not His will about His Church as absolute as about anything else? If this be allowed, there, I say, is the ground of action. Must we not be about our Father's business as to this? So that the one question for all who desire to please God is, what is His will? Not surely to meet as the flock of Mr. So-and-so, (for where do we read anything of the sort in Scripture?) but to meet as Christians who are simply cleaving to Christ, and counting on the Holy Spirit to teach all the will of God? Is not this, and this alone, the true basis on which Christians should corporately act? Where, then, shall I find believers so meeting? Are there any who have had the faith to come out of that which is merely human, so as to stand on the ground laid down in God's word? The same Scripture that tells me how I am to be saved, tells me how to walk in His house, the Church of God. Neither the assembly nor ministry is left to human wit or caprice; as to both, we must search, and be subject to, the word of God. God's system (for He has one, as revealed in Scripture,) is what we have to find out and act upon; and though we may have very great trial and difficulty, and find ourselves in the same straits the early saints experienced, yet, even this confirms the truth to us, and we shall have joy and strength if simply dependent and obedient to the Lord. The very trials will become a means of fresh blessing; and we shall prove how truly God will give us to use for His own glory much of His word which was once practically useless to us, and which we supposed merely referred to apostolic times. We thus begin to find a present application of the word of God in our corporate position, just as much as in meeting the wants of our souls day by day. If this be so, may we have the happiness, not only of knowing these things but of doing them

steadfastly unto the end!

Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians, Ephesians 4:11-13, Remarks on

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

I HAVE already explained that the first two of these classes of gifts brought before us in verse 11, had for their aim the originating of a new work and testimony. They were destined for, and employed in, laying a foundation for that previously unknown building, the assembly gathered in one out of Jews and Gentiles in the confession of Jesus, the Son of God. The apostles were used not merely like the prophets as the inspired communicators of the mind of God which had not been before revealed, but also as invested with authority in the Lord's name. Hence there was a competent governing power, as well as a sure medium of communication from God to man. The prophets as such had nothing to do with government, properly so called. They did not visit as authoritative agents (1 Cor. 4:11; 2 Cor. 12:3), nor did they lay down institutions here and there for regulating the church as the apostles did. (See 1 Cor. 7:17.)

Nevertheless, the prophet was used in what was of the deepest importance, in bringing out directly and immediately from God truth that had never till then been known or even disclosed. They were, consequently, connected very specially with the revelation of truth, it might be by word of mouth or by writings; and this is the meaning of Romans 16:26. Any one who is able to examine the language which the Holy Spirit employed, will see that the expression is not strictly "the writings of the prophets," but prophetic writings. These refer exclusively to the New Testament Scriptures, which were not all of them written by apostles. Two of the gospels were not apostolic, but they are just as much inspired as if they were. This is as true also of the oral instruction that was given in the apostolic days. For the Church began before any part of the New Testament was written. The misuse of this fact is a favorite argument of those who contend for a sort of inspiration in the Church. They insist that the Scriptures are not so essential as we allege. But I answer, that if the Church at first had the presence of inspired men, the Church afterward had the holy deposit of the apostles and prophets committed to writing, under the perfect guard of the Spirit of God. Here, then, we have the only standard of divine truth: the Old Testament being the original revelation of God as given to Israel—the New Testament being that supplement of His truth, which is necessary to the Church. But before the canon of Scripture was closed or even begun, it is evident there was needed a class of men who should bring out the mind of God in the rising difficulties of the Church. This was supplied in the apostles and prophets. It appears that, among the saints at Corinth, there were such persons as prophets.

Hence we have a remarkable word in 1 Corinthians 14, that I would advert to for a moment. The Spirit of God laid down there as a rule (vs. 29) that in case any one were speaking in an ordinary way in the assembly, if a revelation were given to another, the latter was entitled to stop the former, and to bring in the revelation. Persons may reply, Supposing you had such a thing now, there would be confusion. But I answer, God is no longer now giving new revelations. While you had the state of things in which the full unfolding of the mind of God was not given, and while there were these inspired persons on the earth, God maintained His right, even to interrupt a person by a communication of some fresh truth from Himself. But now, if any person were to plead a fresh revelation from God, he would only prove himself deluded if not an impostor. We have the full communication and standard of God's mind, now that these inspired persons have passed away. Thus the Church is cast, not upon apostles and prophets, but upon the written word of God as a criterion. Of course, there are the more ordinary means that the Spirit of God used then and still uses—gifts just as truly as apostles and prophets, but not of the same authoritative character in action as apostles, nor having the title to communicate new revelations like the prophets. Now everything is subordinate as compared with these. Whatever measure of authority there may be at present must prove itself to be from God in its character, and end; and it must not pretend to be some fresh revelation of the divine mind, but the right use or application of what has already been given.

On the other hand, the gifts which the Holy Spirit still raises up for the good of the Church, are here called evangelists, and pastors, and teachers. These are not the only gifts that abide, for scripture in no single passage gives, as men would like, a complete list of them. We must search all Scripture. And a wholesome, blessed thing it is for us, that we never can find anything complete from the word of God, by merely examining some particular part of it. God necessitates our searching His word through and through, in order to get at His mind with any measure of fullness. Were it not so, we should be disposed to make favorites of certain portions, and to leave the rest alone. This is the reason why many Christians practically neglect a large part of the Word of God as if it no longer applied. On this very subject of ministry there is a great deal of ignorance and infidelity at the present moment. The idea is that you have merely sanctified intellect. Now, I admit, God gives and forms intellectual power. That is what is called in Scripture "the ability." But examine our Lord's parable where He alludes to this very thing, and you will find that He distinguishes between "the gift" and "the ability"—"He gave to every man according to his several ability" (Matt. 25:15). God in calling men to serve Him, even before they are converted, fashions the vessel for His purposes. His providence singles out a person from his very birth, and He orders all the circumstances of his after life. Perhaps he is educated as a priest, or as a lawyer. Thus Paul so thoroughly knew all the resources of self-righteousness that he could fall back upon grace, and judge what it is that man's righteousness loves, lives in, and leads to. His own experience proved that even when cultivated to the highest degree, it issues in direct antagonism to the Lord of glory. Still you have in Paul a most remarkable natural character, as well as no ordinary training and acquirements. All this was providentially ordered in Saul of Tarsus; but besides, when called by the grace of God, a gift was put into him that he did not possess before, a capacity by the Holy Spirit of laying hold of the truth, and of enforcing it on people's souls. God wrought through his natural character, and his manner of utterance, and particular style of writing; but everything, though flowing through his natural ability, in this new power of the Holy Spirit communicated to his soul. Thus there are these two things, the ability which is the vessel of the gift, and the gift itself, which is, under the Lord, the directing energy of the ability. There is no such thing as gift apart from the vessel in which the gift acts.

But now let me make another remark. In this epistle the gifts are not regarded as merely spiritual powers. They are regarded as such in Romans and Corinthians, but in Ephesians they are always persons. He gave apostles—not merely the apostolic gifts. I find the gift of teaching in Romans and the gift of a teacher in Ephesians. The two truths are perfectly harmonious. There is a divine reason for the difference, which seems to be this. In Ephesians the love of Christ to the Church is the keynote to the whole epistle—it is the fullness of blessing which Christ's body, the Church, has by virtue of union with the Head. What acts upon the affections of the Church is not a mere

power. You can love, not a power, but a person; and a person through whom the gift flows evidently acts upon the affections of those for whose good it is used. All through the epistle it is Christ, and not (save exceptionally) the Spirit. In Corinthians the Holy Spirit is made prominent. Here it is Christ and in accordance with this, you have these persons who act from Christ for the good of His body. In this is a beautiful instance of the harmony of the truth of God. The active love of Christ is represented in this epistle, as the spring of all the blessing of the Church; and so with the personal gifts of Christ, whom He Himself loves, and uses to keep up His own love in others.

The difference between the evangelists and the pastors and teachers is obvious. The evangelist is the ordinary means of gathering souls to Christ. It may be said as a gift to be wandering in its own nature; not confined to one spot, but called to be here and there wherever the Lord by the Spirit might lead him out for the need of souls. Timothy, who has been by clerical sleight of hand metamorphosed into an archbishop, is called in scripture an "evangelist." He was marked out by prophecy to a particular work, and a certain gift was communicated to him through the apostle accompanied by presbyters. He goes at the apostle's command to a certain place, and there he takes a cognizance of things. But neither he nor Titus were stationary, like a modern diocesan. Still less was there a provision made for successors. Timothy was to commit what he had heard from the apostle to faithful men who should be able to teach others also: that is, the charge concerns the conveyance of truth, not of authority or holy orders, as men perversely say.

The fact is, that a plurality of bishops were appointed in every Church where there was a certain number of saints gathered together—at least, after a certain time of testing and experience. They were chosen there by an apostle, or one commissioned by the apostles. As it is usurpation for gifted individuals to discharge the functions of the Church, so it is equally usurpation for the Church to assume the functions of the individual gifts. Of course, if there were anything immoral in the conduct of a servant of Christ, he is as much responsible as any other, and more so. The children of God and himself are bound to watch with holy jealousy, because his sin would bring a greater shame and scandal upon the name of Christ than a less conspicuous member of the body. But, except in matters of a moral character in the exercise of his ministry, there ought not to be the slightest interference between him and the Master who has called him to serve Him. Herein dissent is thoroughly and radically unsound, because the Church is supposed to appoint a minister, and, of course, has the power to discharge him if they like. This makes the minister to be the minister of their church, but Scripture never speaks, as all now do, of the minister of a particular church. There is no such thing as "our" and "your" minister. What Scripture shows us is, that all gifts are gifts in the unity of the body of Christ. If a man is a pastor or teacher at all, he is set as pastor or teacher in the whole Church. As far as this goes, it matters not where he may be; wherever he goes he has a call, if walking scripturally, not from a congregation but from Christ, to exercise his ministry fearlessly, of course humbly, and not pretending to more than he has got. For a person setting up for more generally destroys credit even for what he possesses; and, in general, the tendency of the children of God is not to discredit ministry, but to give an undue place to it. But Satan, who is always working to dislocate the means of helping the body on, stirs up the saints to give credit where they ought not, to be captious and to discredit where they ought to be thankful. All these things require to be regulated by the Word. The thoughts of men in general are founded upon the Old Testament and not upon the New: hence the notion of ministry being a kind of honorable profession, or something known as a title in the world. But if we examine such a portion as this, or all others in the epistles, it will soon appear that there never was such a thing recognized in the world as an apostle, Sic, They were despised by the world. Peter was not more honored in his day in the world after he became an apostle than he was before. The world might recognize that he wrought miracles, which is another thing altogether. Many fleshly men wrought great miracles. In Corinth they were mere babes in understanding, because they were so taken up with miracles and the display of external gifts. They liked, too, to hear themselves talk; and the apostle shows that to bring out even a few words for the good of the Church, was far higher and better than any signs and wonders they performed. He could work more miracles than they all, yet he says he would rather speak five words with his understanding "that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue" (1 Cor. 14:19). Thus, if the Church is shorn of the miraculous powers which strike the eye of the unbeliever, what is even more important abides, save the fundamental gifts, which did not require to be continued.

The foundation was so perfectly laid that apostles and prophets were not needed. This is intimated here. The Spirit of God does not prepare the saints for the long continuance of things in this world. Christ gave "some apostles, Some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the works of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." The believers in those days could not have known but that the whole work of the Church was to be completed in that very generation: there is no such an idea as a succession taught here, though now we may see it is implied. Ministry is the exercise of a spiritual gift; and these gifts depend upon Christ always abiding the Head of the Church, never terminating His office as a high priest might, whose office would devolve upon some successor by reason of death. But Christ is in heaven after resurrection, and these apostles are what He gave when He ascended on high. We stand so far on the same ground now as they did upon the day of Pentecost. Christ had left the world then, and it was thence that He gave these gifts here described. The Holy Spirit abides in the Church, and by the Holy Spirit He empowers men on earth for whatever the Church may need. We have evangelists, the great agents the Lord uses for recruiting His spiritual army. Then we have pastors and teachers whom the Lord raises up and gives for the purpose of leading on and guiding and ruling those saints of God who are brought in. All these gifts abide as much as ever. I am not speaking of measure of power, for things are weak indeed; but inasmuch as they depend upon Christ above and the Holy Spirit below, and as Christ never can cease to be Head there and the Holy Spirit does not leave the Church here, these gifts necessarily abide also. So it is added, "Till we all come in the unity of the faith" (vs. 13). There is no divine warrant for the continuance of miracles, but it is implied for the continuance of these edification—gifts for the good of souls.

Our Lord, then, gave these gifts "till we all come" (vs. 13). It does not say He will give them, because the early Church was set in the posture of expecting the Lord Jesus Christ again. Paul and the other apostles directed the saints to be always looking out for Christ. There was no intimation that Christ might come, but they were to expect Him constantly. Hence there is no such thing in connection with ministry as preparing for a long lapse of ages. But Christ is at the right hand of God, supplying what is necessary. "He gave some till we all come in the unity of the faith." If Christ had come in the apostolic generation, this would have been true. Christ has delayed; but it abides true, "till we all come" (vs. 13). So that, with the exceptions already stated, we are warranted to expect a perpetuation of ministry of the same character and flowing from the same source as the apostolic Church had. Whatever is necessary for the gathering in of souls, and caring for them when gathered, abides till Christ comes and completes all.

What a blessed thing it is to know that we can accept from God that ministry, which in man's hand has been so proud or servile or both—that we can look for it from Him and recognize it as a divine thing— that we are not driven to the notion that we have only a human ministry now

instead of a divine, as of old, but that we have the certainty that these gifts flow from Christ, who cannot fail in His word and work! But how are we to know a minister, an evangelist, a pastor, a teacher? I ask, How do you know a Christian? Every Christian, who is conversant with Christians, has a general idea. I do not say there is any infallible discernment of it. But although nobody can pronounce unfaillingly, and we are necessarily dependent for our measure upon God's present help, still we know as a general rule there is that in a Christian which commends itself to his brethren in general. There is that in his confession of Christ which harmonizes with the Word of God more or less. The spirit, the tone, the general life and ways, after they have been a little inured to the trials of the way, may either strengthen or weaken the conviction. It is just so as to judging of ministry. And we are bound to prove all things. A person is used of God to move souls powerfully and with blessing; to gather them in and bring them to Christ. There is an evangelist clearly. On the other hand, you may see one whose heart does not go out so much in putting the gospel before souls, but who enjoys and loves to make enjoy the truth of God, and to develop the character of God. Is not he a teacher? Others may know the truth of God as well, but they cannot bring it out so as to act thus upon others. But if a third person attempts to deal practically with souls and yet habitually makes grave mistakes, can I say, There is a pastor? When there are difficulties, he is at his wits' end, knowing not what to do nor advise. He may be able to explain the Bible, but when it is a question of applying it to the practical life of Christians, there are endless blunders. Again, a pastor supposes not only knowledge of the truth, but the power to urge it day by day on individuals: it involves a dealing with conscience and affection in a way that a teacher does not necessarily imply. A man might be a teacher without being a pastor (and vice versa), or he might be both. An apostle might be a teacher and an evangelist and pastor too. You will find a particular gift in one man and another of a totally different kind in another. Again, there may be a person who cannot bring out truth powerfully, but he can exhort; he can deal with the conscience. This is an invaluable gift not alluded to here; but in Romans 12 we find it. Here are the more prominent gifts for adjusting the saints in their proper order and functions. But while I believe the indwelling Spirit of God is the only power of discerning with the measure of certainty that God pleases, whether a person is a Christian or not, and whether he has a gift or not, of course the degree of discernment depends upon our hearts being above the flesh and its activity. It demands spirituality, and this supposes self-judgment. The whole Church is responsible to judge. An evangelist might make a mistake, thinking a person to be truly converted, and he might baptize him. But something comes out which leads the Church to refuse him. Supposing a person confessing the name of Christ and baptized seeks fellowship, the assembly of God in that place are bound to examine. No one has a right to come: who has rights now but God? We are to be under obedience instead of talking about rights. The Church then examines, and if there be a general fellowship or such a measure of satisfaction as would lead them to say, We believe that this person has received Christ, we should not be justified in refusing his profession to be a member of Christ, the person is then received into the assembly, and then comes the trial—dependence upon God after one is received. Christ is absolutely necessary for a right walk. Those even that are born of God will not be kept unless they walk in real lowliness and looking up to God.

The Spirit of God works in the assembly. One man manifests ability to preach; another to teach; some to serve the Lord in private, and others in public. What is the power for judging of these? The same Spirit of God. And after all, it is a simpler question than many imagine. Just as a human being knows the food that is good for it, whether it be a babe or a man; so it is inseparable from the saints that they should know in the main what is for their spiritual blessing. If persons are low and fleshly they will be taken with showy trash; but you will find in the main a right and sound judgment from the most matured spiritual judgment down to the mere babe. Although all are not able to point out the right thing, all who are guided of God in any measure are able to find out the value of what is ministered. And as to heresy. How can the assembly judge of false doctrine? Christ is the standard. Whatever scripturally exalts Christ is true; whatever lowers Christ is false, and of the devil. Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. But God works by means, and if there is a false teacher who brings in what is evil; there are true teachers who are able to discern it; and though he may try to wrap it up in pleasing forms, yet the Holy Spirit who dwells in the Church works against Satan, and by different members He unveils and brings out the true character of the evil thing before the assembly of God, and all are able, who are walking with God, to pronounce a divine judgment upon it when once it is exposed. If we had to make a railway we should not know how to begin the work; but when the railway is made, we can tell perfectly well the use and value of it, and can judge well enough for practice whether it is a good one or not. So with the Church of God. Though all may not equally discern and expose what is evil, God gives some who can, and afterward all readily form a judgment upon it. These gifts are indispensable to the Church as a whole, though I do not say that wherever there is an assembly of God, it is absolutely necessary for, their walking together that there should be such or such persons raised up in their midst. But we can bless God for this provision for the wants of His Church, as long as He has a Church here below. The existence of the Church and of ministry rests on the same ground; they both flow from Christ's love, and as long as we have the one, we shall have the other; it is the same love of Christ that sees His body and that supplies certain members with the requisite spiritual power for the well-being of that body. All men of God, no matter where they are, acknowledge that God must have to do with ministry, and therefore the dissenter, when he puts his vote into the urn, does not deny that the Holy Spirit must capacitate a man to be a minister. If he was a minister before, he is, of course, a minister after; but they say we want to make him our minister. Would it not be better to drop this unscriptural form and own him as a minister of Christ always? You thus leave him on his own proper ground as one who is bound to serve God at all cost and in all ways.

I admit that we find in the Word of God bishops and deacons; but they are not referred to here. It is not said that He gave some bishops and deacons. But I maintain from the Scriptures that these bishops and deacons required an apostolic or quasi-apostolic appointment. Is it not becoming for us now to say that, not being apostles, we do not pretend to exercise their functions in ordaining, though we do heartily recognize men possessed of the requisite qualifications for these local offices wherever we find them.

But the prevalent system not only assumes an authority which is not really possessed, but it introduces the utmost disorder and the most guilty confusion, if we judge it by Scripture, or even by its practical results; and this too in every human association—Episcopal, Presbyterian, or Congregational. For what can be more fatal to blessing or the Lord's glory than to see an ardent evangelist tied down to a limited sphere and vainly essaying to meet the wants of a body of Christians who need to be built up in Christ to know that a mature teacher, just adjoining, is compelled to abandon his proper gift, because his congregation consists almost exclusively of the unconverted? What can be more painfully calculated to hinder the Spirit of God than this network of canons, ecclesiastical etiquette, which degrades ministry into the bondage of man, and disposes of souls as if they were the serfs of the soil on which they live?

On the other hand, where Scripture ground is taken with conscience toward God, things may be weak, still there is room for the Holy Spirit to enter and work by whom He will. The enemy, no doubt, has his special wiles for distracting, and, if possible, perverting those who are there; nor do any need more watchfulness and prayer, not to say humiliation. But thank God it is the arena of faith; it honors the Word of God; it gives the Spirit His proper place; and it recognizes the Lordship of Christ, welcoming each member of the body where the Head has set it; and

because of this, if men plead that there must be order, I ask of what sort it is to be. Is it an order of our devising or God's that you really wish? If we are subject to Scripture, we shall allow no claim, howsoever specious, to set aside the only order which God sanctions for His children now on earth, that is, His assembly, guided by the Holy Spirit, present in their midst to maintain the glory of Christ and to work sovereignly by whom He will, though, of course, only for edification and with the comeliness that befits the presence of God. Disorders there may be through want of spirituality, and this on the part of gifted men as well as the ungifted. But, assuredly, Scripture is a safer and mightier rule to correct all disorders by, than the wisest regulations of men, though nothing will avail without present dependence on the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Paul, however, whilst meeting fleshly abuses, supposes the fullest opening for every gift of the Lord within the Christian assembly, subject only to His own express restrictions. (See 1 Cor. 14) If this was God's order then, when did it cease? Or has the Church of God no longer divine landmarks for its public services? I cannot envy those who, abandoning God's system for one of their own adoption or invention, do not scruple nevertheless to cite scraps here and there, such as verses 33 and 40, to support human arrangements directly opposed to both letter and spirit of the inspired Word from which they are so abruptly taken. What God has laid down for the Church's worship and service, is and ought to be as obligatory on the conscience as that which He has written for our individual walk and conversation. In a certain sense, indeed, it seems to me that public corporate disobedience is even more insulting to God than any individual's failure, grave as this may be. And what is the present state of Christendom people, with the world mixed up together, have departed from the word of God. I do not speak of them as men or of moral duties; but the Spirit of God is not allowed His own proper place in the assembly, or even in its members individually. His power is not owned as a divine person come down not merely to convert sinners, but to be the guide of the Christian assembly. How is it everywhere with the meetings of the Church (nay, does it meet at all as such?) and with the exercise of the gifts of Christ in the assembly of God, separate from the world? When Christians ordinarily come together, is there not an unscriptural method set up, one thing here and another there, instead of leaving God's assembly in holy subjection to the Holy Spirit, and trusting Him to work freely, and fully, and mightily by the members as He will, for the good of the whole? Is not the revealed word of God, as to His assembly, like all other truth, eternal for the Church's conduct here below? I maintain that it is; and believe those who dispute its constant authority and their own present responsibility, will have a serious question to answer before the judgment-seat of Christ; whilst such as stand by the will of God in His word, will surely have His blessing now and His approbation in that great day.

But to come out from what is ostensibly evil is not all. Separation from our associations ought to be a pain to us, and should never be done except as believing it to be the clear will of God. And though one ought not to refuse the weakest Christians that come from elsewhere, yet I do not think that a person ought to be quick to receive what is new to them, unless they believe that it is assuredly of God. If they only come because of some happy circumstances, it will not stand: if they say, "There is so much love, truth, union and simplicity among these Christians that we must go there," by and by some trial comes, and then they are ready to say, "There is no love at all among them—how changed they all are!" These spiritual effects may act upon the affections and win attention; but they are not an adequate ground-work for the Christian in presence of the revealed will of God. Nay, supposing you could assemble a company of happy believers, all of the same mind as to the Spirit, and the Church, and the Lord's coming, beside fundamental truth, I would not belong to it, if adhesion to their mind were a condition. It wants and ignores the divine foundation. Be it mine to cleave only to the name of the Lord Jesus, the sole and sufficient gathering-point for the entire Church of God; and this if those who gather to it are ever so few and feeble and whatever the cost. Perhaps my dearest friend may get astray or I may myself. Of course it is painful and humiliating for one to be judged by others, because of failing to judge self. But I dare not stay away because I know the will of God is against it. We are not free to make of the Church a religious club to suit ourselves. It is God's to choose and to call as it pleases Him for the glory of His Son; it is ours to obey from our hearts. In the present broken state of Christianity we have learned that God's principles always bind the consciences, and we have come together to be where His word is free to be carried out by the Holy Spirit. If some one amongst us falls into sin, our adversaries cry, See! they are no more perfect than their neighbors. But whoever talked of personal superiority? We arrogate nothing to ourselves, only desiring to be led of God to walk individually and collectively, as He would have us to do.

Are you willing to be like the people who gathered round David in the cave of Adullam? Though they were distressed and miserable when they came, they did not continue so. He who attracted them to himself was the center of God's counsels, and God wrought in them and formed their hearts, and put honor upon them, and the day came when those despised ones became the heroes and champions of the Lord's cause when everything was broken in Israel. May it be our lot to serve Him faithfully! I believe that we are ecclesiastically where we ought to be—where the Spirit is free to open and wield, and apply that truth which is calculated to separate us in heart and practice to God and His objects from the world. It is now our own fault only when we do not get on, if all that hindered us once when bound up with the systematic dishonor of the Holy Spirit is removed, may we feel deeply our personal failure! Our principle is not mere human rivalry but divine, because it is neither more nor less than carrying out the Word of God as to His Church in faith, and this as He vouchsafes light and power. If any others could show us wherein we could do His will more perfectly, should we not greatly thank them, and bless God for the help? May we hold fast truth in subjection to His Spirit, desiring the good of all believers, let them be where they may, and not anxious to bring them out or in, one moment sooner than God gives them to know His mind! I do not acknowledge that any human society, great or small, has the least right to a single child of God. It is only a question of His will. To obey His Word, to urge it upon others, is neither presumptuous nor uncharitable, but faith in God. May we abound in it with thanksgiving!

Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians, Ephesians 4:7-11, Remarks on

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

We have now closed the statement which the apostle has given us of the unity of the Spirit, the common place which pertains to all the children of God who are being called through His grace by the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. We enter now the special ways in which the Lord calls upon the various members of His body to serve Him—not so much the common position which all must have who belong to Him, but the peculiar privileges and responsibilities of each individual member of Christ. And thus the seventh verse opens: "but unto every (or each) one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (vs. 7). This is the basis. Christ, according to His own good pleasure, as Head and Lord, is giving certain gifts. It is important to observe that this is the point of view in which the Holy Spirit presents

ministry in Ephesians. There is no one brought, I need hardly say, into such unequivocal prominence as Christ. In, Corinthians, on the contrary, the Holy Spirit is more prominent than Christ. Both aspects are necessary to God's glory and equally perfect in their place; but they are not the same thing. There is the wisdom of God in each epistle suited to the special object that God Himself aims at.

It is impossible for any spiritual mind to look back upon the Epistle to the Ephesians without perceiving that the great truth of it is the fullness of blessing which belongs to the Church in virtue of its union with Christ. This, accordingly, brings Christ into relief. On the other hand, we cannot study the Epistle to the Corinthians, and particularly that part of it where the subject of spiritual manifestations is treated of, without seeing that it is not so much a question of Christ exalted at the right hand of God, but of the Holy Spirit sent down here below. The consequence is that in Corinthians we have rather the assembly upon earth and the divine person who is pleased to dwell and work in it. Thus the Holy Spirit is brought there into view; whereas, in Ephesians, it is Christ as the Head of the Church, who is regarded still as the giver of these gifts. Indeed in no part of Scripture is the Holy Spirit represented as properly the giver; and I doubt much, with another, that the expression "gifts of the Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:9) is an accurate phrase. You may find in Hebrews 2:4 a text which seems to imply as much; but it is "the distributions of the Spirit" (Heb. 2:4). Wherever giving is simply and distinctly spoken of, it is Christ who is regarded as the giver. So our Lord Himself says of that which lies at the source of all, "the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water" (John 4:14). The water here represents the Holy Spirit. Hence, He is viewed in this place as the gift, and Christ is the giver. And as this is true of that great foundation truth, namely, the presence of the Holy Spirit Himself, so is it of all the details. Christ, the Head of the Church is dealing in the individual members according to His own gracious affection; for this is the blessed side of the truth which is held up here. "Unto each one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." He is speaking about ministerial gift; but it is called grace here because it is regarded not so much as a position of authority (though some of these gifts involve it), but of One who loves His Church and cares for each member of it; and He cannot fail to supply whatever is suitable and worthy of Himself and His love. "Unto each one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ."

And this leads to another remark of a general kind. In looking at Corinthians you have an ampler field in which the Holy Spirit is presented as working; you have miracles, tongues, healings—the remarkable ways in which the Holy Spirit acts in outward power. All this is left out here. To what principle are we to attribute it For God does nothing arbitrarily; but always with a love and wisdom worthy of Himself, and surely intended for our profit. What He has not revealed, it becomes us not to inquire; but what He has made known in His word, we are clearly free, nay, bound to seek to learn simply and thankfully. Why then have we also the more external operations of the Spirit in Corinthians. And why, in writing to the Ephesians, are the outward manifestations left out and only those spoken of which pertain to the growth of the soul, the founding of the Church and the carrying of it on—the keeping up holy growth and fellowship and godly order among the children of God? For to these alone the statements of this chapter apply. The key, I believe is found in what we have already hinted. In Corinthians, the prominent thought is the Holy Spirit present in the Church, and whatever He does comes before us. And as the Holy Spirit works in an extraordinary manner, and is the power of that which is sensibly supernatural as well as that which meets the wants of the soul, hence all is brought before us there. But in Ephesians, where Christ is viewed in immediate relationship to His Church, and where it is His love and the care for the members of His body which flows out of that love, it is plain that whatever merely deals with the world and is a witness to unbelievers would be not needed but superfluous: only that which has to do with the members of Christ is in place and season. Oh that we only had more patience and confidence in God and His Word! We should find the answer to every difficulty in due time. God owns the heart's reliance upon Him. By examining one truth or a particular part in the light of the whole book where it occurs, how often we discern that which gives us the right clue to its meaning!

But before looking at the gifts themselves, I would just draw attention to what is of still deeper interest and importance, the basis on which the giving of these gifts by Christ depends. For we have all suffered immensely from mere traditional views of ministry, regarding it as in general an honorable profession among men, or a certain position which has a status attached to it. These things entirely falsify the nature of ministry; and the consequence is, that the full blessing and meaning of the word are so far lost for the soul. Do not mistake me. I deny not that God works where much is unscriptural. He is always right, and the failure of the Church, or of ourselves individually, cannot touch His sovereign goodness, who always watches over all and each member of Christ for blessing. But then He allows failure to show itself, and permits that we should suffer the consequence of it to humble us and make us feel that all the good is from Him, that all the evil is on our part. Throughout the whole history of Christendom appear these two things: man corrupting his way upon the earth, and God showing Himself above the evil that His light judges. This is true of ministry as it is of all else.

Hence if we turn to Scripture and see the ground on which ministry rests, we shall find that nothing can be more glorious; but alas! nothing more contrary to that which ordinarily is its form among men. For its basis is not short of the redemption that Christ has accomplished by His blood, and of His ascension to heaven. For Christian ministry flows from Christ at the right hand of God; it did not exist before. I do not deny that God had His ways of acting in Israel. But there His dealings partook more of the character of priesthood, from which ministry differs totally in character. Earthly priesthood is a caste of men who deal with God on behalf of those for whom they are priests: that is, they undertake the spiritual business of persons unable for one reason or another to transact it with God directly, and consequently dependent upon these mediators between God and them. The priest goes where the people cannot go, enters the holy place, presents the blood, burns the incense, deals with God, in short, for each spiritual want of those whom He represents. Ministry starts upon quite different ground, being an action, through man, from God toward men, and not from man toward God. The two are clean contrasts of each other. As to the servant of God, if truly one whom God raises up, who has a message from Him and a work to do for Him, that message or work is by God's authority for the blessing of men. Hence, if you take an evangelist, what is he? One who, himself taught of God for his own soul's need, not only knows the way to be saved, but has a power which he did not possess before, given him of Christ, to act upon the souls of others. Every Christian ought to be able to confess truth, to confess Christ; yet this does not make one an evangelist, but so to state it as to act powerfully upon souls, specially of the unconverted, and thus awaken, clear, or establish in the grace of God. The spiritual action is by the Holy Spirit; but it is from God and His beloved Son, Christ our Lord, toward man. Thus, the gift, under the Lord's hand, is exercised in love of souls to seek their good, and implies or is rather power to act upon them.

Take again the gift of teaching. There you have another form of the power of God. Many understand the truth for their own soul's enjoyment, but they cannot help others: they are unable to put the truth so convincingly before believers or so to deal with the affections as to carry home the truth with power to the soul. Where that is done, there is this gift of teaching. But I have only referred to it for the purpose of contrasting the nature of priesthood with ministry, and to show that the confusion of the two things is a lamentable consequence of the state

of the Church. If people go to hear a sermon, they say they go to worship. Men are so habituated to confound teaching with worship that the two things are supposed each to involve the other.

I admit there is such a thing as Christian priesthood: still ministry is wholly distinct. All Christians, without exception, men, women, and children, are priests; for the priest is one who has a divine call and qualification, which gives him access to the presence of God. Priesthood, in a word, gives the title of the soul to draw near to God. This is always its distinguishing character. On the other hand, ministry is a very special action for good; but it is only by particular members of the body that Christ thus acts for the good of all. Hence while priesthood is universal, and no person can be a Christian without being a priest, it is only a few among the many that are what Scripture calls ministers of the Word or public servants of Christ. I am not speaking of the vague sense in which all ought to be serving Christ every day of their lives; but the question now is of proper ministry in the Word; and it is plain that all have not the power to preach the Word of God profitably for the souls of others. The great mass of God's children require to have the path of God pointed out and difficulties removed, the right handling of which things depends upon; or rather is, ministry in one form or another.

Ministry, then, as said before, is from God to man; priesthood is from man to God. When we meet to worship God, it is an exercise not of ministry, but of priesthood. Perhaps one or more of the persons who take part in it might be ministers; but for the moment they are not ministering, but worshipping. Worship is the exercise of Christian priesthood, the offering up of praise and thanksgiving. This is from man towards God—it is the direction of priesthood. Hence where there is an outflow of praise and thanksgiving, you have the highest character of priesthood. Intercession and prayer are a lower form, though intercession be blessed indeed, because it takes up the wants of others. But strictly speaking, worship rather consists of praise and thanksgiving. Hence it is that the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, forms so central a part of Christian worship. It is that which most powerfully, and in solemn joy, calls out our souls in the remembrance of Jesus and thanksgiving to God. And hence, though, of course, the taking the bread and wine cannot be regarded as in itself worship, yet it is that which acts upon the soul and draws out the heart, by the Holy Spirit, in the worship of God. Where the Lord's Supper is regarded as a means of grace, persons repair to it for comfort, or at least the hope of it. It is never so presented in the Word of God. On the contrary, if the communicants did not enter into the mind of God in the Supper (that is, did not discern the Lord's body), it became a means of judgment to them. "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." By this were meant not spurious Christians, but Christians ever so real, who were taking the Lord's Supper in a light spirit and without self-judgment. Where a soul, therefore, is walking in known sin, and comes to the table of the Lord, the effect is that the hand of the Lord is stretched out in one way or another, and it is impossible to escape when thus trifling with God. Again, if one put himself outside to avoid this, he is proclaiming his own sin, and practically excommunicating himself. Thus there is nothing for a soul but to go straight forward, and to look up to God for grace to watch against sin, yea, the least risings of it, and in self-judgment to lean on the Lord, who alone can strengthen us to walk worthily of Him. To such an one the word is, "So let him eat;" it is not, let him stay away; but let him judge himself and come.

These two things, then, worship and ministry, ought never to be jumbled together. There may be a word spoken at the table of the Lord, helping on communion; but this can scarcely be called the ordinary exercise of ministry. A regular discourse there would be, I conceive, most irregular: it would distract from the prime object which the Lord intends. There may be the unfolding of the affections of Christ, or in particular circumstances there might be even more, such as one visiting for a limited time, as when Paul continued his discourse till midnight. But the Lord's Supper, having no connection with ministry, but rather with the members of Christ remembering their Lord, and with their worship coming together to praise Him, it is plain that the formal exercise of ministry, properly speaking, finds its place elsewhere, not at the table of the Lord. A brief word that would awaken the soul's affections and gather them up to Christ whom we are remembering, is most comely and seasonable, if the Lord so give; but it is important to see the scriptural place, and order, and aim of the two things. In ministry you have the Lord providing for the spiritual supply of His people's wants. And on what is this founded? Upon the fact that Christ has gone on high as Head, having first put away sin and glorified God on earth; and from His present seat of heavenly glory He is communicating the needed gifts. By what title has Christ taken His place? Not as God, nor simply as man. Neither did Christ enter into the presence of God, because Satan had not been able to touch Him, when tempted in all points. There was a still more solemn scene—the great hour for which He came—the bearing of sin—the cross, where He made Himself chargeable with every failure—with my sins, with your sins. He has done so. Christ has only taken His place at the right hand of God on the ground of His having put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Upon this basis ministry is founded. God's righteous judgment has been borne and vindicated; sin and Satan are completely vanquished for us by Christ. The testimony of divine grace, yea, the fullness of it, can be the portion of the believer now without hindrance. The victory for God in behalf of the guiltiest sinners is won. And Christ has taken His place in the highest seat of heaven as the victorious man. As such He has carried humanity to the throne of God, and is there, as man, set down far above all angels, principalities, and powers. From thence it is that He gives these gifts.

Christian ministry, therefore, owes its very origin to this—the full remission of sins on God's part and the heavenly glorification of man in Christ's person. They are fruits and witnesses of complete victory. Yet is it all and only made known to faith, save so far as miracles once were a sign to unbelievers. What is the consequence? Man goes on in sin. Satan still roams about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. The judgment of God is hanging over the world. What, then, is the value of the death of Christ and of His victory? Immense, but immense only for those who believe in Christ; and, therefore, in the midst of this ruined world, and while sin and Satan are there, the judgment of God impending, there is this wonderful link between Him who is at the right hand of God and those who were once poor, lost sinners in the sight of God. He sends down gifts; He calls out this one and that one, and makes them to be the witnesses of His power, who has won all this and more, who has, in short, left nothing undone that is needed for the glory of God and the blessing of man. The world hears the sound only to slight the good news, and even the child of God sees it dimly if he reasons about it; but I believe what God tells me His beloved Son has done, I ought to know that all these things are gone as between my soul and God with as simple a certainty as if they had never existed at all. I ought to be as sure that sin is blotted out, as if I had been guilty of none—that Satan is as thoroughly judged as if he were in the lake of fire—that God's righteous judgment is completely stayed, and that nothing but His grace remains for me. It is true of all His children. It is the only thing that becomes a Christian, because it is what God provides for him. God does not own Christian people in their trouble or hesitation whether all is finished for them. To doubt that all which Christ undertook is settled in their favor, is practically to deny redemption; and if all this is done and accepted, what more can I want? Did not Christ know better than myself what was needed? Did not God feel what was due to His holiness more than you or I? And yet He who was and is God said, "It is finished." Who or what am I to doubt it? To Christ therefore I owe it to bear this witness.

Ministry is founded upon Christ's work and exaltation. There were the twelve and the seventy sent out no doubt before Christ went up to the right hand of God, but their mission during the days of Christ's flesh is excluded from Ephesians 4. Apostles are mentioned of course, but not in virtue of their call while He was the Messiah on earth. On the contrary, "when He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men" (vs. 8). Not that those who had been appointed apostles when Christ was here below, were not also brought into this new place, Judas excepted; but that their being apostles of the church is founded upon their having this gift of Christ after He had ascended on high. Therefore it is here said, "He gave some apostles" (vs. 11). Why had there been twelve in relation to the twelve tribes of Israel; and so, when our Lord sent them out, He forbade them to go into any city of the Gentiles. But the apostles of the church, are they sent only to the Jews? Every one knows that it is not so. After Christ was crucified, the links with Israel were broken. The rejected suffering Son of man ascends to heaven, and from His heavenly glory He sends down the Holy Spirit, and calls out from the world in sovereign grace, constitutes members of His body, and endows with power to serve Him in whatever way seems good to Himself.

Hence what is called succession, is completely disposed of. In Jewish priesthood there was successional order, and all earthly ministry forms itself on this model. But Christian ministry is not of human appointment, but divine in the fullest sense; and therefore the whole source of man's thoughts on the subject is a manifest and total fallacy. Are we to abandon the clear Word of God for the passing opinions of men? If so, I shall never know any certainty at all. The dissenter will say a church must call a man to be their minister. He may have and be a ministerial gift from Christ; but what makes a man to be their minister is their own call. Thus, it is founded on a particular church electing whom they please to be their particular minister. He is their choice and therefore their minister. But what if there be no such thing in Scripture? What if such an idea be foreign to the Word of God? There is not even a hint of it to be found there. We have the appointment of men to take care of the funds and of the poor, and this with the concurrence of the assembly. No person ought to undertake such a work unless he have the just feeling of satisfaction in the whole Christian assembly. The Church gives what she can and therefore is entitled by God to say who shall take care of their trust; that is, who shall transact the outward business of the Church. But in spiritual gifts, in teaching, preaching, exhorting, ruling, can the Church give? Clearly not. The Word of God contains nowhere such a notion as the Church choosing or appointing, except in such gifts as the Church can confer. The Church gives money and can appoint persons to administer it. The Church does not give ministerial gifts and has no title or room to interfere. Who has? It is Christ alone who gives, as we find here: "According to the measure of the gift of Christ" (vs. 7). "When He ascended up on high, He gave gifts unto men: some apostles, some prophets." This excludes even the true Church of God from any claim of power to appoint; and if it be examined, you will see how the scriptural history agrees with and confirms the principle. Who but the Lord chose Matthias? Who appointed Peter or the rest? Who addressed the multitude on the day of Pentecost? It could not be the Church, for the Church was only formed on that day. Peter preached, and by his preaching the Church was gathered. It was the Lord thus brought such as should be saved; so that ministry precedes the Church, as the atonement and ascension of Christ precede ministry. The Lord from on high calls the vessels of His grace, communicates power, leads forward by His Spirit's guidance, working by and controlling all circumstances, so that His servants shall be more or less faithfully doing His work. The consequence is, souls are gathered and the Church is formed. Thus ministry in the Word never flows from the Church, but from Christ, and the Church is the result. Ministry is therefore antecedent to the Church, instead of being founded on its authority. Hence it is that you have not only the dissenting principle of popular election entirely put aside, but every other human device. It was not the apostles, but Christ who gave gifts. And has He ceased to give them? Is He at the right hand of God still? Then, I ask, is He there as the Head of the Church? Does He not remain now as perfectly and efficaciously the Head of the Church as before the day of Pentecost? Then He was there, bringing the Church into being; and now He is there, to perpetuate the Church and supply all its need. It is as impossible, therefore, for ministry to fail as for Christ to leave the right hand of God before the body is complete. But He is there as the giver of all needful gifts; and the exercise of these gifts is what we call ministry.

But if we look further, there is a most magnificent parenthesis of the apostle on this subject. "Therefore He saith when He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men." That is, He led those captive who had led the Church captive. We were led captive of the devil, and Christ going up on high passed triumphantly above the power of Satan. The fallen spirits were completely defeated, and by Christ as man. Man has conquered Satan in the person of Christ, and we can look up as those that are one with Him who has defeated Satan. We ought never to treat with Satan as if he had power against us. We are entitled always to bid a detected Satan depart from us. We may and should always resist him: and we are told that, if so, he will depart from us; not because we are strong, but because He to whom we belong has gotten Him the victory by death and has given it to us. "Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth" (vs. 9). This supposes the glory of His person. He that is gone up is the One that first came down.

It is indeed the constant principle of God; He is always the first to come down. We require to be lifted up, and have nothing of our own to come down from. Christ, being God, was the only man who had glory proper to Himself and above all creaturehood. He descended first into the lower parts of the earth. His very humiliation is the proof of His own personal dignity. From His natural supremacy, so to speak, He descends first to do His work here below. "He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things" (vs. 10). Thus we have here a most magnificent sight of our Saviour. The Holy Spirit gives us in two short verses the grand sweep of His glory and triumph, who condescended to be a man and a servant. He that is gone up now is the same that first came down, and who only would go up again into glory when He had completely put away all that must have forever have kept us from Him. But He came down to put it away and would not return on high till it was done. He so loved us, with a love according to the glorious counsels of God, that our sins, gross and fatal as they were, only gave Him the opportunity to show what is, and is to us, in His own person. And now it is a question of God's righteousness, not only to Him but to us, because of Him. What a difference! He might come down in love, but that of itself would not give us a place in the presence of God; but He is gone up in righteousness; and this is the reason why our Lord says that, when the Spirit was come, He should convince the world of righteousness, "because I go to the Father" (John 16:17). You have the full display of righteousness now in Christ seated at the right hand of God. Righteousness toward Him in this world was nowhere found, but the foulest wrong and indignity. Where must I look for it? At the right hand of God I see One there to whom God, with reverence be it spoken, is indebted for the display and vindication of His moral glory, to whom He owes the only adequate exhibition of all that which manifested and maintained His character before men, even in the man Christ Jesus. God never had His character at all fully retrieved since sin came into the world till Christ died on the cross. When His blood was shed for the glory of God and the deliverance of man, God shone out in a new light before this world. God was no longer regarded as the hard master that Satan's lie misrepresented Him to be. The veil was rent; the truth could no longer be hid that there was no proof of love the creature could have asked of God but what God had surpassed it in His Son, dead, risen, and glorified above. Up to the death of Christ, God's righteousness must have destroyed every creature that had a sin upon it. Now, on the contrary, it is the righteousness of God to justify me, a believer, though I have been a vile sinner; and for this reason, that, although my sins in the one scale must have sunk myself alone down to hell, yet there was, in the other scale, Christ and His blood, far outweighing all, and raising me up to

heaven. What is the consequence? My sins are clean vanished before that precious blood, and the scale of Christ proves itself to be the only one that keeps its weight before God. Upon this now hangs the very righteousness of God. It is no longer a question of legal righteousness; but now He has Christ, and this is what God owes to Christ's obedience unto death, even the death of the cross; by virtue of which God righteously clears the guilty, which, as dealing according to the law, He could by no means do. "By him all that believe are justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses." What was known of God in creation contained no provision for sin; what was known of Him under the law would have only blasted the smallest hope of the sinner. Whereas now, the more I see what God is in Christ's cross, the more confidence and peace I have. "This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."

We see, then, in these verses, the heavenly source of ministry. It is not a position which according to God gives importance in the world. The laborer, we all know, is worthy of his hire. But do you not see, that the Apostle Paul would not use the title to support that the gospel gave him? He would not have what he calls his confident boasting made nothing of; for, though he had power, he preferred to work with his own hands rather than be burdensome. And this is the wonderful liberty of grace; under it there is nothing we cannot do, except sin. But though all things are lawful, they are not all expedient; and, no doubt, it was in the wisdom of God that the great apostle did what many servants of Christ would be ashamed to do. What a fearful declension there is from the whole spirit as well as letter of Christianity! How complete the change from the character of the gospel, that men, Protestants or Catholics, Churchmen or Dissenters, Presbyterians or Methodists, should alike consider as a blot and matter of censure that which was the boast of the apostle. There was a weighty principle involved in his conduct. He received a gift from the Philippians; help was sent to him in prison as well as out. He desired fruit that might abound to the account of the saints. If the apostle had not occasionally received from them, it would have been loss to their souls. Christianity does not mean that saints should use for themselves what they owe to God, and what grace loves to do for all and any one. But the apostle never acted either so that it could be said that he served himself by the gospel, or that he was indifferent to the saints: God took care that it should be so in Paul's case. The smaller gifts there would have been the danger of despising. But the gracious efforts of the apostle was to maintain the less; the greater less needed his ample shield. But where any gave themselves up to gospel service, the apostle takes the utmost care to affirm their title to live of the gospel. Let those who so live take care that in this they serve the Lord Christ.

"And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets" (vs. 11). I apprehend that the apostles and prophets are clearly what might be called the foundation gifts, such as God used for the purpose of laying a broad and deep platform on which the Church was to be built. This was done by those whom God empowered in a special manner. The apostles and prophets were the two classes that first of all entered as instruments into the calling of the Church of God. Evangelists were at work from early days, also pastors soon after. But the first two, apostles and prophets, were peculiar in their full force to the original laying down of the Church of God. There is no ground to suppose that, in the strict sense, apostles and prophets were meant to continue, or do so in fact, though something analogous to an apostle may be raised up at fitting times. Take Luther, for instance. There was a partial recall of the saints of God generally to fundamental truth, which had been long lost sight of. This answers, in a little measure, to what an apostle did. A prophet, again, was one who not merely expounded the Scriptures, but who so brought home the truth as immediately to connect the soul with God.

At the very beginning, men of God appeared who were not apostles, nor necessarily inspired communicators of truth, such as Mark and Luke; but prophets, like Judas and Silas (Acts 15:32). The Scriptures were not all written when the Church began, nor were the apostles everywhere. God, therefore, raised up prophets, who, in certain cases at least, were the means of revelation. And why is it that we have not such channels now? Because revelation is complete: we have the Word of God, and want no word more. To suppose another revelation now, would be to impair what we have; so that the need for these prophets in the highest sense is closed with the canon of Scripture. In a subordinate sense, what would answer to the prophetic work in hand might be the revival of, and powerful action on, saints at large by recalling truths once revealed, but completely evaporated. Take, for instance, the capital truth of the coming of the Lord as the hope of the Church. This truth has suffered a long and almost total eclipse. Within our own day it has again shone out with a certain measure of power from God. In what writing, since the days of the apostles, do you find the nature and calling of the Church set forth? where the unfolding of the Church's hope—the Lord's coming to receive the Church and to give it a heavenly place? These truths had slipped away from the minds of men, until recovered within the last thirty or forty years. Justification by faith had been partially known by Augustine and Bernard. The Waldenses possessed great faithfulness but not clear doctrine. But the nature of the Church as the body of Christ, and the character of the Christian's hope, were most completely lost sight of, as far as I am aware. They had gone from the Church, and it seems to me that the recovery of these truths resembles prophetic work in this particular, though one might hesitate to call any used in the work either an apostle or a prophet. When we come to the next classes of gifts, namely, "evangelists, pastors, and teachers," (vs. 11) it is plain that we have these still at work, more or less in the present broken state; and not confined to these believers or those, but distributed throughout, as the Lord pleases. Men confound ministry with local charges. It may be said, that I have slurred over a part of scripture—the apostles laying their hands on the elders. With the most entire recollection of it, let me say that elders are not the same thing as ministers. Ministry is the exercise of a gift from Christ; elders were appointed by men, but never except by apostles or apostolic delegates, such as Titus was. How do we stand with reference to that question now? Where are the men who are duly authorized to appoint elders today? Do you know any better than I where they are to be found? Some people, no doubt, pretend to thy power of appointment; but the pretension does not make their appointment valid. In civil things, if one man were without full authority to appoint another to be a magistrate, he would run the risk of being punished severely. Is it possible that in the things of God interference with the authority of our Lord is of small moment? It is not, that some sections have apostles and some have not, for no one has them more than another. I do not see that much is gained by assuming to do the work of an apostle, where it is only assumption. Is it not more humble not to pretend to apostolic work, if we are not apostles? We cannot legitimately ordain elders, because we want for it apostolic authority. Is it not most in accordance with the lowliness that becomes us, to abide within the limits of our powers? I do not admit that any one living is entitled to choose elders, or anything else of the sort, because there is neither an apostle nor an apostolic man commissioned by the Lord for the purpose: if any assume to ordain, they should prove their title.

But ministry and eldership are not the same thing—they are almost always confounded, but they differ totally. These two things are found in Scripture: local charges, duly ordained by apostles or their delegates; and ministerial gifts, which never required human authentication. In Scripture, no person was ever chosen to be an apostle, nor called to be a prophet or an evangelist, except by Christ. It was precisely the same with pastors and teachers, as we see in our chapter; and why should it not be the same still? Christ has not vacated His office; and it is His office to call and give pastors, evangelists and teachers. But there is another principle quite distinct from that involved in these gifts, namely, that Christ warranted the apostles to act in the way of authority. In virtue of this, they appointed persons to be elders or deacons, as

the case might be. We cannot do what apostles did unless we are clothed with like authority; but we have Christ ever abiding the immediate giver of ministerial gifts: this is always true. Ministry does not and never did depend upon apostles or the Church, but upon Christ; and therefore it cannot lapse. But as the appointment of elders, according to Scripture, hung upon the apostles, and as there are no apostles now, the rightful power to appoint elders is necessarily and evidently at an end. Scripture may intimate the continuance of gift, but not of authority to ordain. Elders, or rather officials, of the various religious bodies abound; but what is their appointment (I do not say their gifts) worth? Let any one that knows the Bible say whether I am treating fairly this weighty matter according to the Word of God.

The question, then, for us now is, Are we carrying out the will of God? Many have a notion that there is some special value in a human rite of ordination in making a man a minister. But in the days of the apostles themselves, no one ever thought of being appointed to preach the gospel. If a person could preach, he was bound to do it; if he did not, he was like the slothful servant, hiding his talent. If a man took the ground of having a right to preach or to speak in the assembly, you may safely deny his right. None but God has a right to proclaim glad tidings to the world, or to speak to His assembly by whom He will. He, therefore, may call men and put them forward, one to do this work and another to do that work. And here comes in the searching question, Is the Lord to be acknowledged honestly and thoroughly as the Head over His own Church? In ministry, properly so styled, it is not a question of men appointing men, but whether Christ is allowed to be the Head of His own Church. Do not, then, acknowledge that it is the Church's business to appoint ministers in the Word. The Church is not my Lord, but Christ; and we ought never to put the Church in the place of Christ. This has been one of the main and most mischievous sources of Popery.

It follows that we ought to acknowledge all that the Lord appoints. If a man preaches the truth in this or that body, I am not to ignore, but own the servants of Christ everywhere. They may not thoroughly carry out the truth; but in all cases it is not the brethren, but Christ that gives gifts. But does it follow that I am to go to mass, even if a Romish priest preaches a measure of truth? I must examine whether he who may be ever so real a servant of Christ, is doing the will of God in the matter. We are not called to follow this or that one, except so far as they follow Christ. We are called on to do the will of God; and "he that doeth the will of God abideth forever" (1 John 2:17). Nothing therefore can be more simple than the path of the Christian. Let him value the servants of Christ in their place, but not necessarily all that they are doing, unless it be according to the will of God. But is it not said that we are to obey them who have the rule over us? Yes, and it is as true now as ever it was. But supposing you are converted to God, and there is a priest of Rome who says that you must obey those that have the rule over you, and they have this rule, am I not to question what he means and what he is using the text for? Is it to induce me to disobey God? If so, am I not to say, I "must obey God rather than man?" Thus there is always a path for the saint of God who desires to do His will, and that path is simply obedience. It may sometimes take the form of what mistaken or self-willed men might call disobedience; but certainly it will be the obeying of God rather than man. Nothing can absolve us from the positive, invariable duty of obeying God.

This will show that whatever may be the value of ministry, it was never intended to bind down the children of God, and to make it a question of mere blind acquiescence. Ministry, where it is true, manifests what is the will of God wherein there is a simple mind. Ministry puts the truth in so convincing a way as to bring the conscience into the light and feel its responsibility to follow that light. If you do a thing merely because a minister of God says it, influence is at work and not the power of the Spirit of God. Christian obedience is neither the blind leading the blind, nor the seeing leading the blind; but the seeing leading the seeing. Every believer has power in the Spirit to see the mind of God for himself; and he who is called of God to the place of leading others will, as a general rule, be enabled to bring the mind of God so completely to bear upon the conscience that the simple hearted cannot but see it. But let us remember that it is serious for any one to acknowledge the truth and not to follow it. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).

Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians, Ephesians 4:1-6, Remarks on

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

Before entering upon the subject of ministerial gifts, which is brought before us later on in the chapter, the Holy Spirit dwells upon the unity that belongs to the saints of God in Christ now. It was necessary that this should be laid down as a grand platform upon and in connection with which ministry takes its course. For ministry rather brings into prominence individual members of Christ, and not so much the entire body. For although it is a common statement that the Church teaches, it is really and entirely unfounded. Indeed the notion leads to the pretense of infallibility; and this finds its most open expression in Romanism. The truth is, the Church never teaches, but, on the contrary, is the body that is taught. There is no such thing as a body that teaches. The Church, no doubt, contains within itself the husbandman that are employed of the Lord; but itself is God's husbandry or the scene on which God labors to produce fruit unto Himself. This is an important truth practically; because it destroys all pretension on the Church's part to create or even define doctrines. The Church is called to be the pillar and ground of the truth; it is bound to take care by holy discipline that nothing contrary to the truth should be tolerated within it: God's assembly cannot relieve itself from this responsibility. But while this belongs to the entire Christian community, that it should be that body which on earth holds out the truth before men, and within which we must come if the truth, having been believed, is to be acted on at all; yet the way in which God has been pleased to work for the spread of His truth upon consciences is by individual members of His Church who are qualified for this particular purpose. Power to teach depends upon the gift conferred by sovereign grace. It is not from an abstract right that every man can teach or preach if he likes. There is no such license in the Church of God. The Lord Jesus has a right to call and to communicate power in the Holy Spirit as He pleases. The Church is not a society of men who hold particular views on this or that: still less is it the gathering into one of the world. It is the assembly of God, of those He calls and wherein He dwells. And as this is true with regard to the whole—that it all belongs to God—that it is God who forms, and guards it, and maintains His own holiness and glory in it, so is it with regard to ministry, which is one very important function that is maintained in particular members of the Church. That is, there is the unity which the believers now have in Christ Jesus, by virtue of which there is the assembly of God—the common unity of blessing in which all believers now stand, and which is the groundwork, if I may so say, of everything. But in connection with it you have ministry at work, which belongs to particular members rather than to the whole Church. The gifts are in and of some, for the good of all.

This divides the portion before us into two parts. In the early verses, to the end of verse 6, we find rather the unity of the Spirit; from verse 7 the diversity of the members of Christ. First of all, observe that the Holy Spirit has brought us now to the ground of exhortation. We have

doctrine in the first three chapters; now we come to practice. "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" (vs. 1). This vocation consists of two parts more particularly. First, the saints, all who know the Lord Jesus Christ, compose one body in Him; secondly, they are the habitation of God through the Spirit. Thus, although the assembly of God is a body existing upon earth, yet it is founded upon heavenly privileges, the body of Christ showing us our corporate blessedness, the habitation of God through the Spirit rather bringing before us our responsibility as having God dwelling in the midst of us. I apprehend that these two things are very feebly entered into, even by true children of God. When they hear of the body of Christ, the idea is scarcely more than that they are forgiven, or are children of God, or they are going to heaven. How very little all this is a measure of what is implied in the body of Christ! Many true believers suppose it to mean the aggregate of those who are reconciled to God—the objects of His favor who are not left to die in their sins. But you might have all these privileges without any of the characteristic features of Christ's body, or God's habitation through the Spirit. It would have been quite possible, if God had been so pleased to order it, that Christians should have been children of God, conscious of their redemption, knowing their sonship, fully expecting to be glorified with Christ in heaven, and yet never have been joined together as one body in Christ, with God dwelling among them by a special presence of the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. This was a superadded privilege over and above redemption through the blood of Christ. And this is so true, that if you search all the Old Testament through, you will find that never are the saints of God spoken of there as being members of Christ's body, the habitation of God through the Spirit.

But more than that. The prophets are full of a glorious scene yet to be enacted on this earth, when the Lord will put down Satan's power. There is a time coming when evil will no longer be permitted to go unpunished, nor good to suffer here below; and when that day comes, Scripture is plain that although God will have a people for Himself upon earth, they will not be joined together as one body, nor will they form God's habitation through the Spirit. It is between the two advents of Christ—between the grace which has appeared, and the glory which is going to appear (Titus 2:11-13)—that we hear of this special Vocation wherewith we are called. For let us consider what the body of Christ is—His body, of course, I mean; not as predicated of Himself personally, but as composed of and applied to those who believe in Christ now, that spiritual corporation to which all true saints of God now found upon the earth and ever since Pentecost belong. What are the blessings which constitute it? What does the Holy Spirit mean by membership of this body? I answer, the cross, being the witness and expression of the guilt of the Jews more especially (the guilt, doubtless, of all men in general, but pre-eminently of the Jew), gave occasion for God to dissolve completely, for the time being, the peculiar place of favor which the Jewish people had previously possessed. God Himself blotted out the landmark which separated Israel from the Gentiles; and instead of making Israel to be the one channel of His promise, on the contrary, the tide of blessing turns decidedly and conspicuously towards the Gentiles—to gather out of Jews and Gentiles a people for His name; and to join together this election out of them both, who believe in Christ, into the possession of new privileges that never had been tasted in like mode or measure before.

One most remarkable feature of the blessing is, that the distinction between Jew and Gentile is gone. The cross united them in wickedness before God. But what does God use it for He says, as it were, I will take that very cross which man has made the scene of his outrageous rebellion against God—which proved that my ancient people were grown violent in hostility against Me in the person of My Son; and I will make the cross to be the pivot on which will turn fuller, richer blessing than had even been hoped for by believing men in this world before. Thus, as the cross was the rallying point of Satan to gather men in an unholy union against God and His Son, so God makes it to be the grand center where He forms the Jews and Gentiles that believe in His Son into a new body, where all such distinctions are blotted out forever. And if God is pleased to call out a people for the purpose of giving a practical testimony to this new display of His love, who is to gainsay it? The law is righteous; and it would be an outrage upon God to put the smallest stigma upon the ten words. But while the commandment is holy, just, and good, grace brings in what is higher and better still. It is right, of course, if I do well, that —should be rewarded for it; but is it not more blessed, if I do well, suffer for it, and take it patiently This is grace, acceptable with God, and the practical principle on which He is calling His children now to act. It was not the public rule of government in Old Testament times, but the contrast of it. Does God, then, contradict Himself? Far from it. God may have one way of dealing with the Jewish people; and then He may lay down another way of dealing with Christians. Indeed, who can deny that He has? The Jew would have been guilty of a grievous sin if he had not been circumcised; and I believe that, as far as the earth is concerned, even in the bright day that is coming, the Jew will have His land, and priest, and temple. The will of God for the Jews will remain substantially unchanged. I find in the prophecies a state of things not yet accomplished, when all these outward ordinances of God will be fulfilled. Am I not to believe God till I see the prophecies thus realized? It is not thus we treat the word of a good man. But if we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater. And for a man to receive Samuel and Kinas, and not to believe Ezekiel and Hosea, is to treat God as you would not treat an ordinary man. But if I believe all that He has said, there are peculiar principles of God for the Jews which are still to be carried out by the Messiah reigning in power when the devil is bound. God will accomplish all that He has spoken of in the prophets in the days of heaven upon the earth. But meanwhile the Messiah that was promised to bring in the glory came, and has been rejected. Instead of having a throne, He had the cross; and far from taking the earth for His inheritance, He was cast out of it and went up to heaven. A new state of things consequently was opened; and for this order, altogether different from that contemplated generally in the prophecies, we have the New Testament revelation. Therein we find what meets little intimations here and there in the Old Testament, but at the same time introduces, as a whole, a scene without precedent or successor, where God unfolds privileges that were never tasted before, and looks for a walk that He did in no way demand even from saints of old.

There are, of course, certain plain, fixed principles always obligatory. God never sanctioned a lie or covetousness, or malice: no dispensations can neutralize or weaken the grand moral distinctions between right and wrong. But the God that wrought in earthly power to protect His people, and would have protected them had they been faithful under the law, now, on the contrary, calls His people to suffer in grace. The same God that shielded them and brought them through the Red Sea, and who would not allow any power to gain universal supremacy in the earth till Israel had proved themselves unfaithful, then, when they did manifest themselves altogether unworthy, permitted Babylon, the very worst of the Gentile powers, to overthrow them. And then one empire succeeded another, till finally, under the Romans, both Jews and Gentiles united in crucifying the Lord of glory. Then the world's doom was sealed; the knell of its judgment sounded from the cross of Jesus. You might have expected, had God been then acting upon principles of righteousness, that at once the universe of God would have been convulsed, and Jerusalem and Rome destroyed in His fiery indignation. But, no; heaven opens, but it is to receive the crucified Jesus—not to judge His murderers: it is furthermore to send down the Holy Spirit on earth, to form by grace this new body the Church of God; it is to bring those vile murderers of Jesus, if they only received Him, into a place of blessing, whose breadth, and length, and depth, and height never had been enjoyed or known before.

And this is grace. The law was given by Moses, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. The gospel of God's grace goes out; but it does not merely save souls—it gathers them, unites them to Christ, makes them members of Him and one of another. The Old Jewish vantage ground has disappeared; the Levitical privileges are completely eclipsed as far as the Church is concerned. The Gentiles were sunk in idolatry, and the Jews self-complacent under God's law which they kept not; but both are brought through the Spirit, by faith in Christ, into this one body, and worship God on the same common ground of grace. They are "builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. This is the vocation wherewith we are called."

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord" (vs. 1). He again points to that honorable scar from the world's enmity, because he is bringing out in a practical way what the consequence, even to the greatest servant of God that ever lived (next to Christ), was in this world. After all, he was the Lord's prisoner. What a wonderful honor! There were no fiery chariots to surround him, as with Elijah; no power put forth to preserve him. He is suffering from the same empire that crucified the Lord of glory; and out of his prison he is cheering the saints to walk worthy of that same calling! Even now the world is overmatched: what will it be when Christ comes? "With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love" (vs. 2). There was a danger of the contrary: spiritual privilege might be misused to puff up the saints. He therefore meets this, and shows them the only proper tone that becomes the Christian. "With all lowliness and meekness" (vs. 2). It is a blessed thing to find zeal: but what can redeem the walk of a Christian which fails in lowliness and meekness? There is a time to be firm and a time to be yielding, but neither gift nor position can justify those who seem to think that in their case the exhortation to meekness and lowliness has no place. We must take care, on the other hand, that it is not meekness in manner or lowliness in word only, for God looks in us for what is real. Too often, humility is but a cover for the deepest pride, as love and the spirit of Christ are most talked of where they least exist. Let us beware of this vain show.

But supposing there is that in others which you cannot overlook, as being contrary to the mind of God, how are we to act? No doubt there is to be the fitly spoken word of reproof, if needful; but there is to be "long-suffering" also; and if there be any place where long-suffering is called for, it is where evil touches ourselves. We are not to tolerate evil against the Lord; but wherever it is that which injures us, longsuffering is the word, "forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Here it is not only the lowly grace and patience which the Christian has to cherish, but the spiritual diligence with which he is called to hold fast what is most precious and divine here below.

"Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (vs. 3). How perfect is Scripture! It does not say, "the unity of the body," although including it. But had it been said, "the unity of the body," people might have built up (as indeed they have) an outward institution and made it a point of life and death not to separate from that. But what the Holy Spirit lays upon those belonging to Christ is, "endeavoring"—showing all needed earnestness—not to make, but "to keep the unity of the Spirit" (vs. 3). It is something already made by the Spirit which we have to maintain or observe. It is not merely that we are to have a nice feeling towards our fellow-Christians. This might be in a thousand different bodies; but if ever so well kept, this would not be keeping "the unity of the Spirit" (vs. 3). What is meant then? The unity of the Holy Spirit, which is already formed, embraces all the members of Christ. And where are the members of Christ to be found? In one sense, thank God, everywhere: in another, alas! anywhere. Wherever Christ is preached, and souls have received Him, there are His members. And what have we to do? Diligently to maintain the unity that embraces everyone belonging to Christ—"in the bond of peace" (vs. 3). Here we find peace spoken of, not so much for our own souls with God, but rather for enjoying and furthering practically union among saints of God. The flesh is anxious and restless: a peaceful spirit is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and mightily contributes to the binding together of hearts in practice. God's Spirit is not occupied with merely giving right opinions about things: deeper purposes are His. He is bowing souls to Christ, and exalting Him in their eyes. But to bring one soul out of darkness into light, or out of a little into deeper light, is surely precious; and this is what God Himself is now engaged with. We do well, while holding fast our liberty for Christ, not to allow the barriers that men have brought in, but to treat them as null and void.

But then, it will be, as is often, said that every man has a right of private judgment: I deny it totally. No man has a right to have an opinion in divine things; God only and absolutely is entitled to communicate His mind. What people have to do is to get out of the way, that God's light may shine into the hearts of His children. Men, in their self-importance, only cause their dark shadows to pass over each other: they thus hinder instead of helping the communication of divine truth. Whereas, when the desire of Christ's servant is, that God may lead on and strengthen His children, is it in vain? Never. The moment you begin to gather people round a particular person, view, or system, you are only forming a sect. For this is a party, though it may contain many members of Christ, which forms its basis of union, not on Christ, but on points of difference, which thus become a special badge and means of separating between the children of God. The apostolic Church never challenged a convert's faith as to an establishment or dissent—never asked, Do you believe in episcopacy, voluntaryism, or even the Church of God? The true and God-glorifying inquiry ever was and is, Do you believe in the Christ of God? Is it true that in early days, if a man confessed Christ, he was cast off by Jews and Gentiles, and became an object of enmity to all the world; and this was no slight a guard then against people confessing Christ, unless they really believed in Him. But if a man had received the Holy Spirit, through the hearing of faith, he was at once a member of the one body, and acknowledged as such.

Why should this not rule now? Am I not content with the wisdom of God? Would I then supplement His word, or do without or against it? It is no sect if you act upon the mind of God; it is a sect if you depart from it. The question, therefore, is, What is God's intention about His Church? How would He have us to meet? Am I willing to receive all real Christians—persons whom all believe to be converted? Doubtless there is such a thing as putting them out if they prove not to be so; for there is no possible case of evil but what the word of God applies to, so that there is not the smallest need for any rules or regulations of men. Unless men are spiritual, they will not keep the unity of the Spirit long; they will soon find abundant ground for faultfinding. But those who hold fast and firm to Christ as the center of the Spirit's unity, as they are no sect, so they never can become one, whatever be the schisms, divisions, heresies, of their adversaries. It is very sorrowful that any souls should go away in self-condemnation, but it is the more blessed for those, who, spite of all, have faith and patience and grace to stay. The apostle said in writing to the Corinthians, "There must needs be heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest." These were the men who in that day clave to the Lord with full purpose of heart. May the same thing be true of us now! I deny that the word of God is made of none effect, or that I am in any way bound to sin now more than then. The unity of the Spirit which the Ephesians had to keep, is the unity which God lays upon all His children. If the word has regenerated my soul through the Holy Spirit; if through that word I know my Saviour and my Father; if to it I am indebted as the means God uses for cleansing my soul from day to day, am I to say that I need not follow His word as a member of Christ's body in the assembly of God, where He dwells in the Spirit? Surely, if my soul owns its divine authority, woe

is me if I do not seek to follow it in all things. God calls on us to be diligent in maintaining “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (vs. 3). It is not the unity of our spirits, but the unity of the Spirit.

When we reflect that it is the Holy Spirit who forms this unity, is it not a solemn thought? Ought we not to guard against anything that would grieve Him? Our Lord attached special importance to what touched the Holy Spirit; and so should we if wise. If the Holy Spirit is here for this purpose on earth, He becomes a divine test for souls, whether they are prepared to honor Him or not. But people might say, If you receive all Christians without requiring them to give a pledge for the future, tacitly, if not expressly, you may accept a Socinian or an Arian. But I do not acknowledge such to be Christians at all: do you? What is the Church founded on? “Whom say ye that I am,” (Luke 9:20) says our Lord, in the very chapter in which He first notices that He was going to build the Church. “Thou art the Christ (says a disciple), the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). And what does our Lord reply “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18). Hence there ought to be the strongest, strictest dealing with souls, whether in deed and in truth they believe and confess the divine glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. The smallest compromise as to this allowed would be a reason for standing in doubt of any soul. You have no ground to receive as a Christian him who tampers with the purity, glory, or integrity of the person of Christ. The Church is founded on Christ the Son of God: if this rock be shaken, all is gone. “If the foundations be destroyed, what shall the righteous do?” (Psa. 11:3). To touch Christ is to touch the very basis on which the Church of God rests.

But where a soul confesses Christ really and truly, confesses Him in such a way that it commends itself to your conscience as divine, receive him; for God has. He may be Baptist or Paedo-Baptist: never mind, receive him. If he is living in sin, need I say that Christ and drunkenness cannot go together? Faith in the Son of God is incompatible with walking in darkness. No matter how a man may talk about Christ, if he joins with that confession a disregard for the moral glory of God, he proves by this fact that he is not born of God. Simon Magus thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money. It was a mistake that he made, some will say. Yes, but that mistake was vital, and proved that he could not have life from God; and therefore, though baptized, he was not received as a member of the body of Christ. We have no reason to think that he broke bread at all. Baptism would be no reason in the face of such circumstances, why the assembly should receive him whom they do not believe to be a saint.

This will show in some degree the character or limits of the unity of the Spirit. For the Holy Spirit, while He calls souls and empowers them to confess Christ, never leaves them to walk in the mire of their own wickedness. If a believer falls into sin of a certain character, he ought to be put away. What is merely personal should be dealt with in a private way; it would be monstrous to put all failures on the same ground. The first and deep feeling of the soul ought to be, in vindicating God, to get the person right. The Church is a witness of divine grace, and has to seek the blessing of the unconverted, and the restoration of Christians who have gone astray. Are we endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit? How is it that Christians are formed into different associations? If the word of God be that which they at all cost seek to carry out, why do they require human rules and modern inventions? If God gives a rule I do not want another; I do want to have His in all its strength, so as to bring forth the truth to a man’s conscience, and say, That is God’s will. Is it well or wise to yield this up?

God has written a word that bears upon everything moral, by which He intended His children to walk: are we doing so? You may ask, Are you then perfect? I answer, We are endeavoring to hold fast and in peace the Spirit’s unity, we are honestly seeking subjection to the will of God: are you doing the same? This is the main question for every child of God—Am I endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit? And am I doing it in God’s way or out of my own head? Have I surrendered myself to His will? Our business is to be dutiful to Him. We have our orders, and our responsibility is to carry them out, subject to Him whose we are, and whom we are bound to serve.

But further this unity is to be kept in the bond of peace. God is forming His Church of all those who belong to Himself. It is not Christian persons holding particular views of this or that; but the Spirit holding to His own unity, that is, to what Christ is to them, not to the points in which they differ one from another. If I want to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, I must have my own soul settled upon this: the Holy Spirit is glorifying Christ alone. You cannot please the Father more than in exalting the Son; and you cannot touch Him more nearly than by slighting His Son. All is secured in maintaining Christ. This brings it to the simplest possible issue. What have we to do with forcing people to give up their views and adopt ours, let them be ever so correct? God’s word furnishes a ground, in the name of Christ, on which you can embrace all saints, let them be ever so weak or prejudiced. Let us beware of being more careful of our own reputation or ease than of His will. Let us not be vain of our little knowledge, or of the point we may have attained to in practice. Let us look up to the Lord for faith and patience to own every real member and servant of Christ, wherever found. Let us cleave to the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and be diligent in maintaining it, whatever the difficulties may be, and they are great. Faith does not see many bodies and one Spirit, it knows but one body. Bearing with others who in this see dimly or double, let us be rigid in holding fast the name of Christ, and for ourselves be careful to accredit nothing contrary to it. “There is one body and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling.” This is our most essential, vital blessing in Christ; “for we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones” (ch. 5:30). “One Spirit” is added immediately, because it is the Holy Spirit who makes it good; and what we are now by the power of the Holy Spirit, we hope to enjoy by and with Christ. We shall have it fully and perfectly in the presence of God in heaven. This is the first unity.

There is a difference between this and the following verses. The fourth verse is one character of unity, the fifth another, and the sixth a third; and these concentric unities enlarge respectively. “There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling” (vs. 4). Nobody enters into this who is not born and baptized of the Holy Spirit. This one body is on earth, no doubt; but then it is a real thing and of God now, whatever may be the glory proper to it hereafter. But in verse 5 you have a more outside unity, an area of profession, larger than that of real spiritual power. Here “the Lord” is made prominent; and there are many who will say in that day, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?” (Matt. 7:22).

Hence we hear next of “one faith,” by which is meant the Christian faith. If I talk about faith in the sense of its being the medium by which we lay hold of Christ, and are saved in the grace of God, it is never called one faith. By the latter is meant the common faith that all Christians profess, in contradistinction to the religion or law of Jews and the idolatry of Gentiles. Accordingly “one Lord, one faith,” (vs. 5) is followed by “one baptism;” because whoever professed to believe in Christ was baptized with water. Simon Magus received Christ nominally, and was baptized, though he soon proved to be no Christian. Thus, verse 5 gives us, not the unity that is real, and holy, and enduring, but of the Christian profession.

Last of all, we have "one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all" (vs. 6). Evidently in this I stand before a still vaster compass. There is an immense mass of mankind that does not profess Christ at all. The bulk of men have gone on with their idols, spite of law and gospel. Are there no claims there? I own one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all. That is, it is a personal God. Not at all the idea that everything is God—which is infidelity in its worst shape, or Pantheism. I own "one God," not a number of divinities, like the Gentiles, but "one God and Father of all" (vs. 6). The Jew did not believe that He was the Father of all, nor even properly this for the chosen nation; but rather their Governor, even Jehovah. The Christian revelation brings out God in an infinitely larger, as well as for us more intimate, character; but larger, too, as embracing all creaturehood—"One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all" (vs. 6) (His supremacy and providence—but more than these) "and in you all." There is His near connection with some, and not with all. For it is not said, "in all," but "in you all." The Holy Spirit is speaking of the Father's peculiar relationship to the Christian. Thus nothing can be more full and beautiful, and orderly, than these unfoldings of unity in and around Christ our Lord.

Lectures on the Church of God, Lecture 5: Gifts and Local Charges.

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

Eph. 4:7-11.

SHOULD feel to-night that my subject was dry indeed and promised little profit to souls, if we had only to look at gifts and offices in themselves. It is thus that the subject is often regarded, and is therefore apt to become not only a barren speculative question for some souls, but also a snare to others—barren to such as, looking upon it from outside, think that they at least have nothing to do with gifts and offices, and a snare perhaps as often to those who conclude that they themselves are especially, if not exclusively, concerned in them. The truth is, these spiritual functions closely and materially affect both Christ and the church of God. Attached to Christ as their source, they (at any rate gifts) flow down from the same reservoir of rich grace on high, whence all the main characteristic blessings of the church proceed. They proceed from Him in heavenly places, and therein is the true answer to much, the greater part, of the aversion some feel to the subject, as if ministerial gifts were only a means of giving importance to their possessors. It would be hard to think that such a turn can be anything but a gross perversion of what comes from Christ or heaven. In truth they are of the deepest moment in God's eyes, as He deigns to use them for the glory of His Son; and surely the consideration of the light that scripture affords should be precious to those whose joy as well as responsibility it is to profit by them; and not least to those who have personally and most jealously to watch how the gift of Christ's grace is used, lest it should be diverted from the object for which the Lord gave it to some selfish or worldly account. It is evident, I think, that simply to state the source is, in the principle of it, to cut off all excuse for the earthly aggrandizement, in various forms, which the Lord's gifts are too commonly made to serve.

But then there is another remark to be made. Not only do these gifts of Christ spring from Him in heaven, and therefore must, if anything can, refuse to mingle with the vanity of the world and the pride of man (I speak, of course, of the gift itself, and not of the flesh's perversion of it); but besides there is another feature of these gifts, which is of immense interest to us as believers in the Lord Jesus. They are essentially bound up with Christianity, not on the contemplative side, but in what is equally needful, its active and aggressive character. But whether you look at the source or the character, all is founded on an eternal redemption that is already accomplished. The more these considerations are weighed, the more their importance will appear; the more also, it seems to me, the subject of the gifts of Christ will be seen to be entirely above that earthly and barren domain to which theology at least would consign it.

Further, is there not a wrong done to God and His saints, wherever that which the Lord deigned to make known to us in His word—that which constitutes, rightly applied, so essential a part of the blessing of the church—is viewed as but a secondary matter that can be taken up or laid aside at will? In point of fact, such indifference to His truth is deep dishonor done to Him, and a corresponding loss invariably to the souls of the saints who thus slight His will. It must be evident, if it were only from the scripture just read, that the Holy Ghost does not in any way banish the subject of gifts into some dark comer—if such there can be in the scriptures—whence we may, if we please, draw it forth from time to time, and wield it to the best account of our party. In the Epistle to the Ephesians, where the Holy Ghost has shown both heights and depths of blessing in Christ and in the church—in the very center where He shows us too the Lord Himself in His own glory at the right hand of God—it is there beyond almost any other part of the New Testament, that we find the Spirit launching out into an account of the gifts of the Lord to the church.

But, observe, I say the "gifts of the Lord," because so it is that they are regarded here, rather than gifts of the Spirit. Indeed it would be difficult to find such an expression in scripture. There is a passage which seems to say as much in Heb. 2; but it is properly "the distributions of the Holy Ghost." You will find also in 1 Cor. 12 that wisdom, knowledge, and the rest are said to be given by "the same Spirit." But still, in these things, the Holy Ghost, properly speaking, is not regarded as the giver, save mediately. The Lord, is the real and proper giver; the Spirit of God is rather the intermediate means of conveying the gift, distributing or making it good,—the energy by which the Lord acts. And I conceive it to be of moment, practically, that we should see that the gifts which are used to call out and build up the church, and which are the only true basis of ministry, take their rise from Christ Himself.

Ministry then may be defined to be the exercise of gift, and therefore it is evident that these gifts of grace are bound up with it in the most intimate manner. There can be no ministry of the word (properly speaking) without gift by the Spirit from Christ.

But let us look for a moment at the development which the Holy Ghost gives to the truth that these gifts flow from Christ. "Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" It is not a bare question of qualities possessed; still less is it merely a matter of attainment, let it be ever so well meant to give honor to the Holy Ghost. It is a new thing given, the positive consequence of grace; it is the fruit of the free favor of the Lord, who in these things acts according to His own sovereign will and for the glory of God.

"And unto every one [or each] of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, [taking up Psalms 68] When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." Although the Lord Jesus was in His person, one need hardly

say, competent at all times, still He was pleased, in the order of the ways of God, to wait for the great work to be done—and done too, not merely as regarded man in divine mercy towards him, but in view of the enemy who was to be dealt with; the power must be broken that had led captive the children of God. Hence the spiritual enemies were first disposed of, and the Lord is accordingly represented here as ascending up to heaven on the defeat, the total defeat before God, of all the once mighty unseen power of evil. Upon this foundation ministry is built. The Lord Jesus goes up into heaven. He has Himself confronted and defeated the powers of darkness. He has led captivity captive; and thereon "He gave gifts to men." How completely the door for man's energy and ambition is closed! How carefully God—alone able to teach us on this subject, and in His revealed word having, in fact, given us the perfect truth—shows us the Lord Jesus, from first to last, the one means of good to us, and glory to God the Father by the Holy Ghost! Do you view Him only as Saviour and Lord? The truth is, there is not a single seed of the Church's blessing, there is not a means of acting upon the souls of ourselves or of others, that is not, every whit of it, connected with Christ. Where we have not apprehended this vital all-embracing connection with Him, and where that which assumes to be ministry, for instants, does not flow from Him only, it is clear there is a something not to be held fast, but on the contrary to be got rid of; an object not to be fought for as if it were a prize, but to be suspected as contraband, brought into the light of God, and judged in His presence. For whose ministry is it if it be not of the Lord Christ? and for what are we contending if it be not for the gifts of Christ?

The Lord then is ascended on high, and from that height of bliss and glory He has given gifts to men, and the Spirit of God carefully turns aside for a little, and puts us in the very presence of the mighty work on the ground of which Christ took His seat there. "Now that he ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?" What grace in Him! What infinite love to us, that He might bless us—eternally bless us! He had, with the Father and the Spirit, a divine co-equal right to that place of supreme majesty. They alone were competent to fill it. But He descended first into the lower parts of the earth. He had the highest place above, if I may say so, naturally and intrinsically. It belonged to Him as the Son of God, who counted it not robbery to be equal with God; but He deigned to be made flesh; for, as a part of the counsels of God, it was needful that He should be man. Without the incarnation there could have been no retrieving of the universal ruin of man, and of the dishonor of God through sin; there could have been neither defeat of Satan, nor an adequate and righteous deliverance for man. But now He descends first into the lower parts of the earth. He takes upon Him the sorrow, the shame, the sin. To have condescended to become man, and to live as He lived rejected and abased on earth, would have been much; but what is this to the cross? He went down to the very uttermost, and in consequence of this humiliation, He is now as man exalted to the highest. In His death He retrieved all that was rained indeed, I may say, infinitely more. He "restored that which he took not away." He brought a new and better glory to God than had ever been thought or even prophesied of in any respect; for I fear not to say that, as all types and shadows are but the feeble heralds of His glory, so too there is, there could be, no prediction rising up to the height of blessing that was found in Christ, nor fathoming the depth of His moral glory in the sight of God. Himself was needed to come forth—Himself needed that the full worth of His sufferings and cross might be known. Before that there could be no sufficient expression of His glory. It was out of this descent into the lower parts of the earth that He went up—out of this thorough coming down by Him who was as truly God as man, in the very nature which before had borne such fruits of shame and disgrace to God.

But what a change! Humanity is a nature in which the blessed God could delight, as He looked upon it in the Lord Jesus. Now too He ascends; and this, not as He came down; for, descending simply as the Son of God to become the Son of man, He goes up, not the Son of God only, but also the Son of man. Indeed, it is especially in this very character of man that we find Him seated in heaven now. "He ascended up," as it is said, "far above all heavens, that He might fill all things." On this magnificent ground, whether one looks at the humiliation on the one hand, or at the exaltation on the other—on this twofold ground of a height of glory, consequent on a depth of abasement beyond all thought, is founded that ministry which is according to God, being the simple exercise of the gift of Christ. And yet could it be credited, if one did not know it, that there are men, and Christians too, who can look upon such a scene unmoved, if not moved only to spite and sneer and reproach? But it must be so. To work thus belongs to Him whom the world knew not. No wonder therefore that it recognizes not the gifts of His grace. Whatever can be made to merge into the world's greatness, whatever can be altered to suit the age's taste, the world can admire. Even Christianity and the name of Christ perverted, no doubt, and regarded only in some partial way—may be adopted. Why even the heathen were willing to do it! There was an emperor, as probably many of you know, who would have been glad to put the Lord Jesus as a god in the Pantheon. And so it is now. Has not Christendom something akin for its success? It has taken up piecemeal this institution and that; it has made them the means of adorning the scene into which God "drove out the man," exiled by Him because of sin.

But we who believe are assuredly entitled to look above this world, and there to see, higher than all heavens, our Lord and Master. And what is He doing there? What is His present occupation, according to that which the Spirit of God tells us here? He is giving gifts unto men. Let us bless Him for it He (Himself a man, for so it is that He has taken this place) is giving gifts unto men. From on high He looks round about upon this world, and His grace makes man to be the vessel of these precious gifts, which savor not only of the person who is there, and of the work He has done, but also of the glory from which He gives them. They are heavenly gifts. They will not, if He be consulted, conform to the world's thought or measure; nor were they ever intended to serve the world but the Lord Jesus, though surely for His sake serving any and every body.

Let us take care then that we truly are subject to Him in whom we believe. And let us beware of the evil heart of unbelief, lest we treat a word of His lightly. Let us remember how easy it is pretending to honor His word, to let it slip away from us, counting it something of the past—no doubt to look back on it with reverential awe, but still as a thing gone by. Is this the living word of a God that lives forever and ever? Are you going to treat the Head of the church as if He were dead? Nay, He never was dead as the church's Head. Indeed! He only took that Headship as One alive again from the grave, and so giving life; He only took it when both raised from the dead, and gone up to heaven: and yet men act as if the Head of the church were a dead and not a living Lord! And if He is thus living, what is it for? Is it merely as High Priest, according to the Epistle to the Hebrews, to bring His people through the wilderness? There is some tendency in Christians to overlook the priesthood of Christ; but there is a far greater danger of their forgetting Christ as the living Head, who still stands at the fountain-head of blessing, ever in faithful love giving His gifts to man. No doubt it is all summed up as if it were a given thing here—"He gave;" and there is a very interesting reason for such a way of presenting His gifts. Assuredly the Lord would not Himself put the gifts of His grace in such a form as to interfere with the church's constant hope of His own return. On the contrary, He would fix the church in the attitude of expecting Himself from heaven. Accordingly not even the supply of ministerial gift is so put as to defer the fulfillment of the "blessed hope" from age to age. On high is the Head of the church, and as Head it is part of His work to vouchsafe all needed gifts for men.

Here then is the whole scene of His grace summed up in one—the Lord gave gifts to men; "and He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers." We have not a catalog of all the gifts. It is not at all in the manner of scripture or of the Lord to furnish a mere formal list; for the truth is not written in the word of God so as to satisfy human curiosity or form a system of divinity. What is done is infinitely better. He has given us exactly what suited His wisdom in each particular part of scripture. Hence if we compare, for instance, what we have here with the first Epistle to the Corinthians, we shall find striking differences. There are some gifts found here, not there; and some found there which are not here. Now this is not a thing of chance, nor a matter in which the apostle used merely his own judgment and decided things after his own mind. Nobody denies that his heart and mind were deeply exercised. God forbid! But we may bless God that there was an infinitely wise mind directing all things, and that there was a judgment which knew the end from the beginning. We shall find, accordingly, that the apostle mentions these gifts according to that divine intelligence. Indeed; the reason of it, to some extent, may appear as we proceed.

First of all, the gifts (δῶματα) here enumerated are in view of the perfecting of the saints, which is the great primary object, branching out into the work of the ministry, and the edifying the body of Christ, as connected with it. Now, there, at once, may be discerned the key, or divine reason for presenting here certain gifts and not others. Here we have nothing, for instance, about speaking in a tongue; neither have we any mention of miracles. Why so? What have they to do with the perfecting the saints? The reason seems to me clear and adequate. Those gifts for signs were of all consequence in their place; but how could a tongue or a miracle perfect a saint? We see, in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, that, instead of perfecting, they on the contrary became a very great snare for the saints. No doubt the Corinthians were carnal, and therefore they were like children amused with a new toy—with that which was, indeed, an engine of power. And we know how great a danger this is, just in proportion to our unspirituality. We have the very solemn lesson, that even the greatest powers and most astounding manifestations of the Holy Ghost in man cannot give spirituality, and do not minister to the edification of the saints necessarily in any way; but, if there be a carnal mind, they become a positive means of the soul exalting itself, turning away from the Lord, losing its balance, and bringing discredit upon that which bears the name of Christ on the earth. In this Epistle, however, God is occupied with His counsels of grace in Christ for the church, beginning primarily with the saints as such. He always takes up the question of individuals before He deals with the church. And how blessed and wise is this! He does not begin with the body of Christ, and then end with the perfection of the saints. This would be, very likely, our thought, but it is very far from His. He first puts forward the perfecting of the saints, and then shows us the work of the ministry, and the edifying the body of Christ. Thus, the true explanation of the passage is, that it is the development of Christ's love to the Church. His eye is fixed upon the blessing of souls. It is Christ not only gathering in, but building up—causing them to grow up to Him in all things. Accordingly, He gives the gifts which are of grace suited to this end. "He gave some apostles and some prophets."

These are the two gifts which the second chapter of this epistle shows to be at the foundation, we may say, of this new building, the church of God. Thus, in the 20th verse, we read, "They were built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone." Evangelists, evidently, are not the foundation; neither are pastors and teachers; but prophets, as well as apostles, are. And we can easily understand this. We can see that, as God was introducing into the world a wholly new system when He set His Son at His own right hand—a new work of God in the church, so there was a new word which had to accompany this work, whereby He would act upon the saints so as to give them to grow up to the perfecting of His will and the glory of His Son in this unprecedented thing, the church of God. Accordingly then we have the foundation laid, and here not Christ alone. Of course He is, in the greatest and highest sense, the foundation—"Upon this rock I will build my church:" the confession of His own name, His own glory as the Son of the living God, is this unquestionably. But still, as the means not only of revealing the mind of God touching the church, but also particularly of laying down with authority the landmarks of His husbandry in the earth—the church of God, the apostles and prophets were thus used. To distinguish them the former were characterized by an authority in action, the prophets by giving out according to God His mind and will about this great mystery.

It is hardly worth while to disprove the notion that the prophets here refer to the Old Testament. The phrase "apostles and prophets" is strictly limited to those that followed Christ. Had there been the inverse order—prophets and apostles, there might have been some shadow of reason for this idea; but the Spirit of God, in His wisdom, has taken care to exclude the thought. The work spoken of is altogether new. The apostles and prophets seem to be expressly introduced in this order. But in the third chapter a decisive reason is furnished by the Holy Ghost. It is written in the 5th verse that the mystery of Christ, "which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;" so that we have there with the most perfect clearness not only the same order still preserved, but the positive expression "now revealed." The prophets of the Old Testament, therefore, are necessarily excluded. These prophets are of the New Testament as well as the apostles.

But more than this, let me make the remark before going farther, that this character of ministry was altogether new. When our Lord was upon earth, no doubt there was more or less preparative action for it. He sent out first twelve apostles; then He sent out seventy to carry a final message to His people. All this was a thing never found in any age previously. It was wholly without precedent on the earth—an activity of love that went out with a blessing to others. God Himself had not done it; for the solemn word by a prophet, and the secret action of His grace before, are too distinct to be confounded with it. Who had ever seen or heard such a thing as a Man on earth gathering men to Himself first, and sending out from Himself afterward a message of love, the glad tidings (not yet, of course, in the fullness which was afterward imparted when the great work of redemption was done, but at any rate the blessed news) of the King on God's part of the kingdom of heaven on the earth? This is what the Lord did on earth: He sent out disciples or apostles with the message of the kingdom. And no doubt it was in man's eyes a strange and to faith a blessed thing, suitable only to Him who had divine grace as well as divine authority, worthy of and reserved for the Lord Jesus here below. But it is remarkable that in Eph. 4 all the earthly part of our Lord's action is left completely out, and the gifts here spoken of are beyond controversy dated from the ascension of the Lord, and shown to hinge on it.

Do I mean to deny that the apostles were included—the twelve, or, strictly speaking, the eleven along with the one supplied to fill the place of him that was cut off? In no wise; but nevertheless their earthly call and mission are quite passed by. We can all understand that the Lord as Messiah might prepare a mission suited to Israel, as I have no doubt that "the twelve" had this distinctly as its reference; for the twelve apostles naturally answer to the twelve tribes. The sitting on twelve thrones, spoken of in connection with them also in Matt. 20, clearly confirms the thought. What hinders these same men afterward from becoming the vessels of a heavenly gift? Thus we can recognize in the earlier apostles a sort of double relationship. There was a link with Israel which was conferred by the Lord when He was upon earth in the midst of His people, dealing with them; but a new place became theirs when the Lord ascended on high.

But besides the Lord took care to break in upon this Israelitish form and order, and the apostleship of The apostle Paul becomes an event of cardinal importance in the development of the ways of God, because therein all thought of Jerusalem, all reference to the tribes of Israel, is dropped, and that takes its place which is clearly extraordinary in all its circumstances and heavenly in source and character. More particularly this was plain, that the Lord made manifest what was really true with regard to the others, that they on the day of Pentecost received that gift of apostleship which was suited to the heavenly work which they were afterward to have, in addition to their previous earthly call and work. Apart from and towering over the twelve stood the apostle Paul, bringing out into the utmost prominence the principle that his apostolic mission was a heavenly thing, entirely and exclusively such as far as he was concerned. Therefore he was the fitted person to say, as it was of course by the Spirit of God that he did say, "Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more." The glory of the Messiah on the earth fades away for the time in a deeper and brighter glory, the heavenly glory of Him who is now at the right hand of God. It is the same Christ, the same blessed One, without doubt, but it is not the same glory; and more than this, it is a better and more enduring glory. It is the glory that is suited to the new work of God in His Church, because it is the glory of its Head. "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him."

Thus, the church being a heavenly body, and Christ Himself, its Head, being in the actual and fullest sense a heavenly person, ministry takes a heavenly shape: and these gifts which flow from Him are its first expression. Hence, then, we have the clear intimation from the scripture before us that these gifts from Christ on high are heavenly in their character and source.

Another thing also may be noticed by the way. If we take the bestowal of these gifts as dating from the ascension of Christ, where is there room left for the hand of man? Where can you insert that preliminary ceremonial on which tradition lays so much stress? Who ordained the apostles for their heavenly work? Who laid hands upon them, as authoritatively installing them in that high office? You will say that unquestionably the Lord called them when He was here "in the days of His flesh." He did call them for their mission to Israel; and when risen, but still on earth, He charged them to disciple the nations. (Matt. 10:28.) But what hands of man did He employ in setting them apart to their proper heavenly work? Will any believer breathe the thought that this was an imperfection in their case? Did the new work of God, based on a dead and risen and ascended Saviour, and carried on by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, want anything for its due commencement? If there is no appearance then of that rite of laying on of hands, which some count not merely desirable, but essential for all that minister from the highest to the lowest grade, how comes this strange omission? Who will venture to impeach the regimen of Christ? Will any zealots for "holy orders," as men speak, affirm or insinuate that the Lord did not know better than they what became His own glory in His chief ministers? Let them beware of their theories and their practice, if either lead them to become "judges of evil thoughts."

In truth, the Lord took care, now that it was a question of a new and heavenly testimony, not absolutely to abolish that ancient sign of blessing, but to break in upon and leave no excuse for the earthly order so easily abused by man. Hence, as if for the purpose of manifesting yet more distinctly the vast change which was come in the case of him who styles himself emphatically "minister of the church" (Col. 1), there is no derivation from the twelve apostles that were before him. On the contrary, from His own place in heavenly glory the Lord calls one who was not going up to Jerusalem but rather from it; one who had no connection with the apostles—nay, so much their enemy, that most stood in doubt of him, after he was arrested by sovereign grace in the midst of his determined systematic hatred of Christianity and persecution of all who bore the name of Jesus. What a proof that not only the conversion of Saul of Tarsus was of the pure and rich mercy of God, but that his apostolate sprang from the same source and bore the same stamp as the salvation which reached him! Thenceforward he becomes the characteristic symbol, as he was the most distinct and abundant testimony, of the grace that is now not saving only but choosing vessels and fitting them as instruments for the active blessing of mankind, and especially of the church of God. It was the Lord Jesus at the right hand of God calling and sending an apostle to the church a chosen vessel unto Himself, to bear His name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel; but first taken out from both Jew and Gentile and then sent to them. (Acts 26:17.)

The same principle embraced the other apostles no doubt: because they on the day of Pentecost were made gifts of grace in the highest degree to the church from the now ascended Lord, its Head. But there is fresh and brighter light in the case of Paul, who was not more truly "as one born out of due time," compared with all those that went before, than he furnishes in the strongest colours the unmistakable intimation of the mind and will of the Lord as to the future.

But then it will be objected that after all there was a miracle in Paul's conversion and call, which takes the case out of just application to ordinary ministry. A miracle most striking and significant there was, when the Lord in glory revealed Himself as the Jesus he was persecuting in the members of His body. Notwithstanding it rested mainly on the apostle's testimony; and there were not wanting, even in the church of God and among his own converts, it would seem, those who questioned the apostleship of Paul. His call far from Jerusalem, his isolation from the other apostles, the very fullness of grace manifested toward him, the emphatic heavenly stamp imprinted, on his conversion and testimony, all tended to make the case peculiar and irregular and unaccountable, wherever the old earthly order so prevailed as to cast suspicion on any display of the Lord's ways beyond or different from the past. Personally a stranger to the Lord during His manifestation here below, there was no question of his candidateship, like a Joseph or a Matthias, on the ground of his having companied with the twelve from the baptism of John till the ascension. There was no decision by lot in his instance, nor any formal numbering with the twelve. He was a witness of Christ's resurrection no less than the rest, yet it was from no sight of Him after His passion upon earth. He had seen the Lord, but it was in heaven. His was the gospel of the glory of Christ no less than of God's grace. Thus carefully was the great apostle made the witness of non-succession, that is of a ministry direct from the Lord independently of man! No doubt the highest expression of that ministry was in Paul, who thenceforward becomes the most illustrious exemplar of its source and character.

Allow me also to put another question. Who ordained the prophets of the New Testament? when and how and by whom were they appointed? who ever heard of hands being laid upon their heads? Search the New Testament through, if you wish the best proof that the notion is unfounded. Let me come to the point at once, and affirm further, that neither prophets nor any other of these classes were installed of man after that fashion. Here we have apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers: can you show me a single instance among these classes where the individual was called by human authority? Is it denied then that there was such a form of blessing as the laying on of hands in the New Testament? For my part, I accept the fact not only in its apostolic application to the sick and to those who had not yet received the Spirit, but also in its connection with our subject. The question is as to its scriptural use? Let me ask, When were hands ever laid on any save to confer a gift by the power of the Spirit, or to commend those already gifted to God's grave in a special work, or formally to assign men to

the charge of secular work? It is clear, for example, that Philip, along with his six companions, had hands laid upon him; but was it for his work as preaching the gospel? On the contrary, he was one of the seven men chosen "to serve the tables," in order that the apostles might not be distracted from prayer and the ministry of the word. "The seven" thereon were ordained to be employed in the external service of the church. Apart from this, the Lord was pleased to send him forth in the proclamation of the word here and there; as an evangelist naturally would be a wanderer, not according to the meaning of the word so much as the exigencies of the work.

Hence, when the persecution about Stephen broke out and scattered those in Jerusalem, Philip had a new task which had nothing to do with his local duties as one of the seven. His diaconal service would station him at Jerusalem, to take care of the poor, for this was the purpose for which he was ordained; whereas his preaching Christ flowed from a gift of that character, not from ordination. In fact as far as the New Testament speaks—and it speaks fully and precisely—no one was ever ordained by man to preach the gospel. Hands were laid by the apostles upon Philip like the rest, after he was chosen by the multitude, and thus he was appointed to take charge of the tables; for the scripture, perhaps because of a certain peculiar state of things at Jerusalem, does not positively give the title of "deacon" in this case, though one does not deny its general justice, for there was something akin in their duties.

It is certain therefore that whether we look at an apostle, or a prophet, or an evangelist, or a pastor and teacher, or either of these last, there was no such ministry instituted for the church, which itself existed not, until after our Lord's ascension; and in none of these cases was there the laying on of hands as the initiatory sign or inauguration of these ministers. All admit the imposition of hands in certain cases, ordinary or exceptional. The exaggeration of clericalism should not hinder the Christian from being perfectly fair in dealing with this and every other question. There is nothing that will dispose of prevalent traditions so readily and conclusively as searching and submitting to scripture. There is full and clear instruction there, the effect of which is to confute all that tends to exalt man and lower Christ, whatever support men may try to extract from the word of God for selfish ends. It is outside the light of inspiration that all these errors live; once let that in, and it will soon be seen that the Holy Ghost is not providing for the worldly honor of man on earth, but for glorifying Christ in heaven.

What, then, is the genuine meaning and scope of Acts 13? It has long been the well-known stock passage which theological controversialists are wont to cite for ordination in general. Some insist on it as warranting their "three orders" of bishops, priests, and deacons; others allege it as decisive for parity of ministers, whether Presbyterian or Congregational. The Episcopalian points with triumph to Barnabas and Paul in the first rank; to Simeon, Lucius, and Manaen in the second; and to Mark in the third (as, after the dispute with Barnabas, to Paul, Silas, and Timothy respectively).¹

Only examine the passage, and the more closely you do so, the better will you be enabled to judge how little it countenances, how strongly it condemns, every scheme of ordination which men attempt to base upon it.

In the church that was at Antioch there were, it said, "certain prophets and teachers, as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch and Saul." That is, we have these five prophets and teachers, while engaged in serving the Lord with fasting, made the object of an important communication from the Holy Ghost expecting two of their number. "Separate me Barabbas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." Barnabas had been for years actively engaged in the work of the Lord; and so had Saul of Tarsus ever since his conversion. Not only was he set apart in the providential purpose of God before his birth, as we see in Gal. 1, but he was called by the grave of God from the time when he was struck down on the way to Damascus. But the Spirit of God now separates him to a special mission. It is clear that this is not an announcement of the ministerial call of either Barnabas or Saul; scripture is arrayed against scripture by all who say so. The previous part of the Acts proves that Barnabas was long blessed in the ministry of the word within and without, and that Saul especially was bold and mighty in the work. The latter, indeed, from the first, brought out the Sonship of Christ in a way which we have no reason to believe any other had done up to that time, as we learn from that very chapter which gives us his conversion. The notion therefore that ordination was the question in Acts 13 is most manifestly false.

But how comes it that the theologians fail to notice that their determination to see ordination here destroys their respective systems, as well as contradicts other scriptures? Who was it ordained Paul and Barnabas, and to what? These are called apostles in the very next chapter (14:4); and hence evidently the notion of ordaining Paul and Barnabas is quite unfounded, unless those whom God has set second and third in the church can ordain the first. (1 Cor. 12:28.) Again, the truth is that there is not the smallest reason to call Mark a deacon at that time. He accompanied them as their "minister" (probably to get lodgings, to invite people to come and hear the word, and in general to serve them on their missionary tour); but, as for his being their chaplain, it is mere illusion. John Mark preaching to Paul and Barnabas! The truth is that he then turned out an indifferent help in the work, because he soon tired and went home to his friends. However this only by the way.

But it is transparent, that those who turn the account into the ordination of Paul and Barnabas involve the consequence that it is actually the inferior class conferring the highest ministerial rank upon them! If they were not apostles before, they have nothing to allege in support of the dignity but the sandy foundation that the act of laying on of hands upon them at Antioch conferred the apostolate! In this case it was an equal, if not a lower grade, giving a higher rank to those above themselves. Thus, it is evident that the notion is altogether unfounded.

Is it insinuated then that there was no meaning or value in this laying on of hands? That would be indeed to treat the word of God unwarrantably. It was a solemn and precious act of fellowship with these honored servants of Christ. It was an act not only valid then but valid now. But there was no pretense of conferring anything whatever. The real drift of the transaction is expressed in chap. 14:26. It is said, that they "sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grade of God for the work which they fulfilled." Such was the aim of the laying on of hands by their companions in labor at Antioch; for it may not have been the brethren generally, but only those engaged in the work, and I wish to make every concession that is fair to those who desire to draw the utmost from the passage. But the meaning of the act is neither more nor less than a sign of blessing or of fellowship with those going forth on their new missionary errand. It was probably repeated. (See Acts 15:40.)

The laying on of hands was of the most ancient date in the Old Testament. Thus Genesis gives it in the case of a father or grandfather laying his hands on the children; and so in the New Testament we have the frequent use of it where there was no pretense of conferring any ministerial character. It was a sign of recommendation to God by one who was conscious of being so near to God that he could count upon His blessing. The Lord takes up little children, lays His hands upon them, and blesses them; and so with the sick too when healing some. It was not at all a question of ecclesiastical order in these instances. No doubt there were cases where hands were laid on for the purpose of

inaugurating an office.

It is often thought that the same cite was used in instituting elders, as in Acts 14:22, 23, where the apostles Barnabas and Paul were "confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God. And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed." But this is an assumption. It is not exactly said here or anywhere else that hands were laid upon the presbyters. This silence, if the fact were so, is remarkable. It may have been probably the case; but scripture takes care never to say it. We have the statement that hands were laid upon deacons. We know that an elder was a much more important personage in the church than a deacon. People may reason and speculate; but I have no doubt that the Spirit of God, seeing the superstition that was attached to the form of laying on of hands, took care never to connect the two things together in a positive manner. The passage which some conceive does so is in the first Epistle to Timothy (v. 22), where Paul tells him to "lay hands suddenly on no man." But the object of this is too vague for a sure conclusion, the connection being by no means certain. There is no allusion to elders expressly after verses 17-19. Thus in the 21st verse we read, "I charge thee before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things, without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality." How can one suppose elders in particular referred to there? I see a general description of his work in verses 20, 21, after which comes the exhortation on which so much has been built—"Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sine." It is possible that there may be included in this an allusion to the danger of haste and carelessness in accrediting an elder, but the language is so comprehensive as to take in, it seems to me, every case which might call for the imposition of hands.²

But supposing that it did certainly refer to elders and that hands were laid on these functionaries as well as on deacons, the important and undeniable fact in scripture is, that elders were never ordained except by persons duly authorized, who had a real commission from the Lord for the purpose. Now many may imagine that this is a concession fatal to the free recognition and exercise of gifts. They may think it yet more strange to find that those who contend for the largeness of the action of the Holy Ghost lay the utmost stress upon a divine commission and a definite authority. But be assured that the two things go together, where they are held according to God. None will be found to be more tenacious of godly order than the very persons who plead most for the rights of the Holy Ghost in the church. My assertion is, that in this very matter of ordination Christendom has missed God's mind and will, and is ignorantly but not without sin fighting for an order of its own, which is mere disorder before God. If scripture is to decide, the common plan of ordination for all who minister to those without and within is a departure from the order of God prescribed in His word.

Undoubtedly in the case of "the seven" (Acts 6 you do find apostolic appointment. The great point in this case was, that there the congregation elected and the apostles solemnly appointed. But it was no more than the congregation choosing fit persons to take care of their poor, &c. Nothing could be more proper. It shows the condescending goodness of God towards those who gave of their substance and those who received it. If the church contribute, it is according to His will that the Church should have a voice in the selection of those in whom they have just confidante that they will distribute in God's sight not only with good consciences and feeling but wisely. Thus one sees here a conspicuous instance of God's wise and gracious care. The multitude chose such men as they deemed most suited to the exigency. But even here the mere choice of the believers did not give them that place in itself; for if all chose, none but the apostles appointed them over the business, secular as it was.

The principle tells in a directly opposite way with regard to the elders, and yet more as to the ministerial gifts of Christ. We have no such thought expressed as a congregation choosing elders—never in any part of scripture. On the contrary we have the fact that the apostles went about; and where assemblies were already formed, in which were persons possessed of certain spiritual and moral qualifications which pointed them out to their spiritual and experienced eyes as suitable for eldership, such they chose. Among these antecedents those who desired the office must be persons of good report, and who, if married, had only one wife. There were many individuals brought to the faith of Christ in those days who had several wives. This was a scandal and sure to be felt the more as Christian truth spread. Such a direction showed what was in the mind of God. One could not rightly refuse the confession of a man who had two or three wives, if he were converted; but he must not expect to become an elder or bishop; he could not be a suitable local representative of the church of God.

Again take the case of a man who had children brought up badly. Perhaps this neglect may have been before he was converted; perhaps after conversion he may have entertained the evil notion of leaving the children to themselves on the faithless plea that God, if He saw fit, would convert them some time or other. Such mistakes have been made, and miserable have been the results. Whatever the cause of an unruly house, its head could not be a bishop. No matter what might be his spiritual gifts, they could not countervail; no such man could be charged with the oversight of God's assembly. For such an office it was not so much a question of gifts as of moral weight. A man might be a prophet, a teacher, an evangelist—his disorderly wife or children would not nullify his gifts; but he ought not to be made an elder, unless he brought up his children with godliness and gravity, and himself walked with a good report among those without.

Thus the Lord stringently required in such an officio), these moral qualifications as well as spiritual capacity for his work. Even if one possessed all these things, he was not an elder because he had them unless duly authorized. He needed to be ordained; he must have a legitimate appointment besides. And in what did this consist? Manifestly the whole value turns upon a valid appointing power. In what consisted that competent authority? Are we to set up or to imagine one? It must be according to the Lord and His word. Now the Scripture allows of no valid appointing power except an apostle or an envoy who had from an apostle a special commission for the purpose.

Where is there such a delegate now that can produce an adequate (that is, an apostolic) commission for the work of ordaining? You never saw, neither do I ever expect to see, the like. The fact is, that the word of God nowhere hints at the continuance of an ordaining power. It demonstrates in the most explicit manner that, after the Lord set up churches here and there, when He established local functionaries in each church, apostolic appointment or choice and this only was what He stamped with His approval. The requisite qualifications are clearly laid down; but the fact is equally clear that none but an apostle or an apostolic delegate was warranted to nominate the elders to their office, and not a word about perpetuating that power of appointment after the apostles left the earth. We have an apostle writing, not to the church or churches to choose elders, but to one who was specially charged to do this task. Yet even to Titus there is not a word about another continuing the task; nay, not a hint that Titus himself was to continue it after the apostle was dead. Neither was Titus authorized to appoint where he pleased, but the apostle assigns him the sphere of his commission. Being a special envoy of the apostle, Titus was doubtless a teacher and preacher. But here there was a definite region where he had the duty of ordaining elders in every city. Titus was responsible to

do this in Crete; but nothing is said of the establishment of elders elsewhere or at other times nor of his permanent continuance there. On the contrary—and this would be a strange direction for a diocesan—he was to be diligent to come to the apostle at Nicopolis. He was not to be left at Crete.

It is evident that such directions as these from the apostle to Titus afford no warrant for others to appoint elders now. This is pure assumption, whereas all depends on a valid authority. Titus was apostolically commissioned and could produce an inspired letter of instructions to him personally. Who can today do anything analogous? "It must be so" is a poor and vain reason to him who respects due authority. It is easy to settle matters after a sort where this is allowed to pass; but, beloved friends, we want the word of God. Let me ask for a plain answer to the question, Do you believe that the word is perfect? Do you doubt whether the Lord, who cares for His own order in the church, did or did not foresee all the need and difficulty? Do you insinuate that He forgot anything of real value to us now? Do you suppose that He omitted to take into account the death of the apostles? He did nothing of the kind. The apostle speaks distinctly of his death (and more than one apostle too). He speaks of perilous times and the importance of scripture after he was gone; but not a thought about a line of successors to appoint afterward, not a hint about bequeathing his powers in this case. To you who are commended to God and the word of His grace, to you who tremble at His word, is that silence nothing? To my own mind it is a fact not more surprising at the first blush than increasingly pregnant with meaning the more it is weighed.

Popery, despising this fact, assumes the contrary from human reason and is built upon this contrariety.

Not that one cares to denounce any one system in particular by name, save only to bring out the truth which shows the will of the Lord and proves the evil by the good. In truth every earthly system, no matter how opposed it may become to the word of God, begins by adding something of its own to that word. The power of ordination attaches not to bishops but to apostles and their delegates. The moment you allow men the principle of development after the scripture canon closed, the moment you clothe with apostolic authority a body of officials who never were authorized divinely for the work undertaken, you are off the ground of faith in and deference to the word of God. The present practice has not the smallest foundation in scripture.

Indeed one may safely go farther and affirm not only that the ordination, of which people talk so much, before preaching and teaching Christ, is not a thing to be coveted in the present shape in which it is found among men, but that it is now a disorderly institution, a grievous dishonor to the Lord who gives ministerial gifts by the Spirit. In short it is a mere and sorry imitation of what is recorded in the word of God. Examine well, and you will soon find it does not even resemble what we read of there. God's word remains true, sure, and plain: only there once was a positive personal commission, armed with a certain apostolic authority either direct or indirect; and this you ought to have if you pretend to ordain elders as Titus did.

Permit me now to press another question. Which is the most scriptural course—to do what was always becoming in a Christian, or to copy an apostolic delegate? Which commends itself most to your conscience, to your heart, to your faith? We will suppose now in this place an Assembly of God's children. They see in the word of God that, beside the common privileges and duties of all saints, there were certain gifts for ministry, and that there were also certain offices which needed an apostle or his representative to fill them up. They would like to have them all of course; but what is to be done? Are they to neglect what was written to the assembly at Corinth or to the saints at Ephesus, and to ape what was not written to the church but to Timothy or Titus? Would it not be humbler to consult the word of God and inquire of Him, that they might learn what is His will concerning this matter? What do we see there? That as to the gifts of Christ they never required any sanction here below before their exercise; nay, they never admitted of human intervention. The only exception is where there was a positive power of the Holy Ghost conveyed by the laying on of the apostle's hands. Fully do I admit that there was an exception in such circumstances. Timothy was designated by prophecies beforehand for the work to which the Lord called him. (Compare Acts 13:1, 2.) Guided by prophecy (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6), the apostle lays his hands upon Timothy and conveys to him a direct power (χάρισμα) by the Holy Ghost, suited to this special service he had to accomplish. Along with the apostle, the elders who were in the place joined in the laying on of their hands. But there is a difference in the expression the Spirit of God employs, which shows that the communication of the gift depended for effective agency not in any way on the elders but only the apostle. The particle of association (μετὰ) appears where the presbytery are spoken of, that of instrumental means (διὰ) where the apostle speaks of himself. It was an apostle that communicated such a gift. Never do we hear of elders thus conferring a gift: it was not an episcopal function but an apostolic prerogative, either to communicate spiritual powers or to clothe men authoritatively with a charge. Hence it is admitted that in the peculiar case of Timothy there was by the laying on of apostolic hands a very special effect produced; but who can do this now? Were this the claim (however one might desire to view, not indifferently but with the patience of God, the prevalent and superstitious perversion of a sign, admirable in itself when applied and understood scripturally), yet if any man now presumed to convey a spiritual power like an apostle, should one hesitate to call him an impostor? A mistaken course in assuming the rights of an earthly sovereign is or may be treason. What is it to pretend falsely to communicate the Holy Ghost or a distinct power of the Holy Ghost in the name of the Lord?

Beloved friends, it is a grave thing to trifle thus with the Spirit of God. There are those in our day whose ignorant boldness fears not to arrogate the right of conveying the Holy Ghost and ministerial power in this manner; but, thanks be to God, they are otherwise known to be fundamentally unsound, so that their influence over the faithful is inconsiderable. Then we have alas! the Eastern and Western bodies of Christendom, which are hardly less guilty. But among ordinary Protestants and especially among men of average Christian respectability, such pretensions are regarded with pity or horror. Even where the formularies as in the Anglican Communion approach fearfully near the precipice, the excuse is that their godly framers intended no more than to impart fitting and scriptural solemnity to various offices in the church. I admit however, that the excuse is lame, and that it is hard to decide whether these most suffer in conscience who employ these very serious forms ecclesiastically without believing them, or those are most injured in faith who accept as divine pretensions which are doubtless more respectably connected and venerable but not better founded than those of a modern imposture.

But the important truth on this subject to be seen is that these ministerial gifts were given by the Lord without any form further than that He warranted and sent there. Beware of disputing His will and wisdom. How is one to judge of the possession of a gift? Undoubtedly by its due exercise which finds an answer in the conscience. Let me ask you again, How do you know a Christian? When people talk theoretically, or discuss polemically, there are always great and numerous difficulties in the way. But if you went for practical! reasons to a godly clergyman or dissenting minister, he could give you ample mean of judging who are Christians in what he calls his flock. Listen to many a man on his

knees and, if he be a Christian, he will speak as a child to his God and Father; but hear on his legs, and he will perhaps controvert, without knowing it, what he has been just saying in prayer, till on his perverse principle he cannot tell whether God is his Father or not. How happy that there are such seasons of devotion where people speak with simple-hearted truthfulness! Away from their systems let them speak to God, and their true characters and even condition will soon be manifest as a general rule. Thus the fact is that in practice Christians have little difficulty in knowing for the part who are converted and who are not. There may be a certain number of doubtful souls of whom we need not speak now. Let a believer be sent for to a sick man; is he wholly at a loss how to speak? Does he not seek as soon as possible to gather whether the sick man has peace in Christ, or is anxious about his soul, or whether he has ever realized his lost and guilty condition? If the believer finds no sense of sin, he will solemnly warn of judgment and set before that soul the cross, imploring him to receive Christ; or he will exhort him to Test in Christ because he is assured of his faith.

If then so little haze really rests on the question who are and who are not children of God, think you that the possession of a gift is a question so obscure and doubtful? Some may have more gift than others. But the gift of teaching implies the power of bringing out the word of God and applying it aright. Again take the power of ruling—for there is such a thing as rule in the church, and I hope none here present imagine it is gone—he who has the gift of rule seeks to exercise it of course according to the word of God. Scripture knows nothing of a blind obedience. The conscience is awakened, the heart set free and attracted to Christ. To these is the appeal of Christian ministry. It is not the blind leading the blind, nor is it the seeing leading the blind, but rather the seeing leading the seeing. Christ gives liberty as well as life, and this withal responsible to do the will of God. Therefore it is that according to the intention of God His children do not well to contrive systems to escape difficulties; they need faith to go through them with God. Let them prove their gifts, if indeed they have gifts from the Lord, by real power. There may be severe trials and difficulties now and then. Even Paul himself had to do with doubters of his apostleship, and this within the church, and among his own children in the faith. What true-hearted man should be downcast if he is slighted? But the time came when the Lord vindicated His servant, and when the self-will and pride which refused a divine gift was utterly put to shame, if the heart was not brought back to lowly thankfulness. The chief mistake we are apt to make is in the way of impatience; we do not allow time and space for the Lord to work: and that lack of patient waiting only defers the wished-for solution, because it makes the difficulty so much the greater.

But as to the discernment of a ministerial gift for preaching or teaching, it is in general plain and simple. If a brother stand up to speak in the Christian assembly without a gift from God, he will soon and painfully find it out. If self-judging, he will learn much from his own consciences; but he may quite sufficiently soon hear from others that which will make him understand that he has not a gift in the judgment of his brethren. But where there is really a gift, is it not possible that prejudice may act, and this be refused? Certainly it may be so for a time. Perhaps the speaker thinks too highly of his gift; perhaps he mistakes the character of it, and the right scene and time for its exercise; perhaps he is too exclusively occupied with his line of things, and too urgent or anxious to assert his gift. All this may be, often is, and always creates difficulty. But the truth remains that what is of God approves itself in the long run. My own experience, as far as my limited range of observation and knowledge goes, inclines me to think that the children of God are prone to make too much rather than too little of gift. In the present state of the church there is but a feeble development of gift, and this is felt the more in proportion to spiritual intelligence and a true position. Do you wish to know your place fairly and fully? Look in confidence to God and search the word of His grace. Many things there are to hinder and to draw away: partly the effect of education, partly the difficulty of finding an honest livelihood, especially if a man has been a professional preacher. If he abandons (not preaching but) that profession as an unscriptural innovation, he for the most part loses everything, oven his bread, unless he have private mean of his own. Hence it is that the inducements for such an one to remain where he is are enormous; the difficulties of coming out at the word of the Lord are incalculable. The power of God alone can accomplish the change and sustain the soul in peace and praise, "steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord."

While we may be sure that the word and Spirit of God give us clearly the true position for the individual Christian and for the Christian assembly, we ought not (I think, as things are,) to expect a great variety and strength in the gifts of the Lord's grace. Of course He can work sovereignly, and assuredly we ought to be most thankful for what is given. No doubt also there are gifts distributed somewhere or other. There are gifts of Christ in members and ministers of the national establishments, I do not question; there are His gifts likewise in the dissenting societies; and are we to suppose there are none of His gifts of grace in Romanism itself? For my part I cannot doubt that there are. Who would, who could, reject the testimony of facts that there have been persons therein—such as Martin Boos, for instance, not very long ago—used for the conversion of sinners and for the helping on of saints in some degree? And are such men not gifts of Christ to the church—as truly gifts though in the false position as if they were out of it? Their being Romanists—ay, Romish priests—does not destroy His grace, whatever we may feel as to their faithfulness. The fact is that the Lord gives according to His own will by the Holy Ghost, and we ought to acknowledge these gifts wherever they are. If a man be a dissenter, whether a minister or one of the people, in either case I am satisfied he is in a false position. It is not a question of a feeling of dislike to dissent, if one believe its foundations to be unscriptural. I ask the forbearance of any dissenters who may be here in affirming calmly and solemnly my conviction that dissent is unsound in its distinctive principles; a thorough contradiction of the very character of the church as one body; and in the popular call and choice undermining ministry as a divine and permanent institution flowing from the Saviour's grace. Dissent is religious radicalism, which essentially opposes God's will as much as and perhaps more than any other principle. The proofs are too plain. Dissent substitutes the election of the people in the place of the sovereign choice of the Lord Jesus Christ whether immediate or mediate.

But how is the truth better secured in the national bodies? By patronage, clerical, lay, or governmental! And the painful apology for this systematic self-will is that the men nominated by the government of the day, or a landlord, or a college, or a corporation, have gone through the usual forms! Is there the faintest resemblance between this worldly machinery and the divine system of spiritual gifts from Christ set forth in Eph. 4? I see only One who has ascended up on high. Are you looking to any other person? to any other kind of ascent? to any other heaven for the favors you crave after? I appeal to you as Christians. Do you value the word of God? Do you cherish that word only for the salvation of your souls? or do you confide in the same word and Spirit for guidance as to ministry and church office? What subjects more simply belong to the Lord? For what do we need Him more? As a believer I surely feel the want of God's word for my daily walk, no matter what my circumstances or sphere or duties. And do you, can you believe that the word that lives and abides forever does not concern itself with so grave, delicate, and spiritually needful a thing as the ministry of the word; or that, if it speak thereon, you are not bound to hear and bow? The sum of what has been said is then that these two great principles are revealed in scripture and recognized by the early church: namely, the Lord giving gifts of His own grace which did not require human intervention; next also a system of authority which did require that intervention, as in the appointment of elders by the apostles or persons commissioned to do their work in certain cases. It is clear that we have neither apostles living on the earth, nor representatives, like Titus, charged by an apostle to do quasi-apostolic work. The

consequence is, that now, if subject to the word of God, you cannot and do not look for elders in their precise official form. If any man allege these can be, it might be well to hear his grounds from Scripture. What has been produced is in my judgment amply sufficient to disprove it. You cannot have persons formally and duly appointed to this office, unless you have a power formally and duly authorized of the Lord to appoint them. But you have not that indispensably needful power to authenticate elders: this is your fatally weak point. You have neither apostles nor functionaries commissioned by the apostles to act in their stead; and therefore the entire system of appointment breaks down for want of competent authority. Dare you say of your elders that the HOLY GHOST has made them bishops? You have none really, i.e., scripturally entitled to appoint.

What then? Are there none suitable to be elders or bishops, if there were apostles to choose them? Thank God! there are not a few. You can hardly look into an assembly of His children without hearing of some grave elderly men who go after the wanderers, who warn the unruly, who comfort those that are cast down, who counsel, admonish, and guide souls. Are not these the men who might be elders, if there were a power existing to appoint them? And what is the duty of a Christian man as things now are in the use of what remains? I say not to call them elders, but surely to esteem them highly for their work's sake, and to love and acknowledge them as those who are over the rest of their brethren in the Lord. I ask you solemnly, beloved friends, do you acknowledge any to be over you in the Lord?—any living servants of the Lord to take the lead in Him? Do you imagine such a recognition as this an offense against the principles of God? Rather let me warn you against picking out certain favorite tests from God's word to which only you pay obeisance. If we do so, we are as far as in us lies building up a sect no less truly than our neighbors. On the other hand, beware of adopting that human invention—apostolic succession—to escape dilemmas. If under the fiction of succession we dare to call men apostles who are not, the Lord in due time will not fail to challenge our word or act, and demand, who entitled us to endorse such an unheard of thing as this? who gave us leave, without His word, virtually to acknowledge this or that as an apostolic man by accrediting his claim to ordain? It is evident that to ordain elders is, however well-meant, an imitation of what apostles did, and, if unauthorized, not only without validity but an unwitting usurpation of an authority which reverted and now pertains to the Lord Jesus Christ alone. Thus in the present state of the church, the difference between a true position and a false one is not at all that one has got a due ordination and the other wants it. In truth no body on earth possesses it now. Do you acknowledge the want? or are you trying to cover the humiliating but evident fact that you have not the only ordaining power which scripture sanctions? And yet you go on ordaining, though you have neither apostle nor apostolic deputy! Which course is most orderly? To do as you do; or to acknowledge our actual lack, and carry ourselves accordingly before God and man—to confess that we want apostles or their delegates, and therefore that we cannot have presbyters duly chosen and formally appointed? There are, I repeat, men endowed with such qualifications as would render them eligible, so far as we can pretend to say, if there were a competent ordaining power. And the general principle of Scripture (Rom. 12) manifestly is, that he who had the gift of ruling, or of taking the lead among the saints, is bound to use it with diligence (as the teacher, exhorter, and others, are responsible to discharge their respective functions), even if circumstances made legitimate appointment to a charge impracticable.

But subjection to the word of God discovers readily that a state of things substantially analogous to our own defective condition is provided for in Scripture. The Lord in His wisdom let such wants be felt in the early church. Thus the apostle was inspired to write epistles to churches where there were no elders; as for instance the epistles to the Thessalonians and to the Corinthians. The last was notoriously a disorderly church, and elders might have been thought useful there, Nevertheless not the least word or hint about elders there is heard from first to last. Had elders been then in their midst, would not the apostle have called them to account, and blamed their want of godly care and diligence in oversight? Of this there is not a trace. Further, we know it was not the practice of the apostles to constitute elders in an infant church. Where Paul and Barnabas chose elders for the disciples, it was in assemblies that had existed probably for years, and thus there had been time for spiritual qualifications to be developed. But in a new assembly, where the saints were young comparatively, a certain time had to be allowed, so that those who were competent for such a work should be made evident. Accordingly it is rather a rare thing to read of the apostles choosing or appointing elders.

On the other hand, in the first epistle to the Thessalonians, we have in the last chapter very important instruction given to the saints. They, too, are a similar instance of a young church, yet they were told to own those that labored among them. Hence all this may be where presbyters are not. Thus in 1 Thess. 5:12-13 the apostle writes, "We beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake." The presence of elders is not requisite in order to have and to own those who are over us in the Lord. There is much of importance for us now in that Scripture, for we have elders no more than they. I think we ought to lay its exhortations to heart. There are within and without, not a few ill-instructed souls who hold the notion that, unless there be official appointment, they cannot have anybody over them in the Lord. This is all a mistake. No doubt, when a man was officially appointed, there was a definite guarantee in the face of the church given by an apostle or an apostolic man; and there was thereby no little weight given to those who were thus appointed. Such a sanction had great and just value in the church, and would be of consequence among the unruly. But none the less did God know how to provide instruction for assemblies where there was not yet official oversight. How merciful for times when, for want of apostles, there could be no elders! But it will be noticed that the Corinthian assembly abounded in gift, though elders are seen nowhere among them. The Thessalonians do not appear to have possessed the same variety of outward power, while elders or bishops again are never hinted at. Yet at Corinth the household of Stephanas devoted themselves regularly ἑτάξαν to the service of the saints; and the apostle beseeches the brethren to submit themselves to such, and to every one that helped and labored. The Thessalonians he prays to know those who labored among them, and presided in the Lord, and admonished them. Evidently this did not depend upon their being apostolically appointed, which could hardly have been in their circumstances as lately gathered. It is founded upon that which after all is intrinsically better if we must be content with one blessing out of two. Surely, if it comes to be a question between real spiritual power and outward office, no Christian ought to hesitate between them. To have the power and the office combined is no doubt the best of all, when the Lord is pleased to give both; but in those early days we see that individuals were often and rightly engaged in the work of the Lord before there could be the seal of an apostle, as it were, affixed; and such the apostle encourages and commends earnestly to the love and esteem of the saints before and independently of that seal. How precious that we can fall back on this principle now!

Even at Corinth and Thessalonica then those were raised up in the midst of the saints who showed spiritual ability in guiding and directing "there. That was the work of those to whom one epistle exhorted subjection, and whom the other epistle commended as "over them in the Lord." Such men as these did not labor only; because some might be actively engaged in the Lord's work who might not be over others in the Lord. But these manifested power to meet difficulties in the church, and to battle with that which was ensnaring souls, and so to guide and encourage the weak and baffle the efforts of the enemy. They were not afraid to trust the Lord in times of trial and danger, and therefore the

Lord used them, giving them power to discern and courage to act upon what they did discern. This was part of what fitted them to take the lead in the Lord. There were such at Thessalonica as well as at Corinth, and yet there is not the slightest intimation that they were regularly installed as elders, but on the contrary the strongest evidence that elders as yet had not been constituted in either place. The regular practice was to appoint elders after a certain time; indeed it could only be when the apostles came round, or sent an authorized delegate to choose fit persons and clothe them with a title before the church which none but the bad would dispute.

Need I observe how God had been graciously providing for the wants of His children? This subject will come definitely before us on the next occasion on which it will be my lot to address you. I will not therefore do more now than draw attention to His far-reaching wisdom in meeting the difficulties of the day, when a valid authority to ordain as the apostles did is not left on the earth. Not that His children are left without help; they have the same Lord and the same ever-present Spirit. Hence there is no need of some change or new invention to meet the difficulties of the day, but the return in faith to what was and is the will of the Lord; and this with intelligence of the actual state of the church, and the feelings which become it.

We have seen that, as the rule, the Lord alone gave these gifts of ministry: it depends upon His love to His church, His faithfulness to the saints. Is the Lord Jesus one whit less tender and true now than He was on the day of Pentecost? Who would insinuate it? Neither can I sympathize with those who look wistfully back on the earliest times, as if they only afforded scope for faithful souls. No doubt a bright halo of grace surrounds the scene where the Holy Ghost was first poured out on men with a simplicity and power which carried all along; but who was the spring and whence the energy which produced fruits so much the more wondrous when we think of the soil once so hard, and stubborn, and cold? Was it not the Lord acting for His own name by the Holy Ghost after He took the place, in risen and ascended glory, of giving gifts to men? Is not His grace as equal to these perilous times as He proved Himself when ushering in the mystery that was hid from ages? Are there saints to be perfected and ministerial work to be done? Does the body of Christ need to be built up? Then assuredly His gifts cannot fail till the work is done and all are brought into the unity of the faith; and the many adversaries and subtle snares and increasing perils will only draw the more upon the faithful love of the Lord of all. There is fullness of blessing in Christ for the church now as truly as then. Would that we but confided in Him more for every exigency!

Are we then to disparage the truth or to doubt His grace by setting up some work of our hands, some calf of gold, as if we knew not what is become of Him who is gone on high? Far be it from God's children! Let me suppose you come together as God's assembly; you know not who is to speak, exhort, give thanks, pray. To unbelief this is but confusion. Certainly it looks unwise if I forget who is in the midst; it is unpromising if I do not believe that the Lord is there; but if assured that He, who has all power in heaven and on earth, loves and cherishes the church, and that the Holy Ghost, divine as He is, dwells with and in us, what need I fear? If this position is true for one saint, it is true for all. For my part I would not dare for a moment to stand upon any foundation which did not contemplate the whole length and breadth of the church of God, which did not in its faith and love go out to and embrace all the saints of God. Of course allowance must be made for exceptional states, as for persons guilty of sin that would require their exclusion (immorality, bad doctrine, and such like).

But then if I know that this is the ground of the church according to Scripture, and that there was no other from the first taken and acted on by the holy apostles, the question is, Am I upon it? If I am called to labor in the word and doctrine, the Lord points me out the way. He opens the door which none can shut, He shuts and none can open. He finds a path for the feeblest of His pilgrims, and gives them courage, and makes it plain if they have to serve Him. Let us never doubt Him.

But may there not be a number of gifts? So much the better. If there are five or twice five gifted men in an assembly, let us thank the Lord: there is room for all. God forbid that we should sanction the novelty of each minister having his own little flock! Is it not a degradation for those who so speak, and for those so spoken of? No one behaves himself-nay, he does not even know how to behave himself—who does not bear the sense in his soul that the saints are "the Rock of God." But evidently men do not speak of God's flock, if the divine ground of the church be forgotten: then it is "flock," or "your flock." There is always room for the exercise of His gifts, whatever and however many they may be. Besides it is a strange time to fear that any could be spared as superfluous.

The hour warns me that this subject must now be closed. My endeavor has been to expound and enforce the fundamental distinction between gifts and offices—the one, we saw, flowing from Christ on high, the other requiring appointment here below of men themselves authorized of the Lord for the purpose. As for gifts, they always remain sure as truly as Christ abides the head and source of supply. As for formal authorization, it is no longer possible because you have not a duly authorized power to appoint. All you can do in the direction of appointing, if you will do something, is to set up a paltry and rather arrogant imitation of the apostles and their delegates. But if you really love the Lord and value godly order, is it not your bounden duty in the name of the Lord to acknowledge all His gifts in a way you have never done? Acknowledge them privately and publicly in the work He has assigned them. If the gift be small, acknowledge the Lord in it as heartily as if it were a great one; and if it be a great one, acknowledge it as humbly and unjealously as a small one. On the other hand do not try to imitate what the apostles did; beware of pretending to do what ought not to be thought of unless there were apostolic power. And as to appointing deacons or choosing elders, scripture affords no warrant unless there was direct or indirect apostolic authority which does not now exist.

Note on Acts 14:23.

This opportunity is taken to furnish clear and conclusive evidence against the notion that the elders were chosen by the votes of the churches. The word χειροτονέω, if etymologically viewed, memo to stretch out the hand; hence it was applied to election, as we say by show of hands, and, generally, to choice or appointment without reference to the manner. Just so ψηφίζομαι starts from mere reckoning with pebbles, and was used for voting thus; then for voting in general, and lastly for the simple resolve or decision of the mind. The context, not the word in itself, shows which is to be understood. Hesychius explains χειροτονέω by καθιστάν (compare Titus 1:5), ψηφίζειν; as Suidas for χειροτονήσαντες gives ἐκλεξάμενοι. With all this accords the usage of Aristophanes, as well as of Æschines, Demosthenes, &c., both in the narrow and literal sense, and in the general meaning of choice or designation. Appian, Dio Cassius, Plutarch, Lucian, and Libanius afford many example where the word conveys no more than choosing. In these therefore the idea of popular suffrage with or without the hands stretched out is quite excluded.

But a few instances must be given from Hellenistic writers familiar with the Old Testament and contemporaneous with those inspired to write the New Testament. Thus Philo (περὶ ἰωσήφ) repeatedly uses χ. of Pharaoh's appointing Joseph his prime minister, and of Moses in the place to which he was chosen by God, and in his selection again of Aaron's sons for the priesthood. So Josephus (ANT. VI. 13:9) speaks of Saul as "chosen king by God," ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ χειροτονημένον βασιλέα, and also (ANT. xiii 2:2) represents Alexander as writing to Jonathan in these terms, χειροτονούμεν δέ σε σήμερον ἀρχιερέα τῶν Ἰουδαίων. "We constitute thee this day high priest of the Jews." This may suffice to prove what we are to judge of Dr. J. Owen's statement (Works, vol. xv. pp. 495, 496, Gould's edition) that "Paul and Barnabas are said to ordain elders in the churches by their election and suffrage; for the word there used will admit of no other sense, however it be ambiguously expressed in our translation." Indeed, Beza, Diodati, Martin, and there had committed themselves to the same thing. Dr. G. Campbell, however, Presbyterian as he was, repudiated this version of the text, and (in his Prelim. Diss. x., Part v. § 7) pronounced per suffragia in the Latin of Beza "a mere interpolation for the sake of answering a particular purpose." If one do not endorse so strong a censure, the only alternative is that the gloss sprang from inadequate research and strong prejudice.

The truth is that we need not go beyond the New Testament to demonstrate the error; for here as elsewhere, even when applied to the most rigid election, x, never means choosing by the votes of others, which it must mean to bear the alleged sense. Wherever the word occurs technically, the person intended does not take the votes of others merely, or preside as moderator of the election, but is the voter himself. Now in this case the subject in question is beyond doubt not the disciples but Paul and Barnabas. If any voted by stretching out their hands, it was the apostles only. Hence the authorized version rightly dropped "by election," the sense given in some of the older English and foreign translations which had been too much influenced by the Genevese school and even Erasmus.

The true meaning is that the apostles chose elders for the disciples in each assembly (not the disciples for themselves). And this is entirely confirmed by Acts 10:41 and 2 Cor. 8:19; in one of which passages God is said to have chosen beforehand; in the other the churches are the choosers precisely as here the apostles. Neither God nor the assemblies gathered the votes of others: no more did Paul and Barnabas. But this is the role testimony which has ever been imagined directly to favor the popular election of elders; and we have seen that the inference drawn is assuredly fictitious. For the matter in hand the usage of the word in the political or civil affairs of Greece is no evidence.

It is perhaps hardly necessary to add that x. does not mean the imposition of hands, for which scripture supplies another phrase never confounded with the word in question. But this confusion soon began to show itself in ecclesiastical authors, who not unfrequently employ τῶν χειρῶν where we might expect χειροθεσία or ἡ ἐπίθεσις τῶν χειρῶν. This error occurs in the so-called Apostolical Canons, Chrysostom, and subsequent writers; and it may have led the authorized translators to give "ordained" rather than "chose" or "designated." Bishop Bilson, in his "Perpetual Government of Christ's Church," is guilty not of this confusion only but of the strange error that "the elders" included "deacons." (See chaps. 7. and 10.) But really the discord of commentators is almost past belief, unless one have read extensively and proved the fact by experience. Thus Hammond tries to extract from this verse the appointment of a single bishop to each church or city; whereas one might have inferred (without appealing to such incontestable proof to the contrary as Acts 20:17, 28) that the plurality of the presbyters with the singular distributive was so strongly against him as language could make the case short of an express contradiction. Had Hammond's idea been meant, nothing could have been easier than to have written πρεσβύτερον κατ' ἑκαστὴν ἐκκλησίαν. On the other hand, if I may trust Mr. Elsley's report, Whitby opposes this ultra-Episcopalianism on the equally untenable ground that these elders were such as had miraculous endowments either directly from God (as in Acts 2:4, 9, 10, 11.) or through an apostolic medium (as in Acts 8), and who had the care at first of the churches; not fixed ministers, but nearer to the apostles in rank. Can any statement be conceived more random and unfounded?

The last and perhaps the worst specimen of this speculation I take from Calvin's INST. iv. iii. 15, 16, where, according to the author, "Luke relates that Barnabas and Paul ordained elders throughout the churches; but he at the same time marks the plan or mode when he says it was done by suffrage. The words are χ. πρ. κ. ἐκκλ. (Acts 14:23) They therefore selected (creabant) two; but the whole body, as was the custom of the Greeks in elections, declared by a show of hands which of the two they wished to have." It has rarely been my lot to meet with a more glaring perversion of the fact and language of inspiration than this passage exhibits, the refutation of which has been already anticipated. The new translation by H. Beveridge is purposely cited to cut off cavil on that score; and the original is given underneath for verification.⁴ It is consolatory however to find that so untoward a construction was destined to no long existence; for its own author smothered it though with reluctance in his commentary on the passage:— "Presbyterium qui hic collectivum nomen esse putant, pro collegio presbyterorum positum, recta sentiunt meo iudicio." (Comment. in loo.)

But the close of the chapter is still more full of perplexity and error. "Lastly it is to be observed, that it was not the whole people, but only the pastors who laid hands on ministers, though it is uncertain whether or not several' always laid their hands. It is certain that in the case of the deacons it was done by Paul and Barnabas, and some few others. (Acts 6:6; 13:3) But in another place Paul mentions that he himself without any others laid hands on Timothy. 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.' (2 Tim. 1:6.) For what is said in the epistle of the laying on of the hands of the presbytery I do not understand, as if Paul were speaking of the college of elders. By the expression I understand the ordination itself (!); as if he had said, Act so, that the gift which you received by the laying on of hands, when I made you a presbyter (!), may not be in vain." That apostolic hands appointed the seven men whom the multitude elected for the service of tables is clear. But scripture is silent whether imposition of hands was practiced in the establishing of elders; and to me that silence seems admirably wise, even if in fact hands were imposed, as a divine provision against superstitious abuse. But what can be meant by the reference to Acts 13:3, connected with the allegation that Paul and Barnabas, &c., laid their hands on deacons? As for the notion that τοῦ πρεσβυτερίου (1 Tim. 4:14) mean not the elders as a body but eldership, and so is to be in sense dislocated from its evident and necessary connection with χειρῶν at the end of the verse and put in apposition with χάρισματος at the beginning, I maintain that the grammar is not more harsh and unexampled than the resulting doctrine is strange. Eldership in scripture is not a gift but a local charge.

The modern defenses of this system are of no more weight than those of older date. I have before me now Dr. Crawford's "Presbyterianism Defended," and Mr. Witherow's Inquiry; but they seem to me neither candid nor successful. The insuperable difficulty is that presbyters in scripture were never the ordaining power, though they might be associated with an apostle even in conveying an extraordinary gift as to Timothy, who is never represented as an elder. Further, the minister is as distinct from the elders in Presbyterianism as he is from the deacons in Congregationalism, and is a personage of as high moment in both systems as he is unknown to scripture. Again, to say that elders

are not as distinctly laymen as the minister is clerical among Presbyterians is inconsistent with the notorious difference as to style of address, and salary. Both their systems err in maintaining that the office-bearers were chosen by the people; only those were whose duty it was to disburse funds or its equivalent. And if there was a plurality of elders (who were identical with the bishops), there was the fullest opening for all the gifts of the Lord, instead of that invention of men, Me minister. Elders never ordained elders, but only apostles or their delegates; and gifted men required no ordination before exercising their ministry. Nor does Acts 15. resemble a church-court, i.e. a representative assembly of ministers and elders from all parts of the sphere of jurisdiction. This scripture shows us the apostles with universal authority from Christ, and the elders of the Church in Jerusalem, with the whole Church joining in the decision. Hence the decrees were delivered to be observed far beyond the cities of Jerusalem and Antioch, in total discord with Presbyterianism.

Lectures on the Church of God, Lecture 1: "One Body."

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

Eph. 4

THE subject on which, with the Lord's I propose to enter to-night is the one body, the body of Christ; and this too not only as a great doctrine which the Holy Ghost has laid down with the utmost clearness, and throughout a considerable part of the New Testament, but also, as far as I am able in a short space, deducing some of its practical consequences, and showing its bearing upon the communion and the conduct of every member of it, that is, of every Christian.

But in order to develop the special characteristics of Christ's body, it will be necessary to explain how it differed from that which God revealed or set up in past dispensations; for there are distinctions, and even contrasts, between the past dealings of God and that which He is now accomplishing to the honor of His beloved Son. While there was of course always the only true God: while He had in times past those He loved upon earth; while He ever wrought by His Spirit; while there was necessarily faith at work in order to the blessing of souls; yet for all that there are essential and deeply important differences, which none can overlook without loss to himself, without sure weakening of his testimony to others, and, above all, without coming short of the just perception of what God Himself has nearest to His own heart—His own glory in Christ.

Now it is perfectly plain, if we take up the Old Testament, that when man fell into sin God gave certain revelations of blessing, all of which find their center in the Lord Jesus. We see this from the very beginning of Genesis. When sin entered, not only righteous movement but grace instantly followed. God was there; and in the presence of the guilty pair, and in defiance of the serpent, the mercy of God spoke of that same blessed One of whom we are about to hear further and deeper glories. In due time God brought out, in a distinct and personal manner, blessings in connection with Abraham and his seed. There we have the domain of promise— not only revelation of mercy, but distinct promise— to a given person and to his seed. This had not been the case in the Garden of Eden. Man fell there; and it is evident that fallen man could not possibly be the object of the promise of God. There are promises for such: there could not be a promise to such. When Abraham received the promise, he was not a fallen man merely but a believing man. It was as one elect, called, and faithful, that God made him the depositary of promise. But it was when Adam fell, before there was anything of the operation of divine grace in him; it was when he and Eve had completely separated themselves from God, that mercy, entirely irrespective of their condition or desert, held out a revelation of grace in the person of Christ. The woman's Seed was presented more particularly as the destroyer of him that had wrought this deep and, as far as it went, irreparable mischief— irreparable to the creature, but only furnishing the opportunity for God to bring out His own grace to the glory of Him who, bruised Himself, was to bruise the serpent's head.

The effect of the promise to Abraham was that a family was set apart unto God, and, in due time, a nation. Next, we find that, as this nation was full of confidence in its own powers, God was pleased, in the wisdom of His ways, to try them by the law, as we all know, given at Sinai. I need not enter into the details, but just state the general outline of the divine dealings for the purpose of clearing my subject. But the issue of that trial, however long God might delay, was not doubtful for a moment; for at the very mountain where God spoke, the children of Israel set at naught the authority and the glory of God, and bowed down to the work of their own hands: that is, the law, as a moral question between God and man, was overthrown from its very foundations at the outset. God lingered—long lingered—in patience, and meanwhile brought out His ways in every possible variety. The crowning experiment of all was the presence of Christ, the Seed of the woman, and the Seed of promise, too; for now came the person who answered to all the revelations and promises, the ways and types and prophecies of God. He came, in whose person was found all that was worthy of God, and that was suited to man. But the coming of Christ brought out the awful truth, not only that man is himself corrupt, depraved, and loves his own will, but that he hates goodness—yea, divine goodness—in a man. He is the enemy of God when manifesting Himself in the most blessed manner—in His own Son; when manifesting Himself, not only in power for we can understand a guilty creature alarmed at holy power—but in perfect love, coming clown in humiliation, putting Himself at the foot of man, beseeching man; for this is in truth not a figure or exaggeration of man's mind, but God's own word. Hear His description of it: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech by us," &c. His love beseeching sinners was the attitude of divine grace in the person of Christ. What was the result? That man proved there was no possibility of extricating himself by any means that God put at his disposal: that if it were a question of man's delivering himself, no matter what might be the mercy or the blessing, no matter how deep and full the grace displayed in a living person, man was too far gone—nay, so truly dead in sin, that, far from being won by God's love, he only took advantage of it, and when Jesus put Himself at the foot of man, he lifted up his heel and trod on Him, the Son of God. But if man thus, under Satan's malicious guidance, cast out and crucified Christ, God in the cross not only demonstrated His love (herein is love, indeed!) but wrought out redemption, a work suited even for those that crucified Jesus, capable of blotting out the foulest sin man was ever guilty of. God has triumphed where man did his worst against Him.

But this is not all. In the previous dealings of God, when He had given His law, God had separated the nation that was called out of Egypt—had marked them off in the most distinct and positive manner from all others. It was needful. Men might have complained that there had been no fair trial; the corrupt examples of others would naturally lead astray. God set Israel apart by their institutions, rites, ordinances,

services, and His law; and by that law, and by those rites, He severed them from all others; so that it would have been sin against God for a Jew to have communion with a Gentile, no matter how godly and disposed to respect the law of God. No doubt there might be such a thing as being brought out of Gentilism, at any rate to a certain extent; but still, all through the system of God's dealings by His law with the Jewish people, there was the express and total severance of His people from all the nations. I do not speak of the abuse of it, working upon the corrupt heart of man against others—the pride of men's heart, who despised others because of their own divinely isolated position; but apart from the evil use that Israel made of their separation, faithfulness to God then required it, and His will was in the thing itself. God was proving before the whole world the painful and humbling truth, that let a nation have ever such mercies, ever such privileges, ever such wisdom directing their movements, outward and inward—nay, everything pertaining to them, the issue of all is increasing enmity against God Himself.

The death and resurrection of Christ introduced a new thing in every sense. Now, Christians admit this in general as to the work of Christ in its application to the need of the soul. There is no person of ever so little spiritual intelligence, who does not confess, with more or less clearness and thankfulness of heart, the all-importance of the cross of Christ for his need before God. There may be a scanty perception of the extent of the deliverance, an interrupted and feeble enjoyment of the perfect peace that has been made by the blood of Christ's cross; but there is no believer who does not in some measure hold it and enjoy it, and thank God for it.

But there is more than the sinner's need met in the cross; and I direct your attention to what the Holy Ghost gives us in Eph. 2, as showing the place of the cross in the ways of God—not merely in the salvation of the soul. At the 13th verse it is written, 'Ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby. "Now, it is evident from this scripture, that the cross is not only the oasis of peace for the soul, but the foundation also on which rests the" one body "that God is now making of Jew and Gentile before Himself. And we see this most plainly if we only look back to our Lord's own presence on earth. He forbids His disciples going into the way of the Gentiles— forbids their entering any city of the Samaritans. Need it be said that it was from no lack of love? It was not that His heart did not yearn over the most reprobate of Samaritans; it was not that He did not appreciate the faith of a Gentile—He had not seen" such faith, no, not in Israel." Notwithstanding, they were to go only to the lost sheep of Israel, because to such only He was sent, and so were they too. Now, here we find at once that, while there was this perfectness of grace in Christ, the holy order of God was none the less fully maintained. Law claimed a state of things essentially different from what we have described in Eph. 2 There was a positive barrier even during His lifetime, the very thing being formally prohibited, which, after He died and rose, was not merely a duty, but the delight of love, the only adequate answer in the saints to that death and resurrection. (See Matt. 28:19.)

How comes this to pass? On what is so mighty a change founded? On the cross. It brings out the worthlessness of man, and most of all, the worthlessness of favored, privileged, religious man—of man under God's law. For if man under that law failed, what other law could avail? The law of God was the wisest, the best, the most holy and just dealing that it was possible to bring to bear upon man's natural state. And here was the total failure of man; and God well knew it all from the first, for He took care that in the earliest book of Scripture, and all through, embedded in the very law itself, there should be plain words as well as shadows, showing that man would sin, and that only Christ, by His blood-shedding and His death, could avail. The very first revelation of the Garden of Eden is a witness of both. Faith had no other expectation. But nevertheless there was a full, patient, long-suffering trial whether it was possible to get any good out of man, in the dealings of the only wise God with man. And now it was demonstrated in the cross that all was ruined in man, and that the highest advantages, short of God's saving grace, brought out the ruin most distinctly. Now there is room for grace to work; and, beloved friends, it is upon this that it is my joy to speak a little to-night.

We have come down the stream; we have seen what man was when it was a question of his working for God: we shall now look briefly at God when He put forth His glorious power to work, not merely for man, but for His Son; for oh we never get the full blessing until we see this great and glorious truth, that God has at heart His Son—that God is thinking, not merely of a blessing for you, for me, for any of those that love Him—yea, and in sovereign grace, for those who love Him not, if they repent and believe the gospel—but that He has His eye upon Him who did all and suffered all for His glory, and has bound up that glory of God with the fullest, richest, everlasting blessing of all who believe in His name. And now, then, as the fruit of the cross of Christ (where we have the weakness of God, where nevertheless we have the triumph of God—God Himself coming down lower and lower still in love, not merely, so to speak, beseeching man, but laying all the weight and burden of sin upon the Lord Jesus, thereby meeting the desperate need of sinners by His Son suffering for them,) what do we find? That in the cross He has given the death-blow to sin; He has "put away sin by the sacrifice of himself," as we are told. But besides, by it all the distinctions of Jew and Gentile pass away, and God brings out that to which He had always looked onward—that which was in His counsels not only from, the foundation of the world, but before it, and which consequently He had shown before there was a question of law, and before there was a question of sin. For it is remarkable that the magnificent type, which the apostle applies in Eph. 5 to the mystery of Christ and the church, was brought in before sin entered. (Gen. 2) In truth, it was a counsel that flowed out of what God was and is. It was God in His own love, even God working from what was in Himself. No doubt, the entrance of sin has given occasion for God to bring out His grace in blessed ways; but, for all that, we must ever remember that there were thoughts and counsels of grace in God Himself. There was that which He ever had in His own mind, for the revelation of which, no doubt, sin might furnish the fit occasion. But sin was in no wise the suggestive spring any more than the measure. On the contrary, we see God indulging, so to speak, in the activity of His own perfect love; at any rate, we see Him thinking of, filled with, working for, His own Son. And I think it is of deep interest to observe the fact just referred to—the shadow of the church's union with Christ preceding the entrance of sin and the provisions of grace in view of sin.

And observe further, that as just seen in the type of Genesis, so it is in the epistle to the Ephesians. Where is it that you have the counsels of God traced out? Is it after man's sin has been portrayed in chapter 2.? No; but in the earliest verses of chapter 1., where God gives the richest development of the counsels of His grace, entirely passing over and ignoring in the first instance all question of man's sin, shame, and need. This we have afterward and in the profoundest way. There is perhaps no part of the word of God which shows us the depth of human evil more than Eph. 2; but this is not at all the first thought. Hence we find in the first chapter, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." And then it is only just by the way that the apostle alludes to the fact of their sins, and in a single verse (the 7th), where we read, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the

forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." With the exception of that incidental notice of the fact of our needing redemption, the remission of sins, you would not know from the first chapter of the epistle that the saints of God, these blest ones, had a single evil, or a particle of sin connected with them. That is, it is God perfectly acting from Himself, in and for His own Son; delighting in Him, putting honor upon Him, giving Him what was suited to Him out of His own resources of love, and hence boundlessly to the saints, the body of Christ, as the end of chapter 1. describes them. It is thus that the Holy Ghost is pleased to introduce these astonishing counsels of grace.

Then, in the second chapter, we have man's state looked at most thoroughly. We see him weighed and found wanting as in no other part of Scripture. We have him here, not as an active being, alive in sin, but as all over with him, dead in sin—"dead in trespasses and sins." He is, therefore, hopelessly lost and utterly powerless in sins. The whole case is closed against him; and it is to this condition of manifest moral death and subjection to Satan, that the grace of God applies itself, in His quickening, raising, heavenly power in Christ Jesus.

But, again, we find that in the latter part of Eph. 2 the cross of Christ is taken up, not merely in connection with God's counsels, as in chapter nor even in view of their desperate need who are the objects of His counsels, as in the beginning of chapter 2., but in contrast to the previous ways of God upon the earth. He is addressing Gentiles. Was it not a suitable occasion for God to unfold to them the one new man, the mystery of Christ and the church, the body of Christ? They were hitherto ignored, evidently outside all that God had been doing of old. God had taken up a separated people and had tried them. The Gentiles were as non-existent, so to speak, before God. Not, of course, that the secret providence of God did not watch and work—not that the grace of God did not act as to individuals; but, regarded as Gentiles, they were outside. But now these are the very objects of heavenly grace; toward Gentiles the call goes out loud and large. Not that they alone were brought into the church, for it consists of Jews also; but it was Gentiles whom it seemed meet to God to bring into relief, in contrast to the condition in which they were once, so as to make more manifest the blessing which His grace now confers on both, in Christ the Lord. "Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one."

There we have another fact, not only that they are made nigh to God but both made one—Jew and Gentile that now believe made one body, as is explained more fully afterward, the middle wall of partition broken down, the enmity abolished in his flesh, "even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, for to make in himself of twain one new man." It is not merely a new life, but Christ and the church form one new man, a condition of things that had never before existed—"one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh." Thus the Gentiles had been dispensationally afar off, the Jews were comparatively nigh; but now they were taken completely out of their old condition. It is not, you will observe, that the Gentiles who believed are raised up to the level of the privileges which the Jews used to possess, but that there is now "one new man," wherein is neither Jew nor Gentile. Both, consequently, quit their previous states for a new and most blessed position of oneness in Christ, which had never existed before came in the counsels of God.

Here then is the church, the body of Christ; this is what God is working out. He is not only saving souls, He is gathering; not only is He gathering into one, but He makes the believing Jew and Gentile, while they are on earth, though previously by His own command the most separate, now to be one new man in Christ, even His one body.

There is another truth connected with the church, revealed at the end of the chapter, which I merely notice by the way. Not only is there a body formed—one body in Christ, but there is a building upon earth, in which God dwells. Although it is not my business to-night to take up the subject of the dwelling or habitation of God, yet I cannot deny myself the joy of saying a few passing words on this wonderful place which God has given to His church.

And first of all it is to be noticed, in the Old Testament there was no such thing as a building or dwelling of God, until there was a type of redemption. No matter what might be His mercy or condescension to those He loved, He could not dwell with man until there was a basis of blood-shedding, by which He could righteously abide with him. Hence, all through the book of Genesis, for instance, God does not dwell with men; nay, He never speaks of it or promises it. But the moment the blood of the passover is shed, and you have Israel passing through the Red Sea—the combined types of redemption (one answering to the blood of Christ, the other to the death and resurrection of Christ, in which a complete redemption is set forth in figure)—immediately you hear of God having a habitation God could now dwell in the midst of His people. It is not because the people were better: who could imagine that? Look at Israel at the Red Sea; what were they to be compared with Abraham or Isaac or even Jacob? Yet He who only visited the fathers can now dwell among the children, and put this word into their lips, "I will prepare him a habitation." How comes this? Ah, beloved friends, how little any of us estimate the mighty change and the wondrous effect of redemption? It is not a question of comparing men, or their faith, or their faithfulness. God's estimate of redemption is the point; and He shows that if there be only a type of redemption, He can come down typically, He can then dwell in the midst of His people. I admit this was only a preparatory thing. There was a visible token of it, suited of course to an earthly people; but still the great distinct fact is engraved on Israel's history, as the very center of their blessing, that God Himself deigned then to dwell in their midst. (Ex. 15:2, 13, 17; Ex. 29:43-46.)

The same thing is found here far more blessedly for the church on earth. On earth—and mark, not before the cross but since—God is pleased to make His people to be His habitation. He came down in the person of Christ, but Christ abode alone as far as the dwelling-place of God was concerned. "Destroy this temple:" He was the only true temple. But when He died and rose, what then? Redemption was accomplished; and now God could descend holily, righteously, suitably to His own character, and could dwell in His people. It is not because the New Testament saints are more worthy in themselves than those of old. He that knows himself and redemption knows that such an idea is a fallacy and a falsehood; he knows that human nature is good for nothing as before God; he knows that, in His presence, there is no question of flesh, or what flesh can glory in," but he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." But this is not all; not only is there a Lord to glory in, but now we have actual redemption in Christ through His blood. How does God estimate the precious blood of His Son? What does He feel about those on whom that blood is put by faith those who are washed in it? Does He not as it were say, "I can come now and take my place in their midst?" This is indeed one of the precious characteristics of the church. It especially is even now the habitation of God. In virtue of this it is that the church is called the "house of God," and His "temple," in different parts of Scripture. But I must not dwell longer on this because my subject is "the body."

We find, then, in Eph. 4, that the Spirit of God presses this exhortation, "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Next, He explains, "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."

Will it be imagined that this grand truth of the "one body" does not affect the judgment and conduct of the Christian as well as his affections? We have been brought, I will suppose, to the knowledge of Christ; we have found in Him the Son of God, the Saviour; we rest on Him as our peace before God; we call on Him as our Lord. But have I no relationship with others on earth? Am I left here simply and solitarily to look up to God? Have I to thread my way through the mazes of this world, only using the word of God with prayer? Let me ask, What are my relationships? Am I only a child of God with other children of His here and there? What am I to feel, as I look round upon those that name the excellent name—that call upon the Lord Jesus Christ, both mine and theirs? The ONE BODY is the answer. God it is who forms it for the glory of Christ: it is united to Him. "We are members," as it is said, "of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." It is not for you, it is not for me, to define, even in our natural relationships, our brothers and our sisters. Thank God, we are not asked: God does it; He gives what suits Him, even if it be only in the domain of earth and flesh. He does not give us what we might choose: we know our folly in this respect, He assigns each man a place—puts the high and the low according to His own wisdom. And in that which He is doing for His beloved Son, has He less to do or less to teach us? Is God's will of less moment there than in the mere outward world? Nay, my brethren, nay: even moral men dispute not the will of God as to natural relationships. We know what human lust may do—how it may break through every line of demarcation; but still after all poor man finds even for himself, without thinking of God, the need and the value of owning the relationships which have been established in nature here below. Now, is it not a most solemn thought, and is it not a fact which ought to shame every Christian heart, that in the church which is so near to God, in that which is the fruit of His own perfect love, in that which He is creating for the everlasting glory of His beloved Son, what God orders, what God wills, what pleases God, is regarded as of infinitely less account to Christians than even their natural relationships to each other? Is it or is it not the fact? Is it or is it not a grievous sin?

How do you account for this? Whence the terrible triumph of the enemy? Why is it that there is such darkness over the whole subject of the "one body" now? Is it because God has not revealed His mind? What can be plainer in Scripture? Only a portion of the proofs has been produced from a small portion of God's word; but what can be clearer than that, founded upon the cross of Christ, a new condition has been introduced and established of God? that He is now calling out the Jews and Gentiles who believe, and forming them into "one body?"—that, as He owns no other body than Christ's, so this is His will about us, and our obligation to Him, even as it is the evident and only meaning of His word that speaks of His church? How is it, then, that such a truth escapes the thoughts of man—that you may search in vain to find it in writings new or old—that we have, some of us, long lived as Christians, and many of us once churchmen and dissenters so called, yet all utterly ignorant of its character? But if so patent, and with such a fullness of truth about it in God's word, how comes it to have been a forgotten thing among His children?

It is not because there has not been sincerity—"godly sincerity" if you will—among Christians. But whatever is near to God, whatever is the present operation of God, is always that against which Satan sets himself with all his might and subtlety. And this, because it is bound up with Christ, because it is the special actual will of God for His people. Therefore Satan seeks to thwart and mar. He does not now try so much to darken other truths, but he takes up that which most nearly concerns the glory of Christ as now displayed; whatever that may be at any given time, there is the battle-field, there the arena, where no means are untried to blind and hinder God's children from understanding and doing the will of their God and Father. When God is gathering out His church, then is the enemy's season of active unceasing effort, to oppose, confound, and obscure all the truths connected with it.

Besides, there is another question. How comes it that Satan finds it possible to succeed in the face of such evidence as the New Testament affords? Alas! the reason of this, too—the moral reason—is evident. The children of God may be the more readily deceived, because the doctrine of the church, the body of Christ, brings God too close to us—sets His grace too richly before our souls—makes us feel (if our souls believe, bow, and enter into it) the vanity of things here. Alas! our hearts shrink from the feeling. We naturally love ease; we like position in this world; we are fond of a little reputation, it may not be perhaps in the vulgar world, but in the so-called church—something, at any rate, for self, something outside the portion of Christ and the cross. The body is only for the Head, for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby. Man in nature disappears; his glory wanes and vanishes; his will is judged as sin. We do not like a doctrine and practice so peremptory, and withal so heavenly. Men like to do something, and to be somebody. Man has in himself, whenever this is allowed, that which exposes him to the power of sin, to the malice and wiles of Satan; and hence it is, that this great truth was no sooner revealed than it began to fade. There is no testimony to it whatever in the early fathers, and of course a position more and more distant and antagonistic as you descend. Take up any writings you please:—Papists and Protestants, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Calvinists, Arminian— all ignore it. It is not that you will not find enough truth asserted and preached for souls to be saved by; but the bare salvation of souls is not the whole truth, nor that part of the truth which reveals the church of God. Were not souls saved before Christ? Was not salvation of the Jews? Were there not faithful souls before God had a people upon earth? Was it not so from the very beginning, before the flood and after it? Most clearly and certainly.

But there comes in another thing which was not true before, which God had not revealed or established till the rejection of the Messiah, and for which He had reserved the sending of the Holy Ghost from heaven. Now in the cross of Christ God has laid a foundation for this new work, and is gathering together out of Jews and Gentiles His assembly, made in Christ one new man. Man likes to be of importance to himself, and in this world. Just in proportion as he allows this, he falls a prey to the working of the enemy; and the more easily does he deceive himself, because up to the cross of Christ there was room left, for man more or less. His total ruin, his enmity to God, his hatred of grace in the revealed person of the Son, were never brought out in their fullness until then. Till then God was not, could not, be known as He now is. But the only begotten Son declared Him, and this in respect both of sin and of His righteousness—a new kind of righteousness, which, by all means and on every side, clears and blesses the guiltiest who now believes in Jesus.

Now, it there is to be a heart growing up into the revelation which God has made of Himself in Christ according to His grace towards the Church, the one body of Christ, there must be the judgment of nature, root and branch—the judgment of the world in which man arrogates some place to himself. The church of God is based on the proved ruin of man, and is for the glory of God in His Son, as maintained by the Holy Ghost. Now, this will show the immensely important place of this truth as a matter for the soul both in communion and in conduct. Away with what does not touch upon practice and the soul's relationship to God! But the fact is, that so far from the truth of the church leaving out

heart and conscience, intercourse with God, worship and service, there is nothing which brings them out so much, and binds them so fast together, save only the truth of Christ's own person; there is nothing more commanding, comprehensive, and penetrating for the walk or conversation of a Christian man.

Take, for instance, all the difficulties men gather from the Old Testament: on what are they founded? I speak now of the legitimate difficulties—at any rate what seem to be legitimate and authoritative to the mind of an uninstructed believer. What, after is their gist? Reasoning founded upon Old Testament precept or practice. But is the analogy just? How can we reason in an absolute way, if there be this "one new man"?—if the church is a novel special thing which did not even exist then? It is evident that conduct (for instance, found in a David or a Solomon—in an Abraham, or an Isaac, or a Jacob) may not apply now, but, on the contrary, be out of harmony with the ways God looks for in His church. I am not speaking of those moral landmarks which always condemn falsehood, corruption, or violence: no Christian is supposed to produce the sin of any of these men to justify his own evil. I speak of what was right and according to the will of God as then revealed. The moment the doctrine of the Church, the body of Christ, is seen, all such reasonings and difficulties have no more a place. God has now His Son in His presence as the risen man. There could not be such a thing as the body of Christ till Christ was there, not only as the Son, but as man, the Head of the body; Christ could not be there as man till the work of redemption was accomplished. Of old He had the title of the Son of man given, looking onward to His assumption of humanity, when He who was God and the Son of God became a real man. But how could He take this place in Heaven He was born a man on earth. He was not a man until He was born into the world. How take this place in heaven? Christ was not Head, still less was there the body, the church, till then. "The church, which is his body," assumes that Christ had become man, and, more than this, that He is Head, as the risen and ascended man. It is only after He died, as we know by His own figure of the corn of wheat, that He produced fruit. (John 12) But more than that: not to stand upon figures only, but to take any Scripture that speaks in precise terms upon it, what do we find?

Read the end of Ephes. 1: "What is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church." Thus He has been given to the church Head over all things; but it is after He was raised from the dead, and set at God's right hand. The risen man is Head there: even He never was head till after redemption. He took His place there and thus.

What is the consequence of that, beloved friends? The body of Christ is heavenly, as the head of the church is. Man does not relish this—nay, many a Christian man finds it too high and hard. If he is a heavenly man where is the room for the pursuits and plans and projects of literature, of science, of politics? Where are all these things that fill the mind and the appetites and the desires of men? Are they in heaven. Are warlike schemes—are courtier dreams—in heaven? You hear no doubt of the battle against the devil, who is turned out of heaven, as the Lord wars by the angels of His power by-and-by. But I need not say there is no place in His body for the pride, ambition, or energy of man.

What then is the great idea of the church of God? It is the body of Christ, after He has accomplished redemption; and consequently, sin, as far as God's judging the believer, is completely gone, put away in such sort as to glorify God and justify the believer. Founded upon this, those who believe are consequently not only born of water and the Spirit, and justified from their sins by the blood of Christ, but united to Him, their blessed Head, at the right hand of God. The church of God accordingly does not consist merely of the redeemed or saints. A "Christian" means more than a "saint"—much more! I am aware there are many who think it means much less, and would count my doctrine strange; because they consider everybody in these lands a Christian, and but very few on earth a saint—perhaps none till they get to heaven. But it is to me most evident—nothing more certain—that a Christian is a saint, and a good deal more; and that good deal more is, that he is a saint after God effected redemption in the blood of Christ; that he is a saint united to Christ at God's right hand; that he is a saint who has God dwelling in him by the Spirit, for God now can dwell there. The atoning work is done: the blood has been shed and sprinkled. God can take up His abode there and does! How do I know it? Because God has told me so in His word. One may, alas! have poor enjoyment of it—that is another thing; but the enjoyment of the truth depends upon the measure in which our souls first rest upon it believingly: even then, unless we judge the flesh that hinders the realization of it, we cannot enjoy it either long or much if at all.

God shows then in His word, that the church is the union of believers—one with Christ, by the Holy Ghost, after He died and rose and went to heaven. The consequence is, that we must consult what God enjoins on the members of that body, if we would know how we are to walk and worship; how we are to act and feel towards the other members of Christ; and how to behave in "the house of God."

The New Testament occupies itself with these subjects, more particularly the epistles of The apostle Paul It could not be formally or definitely in the gospels, because they are devoted for the most part to a living Christ, closing with the facts of His death, resurrection, and ascension. You may find there preparations for the new work and testimony—not a few intimations of what was going to be done; but all show that the building of the church was not yet begun. In the epistles, on the other hand, we have revelations altogether founded upon the great fact that the building was going on, the body was being formed. And mark another thing, which I hope to develop on the next occasion I address you, namely, that along with the body of Christ goes the presence of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. It is only just referred to here to show the connection: we shall find its importance afterward. Those who have not examined fully the testimony of Scripture will feel the weight and value of the instruction there furnished, when that point comes more at length before us. But this at least is plain, that though it is a new work, entirely distinct from all that God had wrought before, there are great moral principles, as already hinted, which always abide. In every part of Scripture, in that which speaks of the times before the law, or during the law, as well as now under the gospel, God is the righteous, holy, almighty, faithful One, a God of longsuffering, and goodness, and truth: all this remains. Even here the difference is, that all these attributes of God shine out more gloriously, and, in consequence, deepen the revelation of God, in addition to other new ways and workings of grace which were not and could not be expressed before. What an accession of light when Christ, the true light, shone! What an infinite display of God Himself in His person! And what shall we say of the cross and death, resurrection and glorification of Jesus as the manifestation of God Hence, in this new man, all the moral glory of God of course abides; but now, in presence of that infinitely fuller manifestation, and the accomplishment of eternal redemption, is there to be no answer in the thoughts and hearts and ways of His children to what the God and Father of Christ is doing? If, for instance, God calls a person into the place of a servant, there are certain responsibilities that attach to a servant. But suppose these servants turn out thoroughly unfaithful and end in rebellion, and God says, "I will have no more of this; I will create a family and adopt children to Myself; I will bring people, according to My sovereign pleasure, out of the old condition into this new

place." What then? It is evident that to go back to what was true of the servants might be a most misleading guide when it became a question of the children; and, in point of fact, it is and must be so. On that mistaken ground Christians meddle with the world, occupying themselves with those things that please the flesh and give importance to man.

In contrast with it, God has given us the glorious truth that He has, as it were, but one man (the first Adam being done with, and pronounced to be ruined, and dead, and buried in the grave of Christ). We Christians belong to the second Man, the Lord from heaven. (1 Cor. 15) There is "one new man," not only in contrast with old distinctions, but as uniting all, Jewish or Gentile saints, in one body—His body; for that is the way in which it is presented in Ephesians. The consequence is, that we need, and God gives us, a new revelation; He furnishes fresh instructions which had no place before. Supposing you had the New Testament in Old Testament times, what would have been (I will not say the worth, but) the effect of it then? Perplexing beyond measure! A Jew would not have known what to do with it. He might have been struck with the wisdom, beauty, holiness, and love of it all; but how to act upon it and reconcile it with the law given by Moses, it would not have been possible for him to know. He would have been commanded by the Old Testament to keep wholly apart from the Gentiles; he would have been told by the New Testament that they formed one body, and that they were all one in Christ—that both had access by one Spirit unto the Father. He could not have put these things together; and no wonder: they were not meant to be together. They belong to distinct times and to totally different states. The confusion of the two is one way in which Satan has triumphed in the professing church. Alas it was not otherwise under God's dealings with the Jews. While He was standing by His law, they were breaking it; while He was holding up the unity of the Godhead, they were set upon idols and going after the gods of the nations. They were utterly unfaithful to their testimony; but I am persuaded that a Jew, dark as he was and little versed in the mind of God, would have perceived that the instructions of the New Testament were irreconcilable with his calling. But God never gave it thus. When the work of atonement was finished on the cross, God brought out these new revelations by degrees. Why? Because there was a new state of things—"one new man"—that did not exist before. Consequently, a new word of God was given, suited to bring out the due relationship of Christians to one another, and the working of God in the Church, the body of Christ.

Let me notice briefly, before I close, the practical effect—"endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." What interest this has, if really applicable in the face of our divisions! Consider for a moment the case of a Christian; he is awakened, finds peace, but questions what he is to do. How truly it has been the fact that many of us have been perplexed in such circumstances! We may have known very little of the word of God; but still we found difficulties in reconciling that word with what we saw around us—especially such a word as this, "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit." But it is really a plain and humble path. I have nothing to do with making the unity; I have not to set up something, or join what others make. What then? I am to be diligent in keeping the unity of the Spirit. In other words, God the Holy Ghost has made a unity; and the business of the believer is to observe that unity—to keep it. What an amazing relief for a humble soul, that feels his liability to mistake, in danger of being either too lax on the one hand, or too narrow on the other!

What is the unity of the Spirit? Where does it begin and end? What is its nature and character? Scripture tells us that He has established a unity among men, yet apart from and above them. What is it? The answer is, It is in the church, which God has made the body of Christ. What a comfort it is for a believer that he has simply to judge by the word of God where the unity of the Spirit is! But how? I come to a place, and I am at a loss to know where to turn. Where shall I find the unity of the Spirit of God? How do I know it? God has left landmarks; He has given clear distinct light in His word. I search and see that He is gathering together the children of God into one; He gathers them unto the name of Christ, assuring them that where they are thus, He is in their midst. I never get the key to any spiritual difficulty without Christ. Do I merely look for the unity of Christians? It is a delusion and a danger without Christ. Christians—where shall I not find them? In what pit of error may I not discover some stray child of God? If I go in quest of the children of God, I may easily see them in this form of worldliness or in that; may know them unattached here, close and bigoted there; I may find them gathered together according to human rules, and for entirely minor objects; I may hear them setting up the names of men, certain special doctrines, favorite views, as their centers of union. Is this the unity of the Spirit? What then is His unity, and how is it to be kept? It is that which He forms for the glory of Christ.

Christians of course are those that compose the unity; yet keeping it consists not in the bare fact that they are Christians, but that they are gathered unto Christ—gathered not to His bodily presence, but unto His name, now that He is in heaven; none the less, however, for that, but the more counting on His presence with them, though unseen, faithful to His own word. If I isolate myself where I may thus meet, I am indifferent to that which was an object of the death of Christ (John 11:52), and I am setting at naught the unity of the Spirit; if I value the one and am diligent to keep the other, I shall meet on that ground and on none other. Many members of Christ no doubt are elsewhere now, who ought to be there, as truly as any that are gathered to that name; but am I who know my Master's will to hold aloof, because others see it not, or are faithless if they do? Am I to say His will cannot be done?

Therein lies part of the ruin of Christendom; there is the painful fact, that what Christ died for Satan has set himself to oppose, and has succeeded in it. Wonder not; for everything that God undertakes is first of all put into man's hand, who is responsible to use it for Him. Alas! there is but one issue—the utter failure of man; and there will be no reversal of the tale till Jesus comes again. Nay, even then will be another trial of man—to show whether he uses the coming and kingdom of Jesus for God's glory; and the end of the millennium will prove that, as it was before, so it will be then. Nevertheless, faith overcomes at all times. See that you hold the truth fast. Let none cheat you out of the blessing which God has given, and calls you to enjoy. Founded on the cross, united by the Spirit to Christ, waiting for His return, the church is the precious fruit of God's grace.

After His people departed from the power and even let slip the bare form of this great truth, He has brought it before them anew. I cannot doubt that its recovery, in any measure, is vouchsafed of God in view of the Lord's speedy coming: else how do you account for it that God has been pleased to recall the bride to put herself, as it were, in readiness for the Bridegroom, signally bringing out again that mass of heavenly testimony which had been despised, deserted, and forgotten? Happy are they who not only bow and receive the grace of God in it but keep the treasure faithfully! "Behold, I come quickly; hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." Be assured, brethren, that we are in the same danger as men ever were in of letting slip that which God has given us; and that every engine which Satan can devise to drag us away—taking advantage of carelessness, difficulties, trials, or anything that can tax us to the utmost—will all be put in force, because he hates not only us but Christ and His truth.

But as the Lord has been pleased to raise up again a testimony to His person, work, and heavenly glory, so I pray and beseech you, especially the younger of my brethren and sisters who are here—all who may not have felt its force and preciousness—more particularly you who have been trained from your earliest perceptions of truth, brought in, as it were, rather than out, at comparatively little cost, and who have not known (as some others) the wrenching of many a tie, with a deep disciplinary work in the heart, realizing gradually the true condition of Christendom;—I call upon you all to beware lest Satan should, in any insidious way, lead you from the only solid divine rock in the midst of the rising surges of apostasy. Fully do I admit, that all who are brought into this glorious place, the body of Christ, ought to walk and carry themselves in a way suitable to such a position. It is a deep shame where there is no devotedness beyond what existed before this further measure of truth dawned on our souls; not only shame to us, but a serious hindrance to the truth, and a reproach upon the grace of God that revealed it and brought our souls into it, that after all there should be such an unworthy manifestation of its power. But how are we to deal with this? Are we therefore to slight or doubt the truth? Are we because of our unfaithfulness, to put aside the plain word of God that condemns us for a lower ground on which we can rest more consistently and comfortably? Are we to yield to that which the fleshly mind has often sought and fallen into—to set up other centers than Christ, other ministry than that of the Spirit? Are we to abandon the only place and principle which the New Testament allows for the members of Christ's body, on the unbelieving plea that, as to walking according to this heavenly light, it is a thing impracticable in such a world as this? There are beyond question difficulties and perils neither few nor small in maintaining it. There is constant need of self denial most surely, if it is to be walked in with God.

But how are we to judge, if not by the word of God? Are we prepared to surrender His word as our only standard of judgment? Now, while that word of course condemns deeply the shortcomings of those who are thus privileged of God—not only brought into the unity of the Spirit, as all saints are, but brought into the conscious knowledge and faith of it; while the failure of such is in a certain sense more inexcusable than that of any others, yet at least such are justifying God and His word and Spirit against themselves in a humbling way. Taking our stand upon this, that no one should glory save in the Lord, we shall find (and painfully too) that we are brought into this place to learn our faults as we never knew them—the shortcomings of others as we never suspected them. We may be astonished at the manifold failures, trials, hairbreadth escapes, and deep occasions of shame; but how come these to be so seen and felt? Because it is not the ground of the church Nay! but because it is. And one of the most comforting things to our faith in that which naturally might perplex is, that we learn the present and permanent value of the Scriptures as we never proved it before. Take all the ways of God in discipline: they did not apply while we were mixed up with the world-church; but how precious, profitable, and indispensably needed when we endeavor to keep the Spirit's unity I Take again all the warnings about the world: we hardly knew what it was. Is it not with Christians a constant question what the world is; or is not the answer that they give us the proof of an unsuspected blinding influence? They have something or other which they avoid doing, and this they call "the world." But the moment we see the body of Christ, the world acquires a plain meaning: if we realize what it is to be among those "within," those "without" are no longer a vague uncertain question.

Let us not fear then to quit all for the honor of God in this world; let us look to Him for grave that we may bear all rather than abandon it. There may be only two or three; but yet if they contemplate the body of Christ, shutting out none cave according to His will, not for any feelings of their own, it is the only thing that is or ever was divinely large in this selfish world, as far as men are concerned. I do not mean that any who blaspheme Christ, or who make light of blasphemers in their deeds, if not in their words, should be sanctioned. "O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honor, be not thou united." It is vain to argue that the Spirit's unity can make so light of Christ and His glory. I say not that individually such may not be Christ's. We know what Satan may do even with one who really loves the Lord—how he may ensnare him into denying His Master, and denying Him with oaths too; but who would contend for justifying such sin or having communion with the guilty, till it was put away?

I repeat then, if there be only two or three, and they endeavor to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," with them is my place as a Christian. My heart should go out to every Christian, in whatever circumstances, whether nationalist, dissenting, or, if there be such, in popery; my heart should go out, spite of the error and evil—yea the rather because of these things in intercession. But then am I to give up diligent observance of the Spirit's unity? Am I to follow and join them in what I know to be unscriptural and sinful, because there is a Christian oi many Christians there? Surely not! We ought to get them out with and for the Lord. How is this to be done? Not by plunging ourselves into the mud, but on the contrary by taking our stand resolutely on the rock outside of it; and there seeking grace from God that, by the manifestation of the truth in every man's conscience, and by holding out the light of Christ in the word-pressing too the responsibility of walking as Christ's body on His members, they may be turned from the error of their way. Never deny that they are members of the body of Christ; remind them of that very fact and of its gravity that they are members of His body: why should they value any other body? If members of that "one body," why not own it, and own it always, and nothing else? If they belong to the unity of the Spirit, why not endeavor to keep it? God is now raising a question, not about Popery and Protestantism, but about Christendom's denial of His church, Christ's body. Our business is not to originate a church of the present or future, but to cleave to the church God has made, and consequently to confess the sin of all rivals—to repudiate them and come out from them. Let us put away every human invention in the things of God, and keep ourselves from idols. The word of God at all times calls upon His children to be subject to Himself and to His will. Are we so doing? On the one hand, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them;" on the other, "To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." Surely, if there be one thing in which, more than another, human will is most evidently sin, it is in that place where God exalts the Lord Christ; where He has sent down the Holy Ghost that He may be a spring of power in His people's obedience.

Though this be merely an introductory lecture, and therefore I cannot be supposed to enter into all the proofs now—only laying down a kind of foundation for the subjects which we hope to pursue; yet I do trust that enough has been said to make plain, even to the least mature of those who hear me, the immense importance of their seeking from God to realize that they are not only saints but Christians, resting upon redemption, united to Christ, and responsible to act as members of His body, diligent in keeping the unity of the Spirit and none other in this world. This is a divine obligation superior to any changes in the church's state here below. It is no question of numbers, but a duty always binding, even though there were only two or three who soy the truth.

The Body, the Church, Body, the Church, The: 2

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

“Wherefore remember, that ye being at one time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called uncircumcision by that which is called the circumcision in the flesh made by hands—that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus ye who at one time were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace, who made both one, and broke down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in His flesh the enmity, the law of commandments contained in ordinances; that He might make in Himself of twain one new man, making peace; and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby. And He came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.”

That is, in and for the church, such fleshly distinctions are done away. Beyond a doubt, in the church's glory accomplished on high, they will be unknown. But the apostle goes farther, and particularly insists that they are, and ought to be, unknown now. No man, not even Christ, known after the flesh, is the key-note of the church: “yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more.” The church can rest on nothing short of death and resurrection. She rejoices in her Head glorified in heaven, and knows herself even now one with Him there. Consequently she is raised alike above the high estate of the Jew, and above the low estate of the Gentile. “For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior” (Phil. 3:20).

But again, if the mass of those gathered into the church were dark, outcast Gentiles; if they could not say, we are “Israelites, to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises, whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever,” they received a better adoption and a more surpassing glory: not merely covenants connected with earthly things and presented by a Messiah (whatever His own personal dignity), as minister of the circumcision, for the truth of God to confirm the promises made unto the fathers; but the unsearchable riches of Christ freely given, which it was meet for the God of grace and glory to bestow upon the far-off penury and wretchedness of those who possessed nothing!

This was “the mystery” which was specially entrusted to the apostle Paul, made known unto him by revelation, “as I wrote afore in a few words, whereby when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ; which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it was now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel.” It consists of Christ as well as of the church, she only by grace having oneness with Him Who is Head over all things.

In previous ages the Spirit had quickened souls: there was nothing strange in that. “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work,” said the Son of God, not yet lifted up. The extraordinary thing was, that, when the Jews perverted their singular endowments to sin and insult the most aggravated against God, not aiding only but provoking and inciting the Gentiles to the crucifixion of their own Messiah, occasion was taken of the breach thus of necessity made between God and a guilty world, to introduce a secret hitherto undisclosed but now unveiled. The elect nation had consummated their corruption and violence. God's name was blasphemed among the heathen through those who were separated to be the grand depository of His oracles and the witness of His character on earth. What remained, if thus the earth and its choicest people were in rebellion? Heaven; and so, in the depths of divine compassion and wisdom and love, God began to create a new body neither Jewish nor Gentile properly, though chosen out of either, both made one, both reconciled in one body, destined for a sphere as alien from the most exalted as from the most debased of earth.

“God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause His face to shine upon us,” say the Jewish saints in Psa. 67, “that thy way may be made known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him.” Such is the order of blessing in the world to come: the Jews in the inner circle, and in the outer the Gentiles through them glad and singing for joy, for God will govern in righteousness. The blessing of the nations was an ancient and reiterated truth; proclaimed to Abraham (Gen. 12:3), renewed to the seed (Gen 22:18), repeated to Isaac (Gen 26:4), and to Jacob (Gen 28:14). It was bound up in terms with the promises so well-known and cherished, which guaranteed the highest seat on earth to the seed of Abraham.

Is, then, a most certain and familiar pledge of Gentile blessing in the promised seed, so often and not obscurely referred to in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms—is this the mystery which has been “hid from ages and from generations, but is now made manifest to the saints”? Can that with propriety be said specially and absolutely to be hid, which was among the simplest and most frequently recurring household-words of the people of God, from the time of the first promise to the patriarchs? There is no secret nor silence about that which was published from age to age, and declared from generation to generation. What was made known to the fathers, and indeed to all Israel, cannot be, for this very reason, the mystery of Christ — that peculiar mystery, “which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it was now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.”

Some, I am aware, through unbelief and a consequent lack of spiritual intelligence and heed to human tradition, have unwittingly sought to neutralize the speciality, and thereby the nature and being, of “the mystery,” by the assumption that it had been revealed from the beginning, and that it was always, though dimly, understood by the Old Testament saints. The answer is plain and direct: the apostle Paul says positively that “it was now revealed.” From the beginning of the world it was hid in God (Eph. 3:9). To the apostles and prophets it was now revealed, and to none previously — *ὡς νῦν ἀπεκαλύφθη τοῖς ἁγίοις ἀποστόλοις αὐτοῦ καὶ προφήταις ἐν πνεύματι*. Certainly it is not to the apostles at the present and to the prophets at a former time. It was “now” revealed, and that to persons joined together as a common class to which the revelation was then made; as the structure of the words necessarily implies to any competent to judge of such a question, shutting out therefore the idea of any prophets being referred to before the Pentecostal mission of the Spirit. The prophets, alluded to in the text, were of the present economy as much as the apostles were; and therefore the words, far from weakening, tend directly to strengthen the distinctive character of “the mystery,” as a thing wholly unrevealed in former times. It was a new revelation. (To be continued, D.V.)

Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians, Ephesians 3:14-21, Remarks on

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

On the closing verse or two of the portion last before us, I did not comment. A few words now, therefore, on verses 12, 13. The apostle having alluded to Christ as the One in whom, exalted on high, the eternal purpose of God has now been revealed by the Spirit, adds that in that same person, "We have boldness and access, with confidence by the faith of Him. Wherefore, I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory" (vss. 12-13). Now it is very sweet to find how, even in so vast a subject as that which was occupying his heart, and which he desired to press upon the saints, he can link on with the highest and deepest counsels of God the very simplest of the fundamental truths on which the believer rests. This is most instructive: because while, on the one hand, we saw before now that it is quite in vain to enter into the nature of the Church without having a simple, clear, and full understanding of the peace which Christ has made, and which He is for us in the presence of God; on the other hand, when we do seize in any measure the character of the Church, when we see the astonishing privileges which are ours as being made one with Christ, we regard with a more intense enjoyment the first elements, and we realize the amazing stability of the foundations on which our souls are privileged to stand. Thus one sees God would take care that peace of conscience and of the heart, too, should be kept up practically. There is nothing that is merely given for the wonder of our minds. I do not say that there is not endless matter for admiration, or that there is not an infinity to learn; but every step, and, indeed, the highest attainment of the knowledge of God's purposes in Christ, is intimately linked with the confidence of our souls in His love. So that while we cannot apprehend aright the nature of the Church until we have known simple peace with God, when we do enter into it, that peace is brightened in the heavenly light of the privileges into which the Holy Spirit has been leading our souls. We come back with renewed understanding and deeper enjoyment of the boundless grace which is ours in Christ. Hence it is that having ushered us into this wonderful expanse of God's love and purposes, he for a moment glances at certain practical consequences in us. "In whom," says he, "we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him" (vs. 12). It is not only peace, but "we have boldness," (vs. 12) which refers more particularly to our speech in addressing God: being able, as it were, to say anything to Him; because of our confidence in His love. And "access with confidence," (vs. 12) which is not merely what we utter, but the drawing near to Him, even where there may be no positive going forth of heart in the way of formal prayer; but there is the enjoyment of nearness, "access with confidence by the faith of him" (vs. 12). "Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is—your glory" (vs. 13). There is another practical fruit of this blessed truth. We saw before how he introduces the unfolding of the Church along with the fact that he was a prisoner of Jesus Christ. At the very moment when he was under the hand of the power of this world, and with the possibility of death before him, the Lord is pleased to bring out through the apostle the glorious calling of the Church. And He reminds them of this again. They might have been cast down at his sufferings. He says, on the contrary, you should not faint; tribulation ought to be rather that which would exercise and strengthen your faith. In 2 Corinthians 1 the apostle speaks of being pressed out of measure, above strength, so that he despaired even of life. But when the Corinthians needed comfort, he had it from God, and was able to give it out to them. Now he was under the world's power and in prison, and there God unfolds the glory of the Church. They would, no doubt, be called to suffer too, and would have to know what tribulation was. So that the apostle, in the fullness of his own enjoyment of the truth which enabled him to rejoice even in his sufferings, calls upon them not to faint. So entirely has the Spirit of God united together the saints, not only with Christ, but also with one another, that what Paul was suffering was their glory, not his only, They had a common interest in it as being members of the same body.

"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man" (vss. 14-16). Here we are on perceptibly different, and I may say higher, ground than that of chapter 1. It is one of the two great relationships in which God stands to Christ, and, consequently, to us. For God now acts toward Christ, in view not merely of His person, but of His work. The consequence is that the work efficaciously puts us in the same place before God which belongs to Christ as man, yea, to Christ as man risen from the dead and in heaven. I carefully guard against saying all that Christ is, for this would not be true. We never can share what pertains to Him as the Son of the Father from all eternity. It were impossible, and even if conceived, it would be irreverent. No creature can overpass the bounds which separate him from God, neither would a renewed creature desire it. For in truth it is the joy of the most exalted creature to pay the lowliest homage to Him who is above him. Therefore I have little doubt that, in heaven among the angels of God, the highest is he who shows the deepest reverence. So, in earthly things, it is plainly the duty of every one to mark respect to the sovereign; but the one who has the place next to the sovereign has the largest opportunities and the strongest obligation to mark what the sovereign is in his eyes. So with us now in things spiritual.

In this portion, then, we have the second of the two great titles of God in relation to Christ and to us. It is not here, as in chapter 1, the God, but the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The God of Christ brings out Christ more as the glorious man which He is—the glorified man in God's presence, the center of all the counsels of God's power, who is even now exalted in the highest seat in heaven, and all things put under His feet. But it is plain that Christ has that which He values more than all that is set under His dominion—the love and delight of His Father in Him. Even our hearts are capable of understanding and enjoying this in the Holy Spirit. Indeed the time comes in most men's history, even where the world has counted them greatest and happiest, when they find a void that nothing can satisfy. But in Christ's case glory will not be the withering plant that human handling makes it. We know that in His hands it will be equally bright and holy, because God will be the object of it all; and everything, consequently, will be turned to His praise; as it is said, "Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." But then no possession of the universe, no expulsion of evil, no righteous judgment, no blessed control of everything to the glory of God, could possibly satisfy the heart. There will be the salt of the everlasting covenant of God in it: the constant maintenance of God's will and glory will be felt. But there is something sweeter than any power, let it be ever so glorious or howsoever administered; and this we have here. It is the Father's love which is above all. The effect of the one prayer is, that you look down upon the immense scene that is put under Christ; and it is intended of God that you should. But the effect of the second is rather, you look up in the enjoyment of the love that is the secret of the glory—and the glory the effect and fruit of the love, and that which evidences what the love must have been that has given such glory. But blessed as glory is, the love that gives the glory is still deeper and better. And hence, when our Lord in John 17, prays for the saints—when He says, "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them," (John 17:22) what is it for? "That the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me" (John 17:23). This is the object of it. All are made perfect in one in that glory; but the end of that manifestation of glory is that the world may know how much the Father loved them. Thus, the glory that is seen, blessed as it must be, is not the end of everything. There was love before there was glory. And while I would not assert that there will be love after there is glory, still I do say that what produces, gives, and maintains the glory, is better than the glory itself. Aye, and there is nothing in all the thoughts of God more wondrous than that God can love such as we are with the same love

wherewith He loves His Son. And He does so love; I know it for myself, and dishonor His word if I do not know it. If He says it, is it not that I may believe it and take it home to my heart, and enjoy it now in this world?—that I may use it as my constant buckler against everything that flesh or world or Satan can insinuate against me? He loves us as He loved Him. Do not say it is too high a thing. I know nothing so humiliating—that so convicts us of being nothing—as this that so loved, we should so little feel it; that so loved, we should so feebly return it; that so loved, we should yield to the cares, the vanities, the thoughts, the pursuits, anything, in short, that is not according to that love. It is the delight and, if we may so say, the desire of God that those who are His should enter into the greatness of His love. For no glory, nor sense of it, nor confidence, nor waiting for it, ought to be enough even for such hearts as ours. It is a most wonderful thing, to think that we are to share the glory of Christ: but we have the same love too. The same God that gives us the glory of Christ, will have our souls enter even now by the Holy Spirit into the community of the same love; and such is the grand central thought of this prayer. “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (vs. 14).

The Father of Christ is that relationship which brings out the love, just as the kingdom of Christ is connected with His conferred or human glory. In the one case it is what He is going to do for us. If we think what He did for Adam, what His purpose was about man, what will He not do for the last Adam, even Christ? And all that He does for Him as this blessed, glorious man, He will share with us. But more than that. The love that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ bears to Him, He bears also to us. We know how He expressed it when His Son was here—at what striking moments He brought out His love—how jealous He was lest man should suppose that He was indifferent to His beloved Son. Suffering allowed is no proof that He does not love; yea, rather, the contrary—a proof of how much not only He trusts our love, but how much also He would have us to trust His: confiding in Him, that, spite of all appearances, He loves us as He loves His Son. We may be exposed to all that Satan can array against us; but we are only in the same scene which the Son of His own love has trodden before us. But when men might have thought, from this or that, that Jesus was no more than any other man, see how God vindicates Him. Thus, it was not only that John the Baptist tried to hinder the Lord Jesus from being baptized, as if He needed to confess anything—for that baptism was a confession of sins; and therefore did John show his astonishment that there should be even the appearance of confession on the part of such an one as Jesus. But God had deeper thoughts, and allows that there should be that which unbelief might torture into the insinuation of evil, but which faith lays hold of, and for which only we adore Him and the Lamb yet more. So it was that the Father, when His beloved Son rose out of the Jordan, where all others were confessing unrighteousness—where He was fulfilling all righteousness—where He who had no unrighteousness to confess, still would not be severed from those who were doing that which became their unrighteousness—who were owning the God whose rights had been forgotten—and in sympathy with the holy feeling that led them there, He would be with them there: then it was that the Father declared, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 17:5). It was just at the right moment, and with the fullest wisdom; but with what love the Father uttered these words! He that served Him as He never was served before—He that glorified Him as God never had been glorified on this earth—He that finished the work which God had given Him to do—was God likely to betray the smallest turning aside of His heart from Him? But yet we know that at the moment when He most of all needed it, when all else was against Him, then, crowning all, God forsook Him. If sin was to be judged and put away forever, it must be judged in all its reality. There must be no sparing, nor mitigating the wrath of God about sin. The whole judgment of God fell upon Him—the work was done—sin was put away by the sacrifice of Himself.

And now all the love which the Father had towards that blessed One can flow out to us on the ground of that work. It is there that the apostle puts us, brought into the place of sons with the Father; and he bows his knee to the “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom every family in heaven and earth is named.” The expression “the whole family” (vs. 15) is jumbled up with people’s notions about the church, as if part were meant as in heaven and part on earth. But the real force is “every family.” There is no reference to the unity of the church here. On the contrary, he means that when we look at the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, we rise sufficiently high to take in every class of creatures that God has made. Supposing you look at God as He made Himself known of old, it was as Jehovah to Israel. Does every family in heaven and earth come under this title? Not a single family in heaven, and only one family on earth. Under the title of Jehovah there is a separate relationship in which God reveals Himself to the Jews. He was their God in a sense in which He was not the God of any other people. As Creator, He is the God of all; and thus in some scriptures the term “God” is used, not Jehovah, because of a certain dealing with Gentiles. But where it concerns the ancient people of God, he uses the term Jehovah. Nay, in the second book of Psalms, when the Holy Spirit is contemplating the godly Jew worshipping God far from His temple, we have not Jehovah prominent, but “God”—for they are not able to enjoy what is specially given to Israel. He never will cease to be God, and they find their blessing in this—come what may—God cannot deny Himself. They are outside the special place in which He had promised to bless them; but God was God everywhere. So that if they were cast out of the Holy Land, and could not go up to the temple to worship according to the law, God could never cease to be God. It is the very same principle of grace that Christ was bringing down the poor Syrophenician woman to—that we must always come to our true position; and the same thing in substance is verified in every real conversion. I must always be brought down to the truth of what I am, as well as to the truth of what God is, and then there is no limit to the blessing.

I have just referred to this, by the way, for the purpose of illustrating by contrast the phrase “every family in heaven and in earth.” When God was revealing Himself in special relationship with Israel, it was as Jehovah. In Daniel we hear not of Jehovah, but the God of heaven, he is clearly in contradistinction to God revealing Himself on the earth to a certain people that He gave a peculiar land to, and privileges that no other nation shared along with them. They go after false gods: He takes His place in heaven, and falls back upon what never could be denied, and as “the God of heaven” (ch. 1:3) He says, I will choose now whom I will. I will take the very worst people in the whole world, and will give them the empire of the earth. So He chose the enemy of the Jew—the Babylonians. If God is acting thus sovereignly, as the God of heaven, the vilest may have the power here below. But “there is a God that judgeth the earth,” (Psa. 58:11) and when the day comes to verify that, it will be in the midst of His people as Jehovah. Looked at in this way, He has only one family that stands in covenant relationship to Himself: “You only have I known of all the families of the earth” (Amos 3:2). But here we have the contrast. He is revealed not merely as Jehovah, having Israel, His people, upon earth, but as “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (vs. 14). The moment He speaks in such a relationship as this, it is expressly in association with one who made everything, as was said before, “who created all things by Jesus Christ” (vs. 9). All creatures therefore come into view, and finding their due place with Him as the Father, because the Lord Jesus is He that formed all, and for whose glory all was made. Hence all families in heaven and earth, let them be principalities and powers, angels, Jews or Gentiles, as well as the Church of God, all come under “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (vs. 14). The title Jehovah is restricted to a particular race: the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is unlimited in its range, and brings in every class of beings that God has made. This puts the Church in a most remarkable position, taking us away from all that is local or temporary. We ourselves may have the most special place within this display of divine glory, but still we have to do with a God and Father who is the proclaimed and supreme source of everything else. We may be, we are,

if we understand the calling of the Church, near to Him, in a place that none can share, a nearness that no angel enjoys. I mean by “we,” all the members of the Church of God. We have by grace a place of association with Christ before God, which none others enter. But as He is revealing Himself in connection with Christ as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, so He brings in other classes of beings that He has made for the purpose of His giving blessing in their suited measure. He has brought out the heir and center of all His purposes, and there is not a single class of beings that He has made for His praise, but what are put in their proper place before the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is in contrast with the peculiarity of the Jew as being the sole possessor of the privileges God gave to them as Jehovah. The Father is Jehovah, and so is Jesus; but it is not thus that we have to do with Him; nor is this our intelligent character of addressing Him. It is to the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ that the apostle is here bending his knees. And we ought to be conscious that we are drawing near to Him in the full nearness that such a title implies. He takes in within His eye and heart all creation as that which He means to bless with Christ. But there are those that have rejected Christ, and remember the very same love of Christ which means to bless the creation through Christ, will maintain His glory against those who despise Him. This is a solemn truth. There is nothing more intolerant of evil than love, and the gospel of God has, as its background, the eternal condemnation of every soul that despises Jesus the Son of God. It must be so. The son of man that was the favored one of God to bring out love as none other had done, is the one who brings out the eternal death of those who refuse His love. The revelation, therefore, of the endless ruin of those that despise Christ, is in the closest possible connection with the love that brings out the everlasting blessedness of those that cleave to Him. Thus we have this universality brought in, “Of whom every family in heaven and earth is named” (vs. 15).

But there are, by grace, those that will have that which is most peculiar, which is nearest to His heart in the midst of this scene of love and glory; and here they are—“That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man: that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height” (vss. 16-18). He does not say what of—he leaves yet there without any ending to the sentence. He brings you into infinity. I do not believe that it means the breadth, length, depth, and height of the love of Christ. The passage is often quoted so, and oftener so understood; but the “and” of the next verse indicates another sense distinctly?—“And to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge” (vs. 19). The love of Christ is evidently an additional thought. What then is the meaning? I would not be bold to fill up an outline which the apostle has left thus vaguely, but I venture to think that what he puts before us here, with such singular marks of undefined grandeur, is the mystery of which he had been speaking, and assuredly not Christ’s love, which he immediately adds. He had shown how every family in heaven and earth is ranged under the fatherhood of the Lord Jesus Christ. In connection with this he prays, “That you may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height.” It is in relation to the heavenly counsel of God the Father, once secret but now disclosed. All things were for the glory of His Son—the whole creation, heavenly and earthly—and the saints are to have the very highest place with Him over it all.

But there was something still deeper than this, and which needed to be known along with it. Therefore he adds, “And to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God” (vs. 19). Glorious as all these prospects are, still the love is deeper than it all: the best wine is kept to the last. “To know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge” (vs. 19). It may seem to be a paradox to say so, but a blessed one. It does not mean that we shall ever know it perfectly, but there may be the knowing more and more of that “which passeth knowledge” (vs. 19). He supposes us launched upon that sea where there is no shore: we can never get to the end of it. Yet he adds, “To know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge; that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God” (vs. 19). You could no more get to the end of the love, than you could get to the end of God Himself. Nothing can be more wonderful than this prayer. He adds further, “Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” (vs. 20). He does not say, above all that we can ask or think. The Holy Spirit takes particular care not to say so. There is a great difference between what we do ask and think, and what we can ask and think. There is no limit to what we may ask. God is above anything that we can ask of Him, and He loves to hear us asking more and more. He would exercise us in asking more abundantly. “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” (vs. 20). Whose power is that? It is God’s. God Himself dwells in every Christian. It is God Himself who makes every saint, that is, every Christian, to be His temple. Therefore, however poor and weak a Christian may be, looked at as he is, yet what cannot God make such an one to be? He is the temple of God. God will always be above him, higher than any man’s expectations of His love; but it is taken into account that there is a power which has wrought in us, as well as a power which has wrought for us, to which we can see no limits. As to the power that wrought for us, we see it in chapter 1. That was the power which raised up Christ from the dead; and it is the same power that works in us in connection with entrance into His love. Do we remember that this is precisely the thing in which we most fail? For there is many a soul constantly saying, I do not think of this power; I am apt to be murmuring, and tried by the very things which, if I only had the sense of His love, I should bless Him for. “To him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (vss. 20-21). There he gives us the Church in this most special point of view. He intimates that there will never be a time when the Church will not have its own peculiar place. But it is not only true that the Church will have a wonderful introduction into the love of Christ and the fullness of God, by His power that works in us now; but it would appear also that there never will be a time, in all the ages to come, when there will not be an unique and blessed character of relationship between the Church as such and God Himself—the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. And this is confirmed by the beautiful scene in Revelation 21, where we have no longer nations and kings, but God with men. But it is not said simply, “Behold, the dwelling of God is with men,” but “the tabernacle.” It is not only that God comes down to dwell with men, but “the tabernacle of God is with men” (Rev. 21:3). It seems exactly the same thing that is here called the Church. God, dwelling in the Church, will take up His place with men; so that there will abide the peculiar dwelling-place of God in the Church, even when the scene is an eternal one. Thus, when the heavens and earth have passed away, after the great white throne, and when all the saints will be in their resurrection bodies, then not only will God be in face of men, but “the tabernacle of God” (Acts 7:43) will come down to be with men—God dwelling with them in His own tabernacle, which tabernacle I believe to be that which is here called the Church. So that the Church, even in eternity, when all enemies and things shall be subdued, will enjoy the sweet and amazing privilege of being the home or dwelling-place of God. What manner of persons, then, ought we to be in holy conversation and godliness?

Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians, Ephesians 3:1-13, Remarks on

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

WE have here a remarkable instance of the parenthetical style of the epistle; for the whole chapter on which we are entering is an example of it. We shall find parenthesis within parenthesis, the want of seeing which increases the misunderstanding of the epistle; but once observed, all is easy, and the moral fitness of such a form of describing what is in itself a sort of parenthesis in God's ways has been and should be noticed by the way. We can seek, by the grace of God, to learn and consider the reason for these digressions, which form a parenthesis of unusual length. The whole of chapter 3 comes in between the doctrine of the close of chapter 2 and the exhortation at the beginning of chapter 4, which is founded upon that doctrine. What is the meaning of this turning aside? The Holy Spirit stops short in the midst of the unfolding of the doctrine to lead us into—what? The answer, I think, is very plain. He had just alluded to that which must have seemed a great stumbling block to a Jew; namely, God's forming one body, where there is neither Jew nor Gentile. Among Christians now, I am sorry to say, the difficulty is not even felt, still less is the truth understood. The reason is because they have so little hold of the faithfulness or the purposes of God. For what is a real trial of faith to a devout mind is when one part of the truth of God appears to clash with another. There cannot be any real discord; all must be in perfect keeping and harmony: But we are not always able to understand how the different parts of truth hang together.

Let us for a moment seek to put ourselves in the position of the Jewish believers, who inherited the thoughts and feelings and prejudices of the Old Testament saints. And let such an one have words of this kind clearly pressed upon him—one body, neither Jew nor Gentile, the enmity slain, the middle wall of partition broken down. What a truth for a Jew! How extraordinary that God should destroy that which he had been building up, and had so long sanctioned; that God who had so formed and insisted on the distinctions between Jew and Gentile, on peril even of death to slight them, that He Himself should reduce them to nothing, and bring in what is totally different from and irreconcilable with the old order! No wonder all this should be a difficulty, if put together as being the mind of God for the same time. But there is a key to the whole enigma. They are not instituted of God for the same time. Hence all the difficulty amounts to is—that God, who at one time ordained the distinction between Israel and the Gentiles, is pleased now for a season to abolish it and to bring in an entirely new thing. Now the early part of chapter 3 is devoted to the explaining of this special part of the mystery of Christ, whereby the Gentiles are brought forward and put upon exactly the same level with the believing Jews that now received Christ, so that in this world they form one and the same body. But the more that a man adhered to the truth of the Old Testament, the more insuperably hard this was, because the Old Testament never speaks of such a state of things. In fact, for a person who only knew the Old Testament revelations, it was a wrench without precedent, and that for which he must have been altogether unprepared. There was this difficulty of apparently going contrary to the plain word of God. This is the difficulty that the Holy Spirit here removes out of the way. And first of all, observe the wisdom of God in laying an admirable foundation for the bringing in of this doctrine. We have seen the counsels of God from all eternity centering in Christ, and embracing the glorious thought of souls gathered out from this world to be the sharers of the same love and glory in which Christ is now found in the presence of God. (Ch. 1) That He gradually brings down to meet souls in their ruined state upon earth; and we had it in chapter 2. And now in chapter 3 we have the digression for the purpose of explaining fully the nature of this part of the mystery.

We must, however, guard against the notion that the mystery or secret means the gospel. The gospel never was, and never can mean, a mystery. It was that which in its foundations always was before the mind of God's people in the form of promise and of a revelation of grace not yet accomplished. But nowhere in Scripture is the gospel called a mystery. It may be connected with the mystery, but it is not itself a mystery. It was no mystery that a Saviour was to be given; it was the very first revelation of grace after man became a sinner. The seed of the woman was to bruise the serpent's head. A mystery is something that was not revealed of old, and which could not be known otherwise. Again, you have in the prophets a full declaration that the righteousness of God was near to come; the plainest possible statement that God was going to show Himself a Saviour-God. So again you have His making an end of sins and bringing in reconciliation and everlasting righteousness. All these things were in no sense the mystery. The mystery means that which was kept secret, not that which could not be understood, which is a human notion of mystery, but an unrevealed secret—a secret not yet divulged in the Old Testament but brought out fully in the New. What, then, is this mystery! It is, first, that Christ, instead of taking the kingdom, predicted by the prophecy, should completely disappear from the scene of this world, and that God should set Him up in heaven at His own right hand as the Head of all glory, heavenly and earthly, and that He should give the whole universe into the hands of Christ to administer the kingdom and maintain the glory of God the Father in it. That is the first and most essential part of the mystery, the second, or Church's part, being but the consequence of it. Christ's universal headship is not the theme spoken of in the Old Testament. You have Him as Son of David, Son of man, Son of God, the King, but nowhere the whole universe of God (but rather the kingdom under the whole heavens) put under Him. In this headship over all things, Christ will share all with His bride. Christ will have His Church the partner of His own unlimited dominion, when that day of glory dawns upon the world.

Hence then, as we know, the mystery consists of two great parts, which we have summed up in Ephesians 5:32: "This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the church." Thus the mystery means neither Christ nor the Church alone, but Christ and the Church united in heavenly blessedness and dominion over everything that God has made. Hence, as we saw from chapter 1, when God raised Him from the dead, He set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, "and put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the Head over all things to the church" (ch. 1:22). It is not said, "over the church," (ch. 1:22) which would overthrow, not teach, the mystery. He will be over Israel and over the Gentiles, but nowhere is He said to reign over the Church. The Church is His body. I admit it is a figure; but a figure that conveys an intense degree of intimacy, full of the richest comfort and the most exalted hope. The saints that are now being called are to share all things along with Christ in that day of glory. Hence it becomes of the greatest interest to know what the nature of the Church is. When did its calling begin and what is the character of that calling and the responsibilities that flow from it?

The Epistle to the Ephesians is the capital seat of the doctrine of the Church; and if the Spirit of God here departs from the current of the doctrine, it is to give us a view of what was one of the chief difficulties connected with it; namely, the Gentile believers being brought with believing Jews into the unity of Christ's body. A Jewish mind would not feel it so strange that God should bless a Gentile; but he would suppose that the blessing must be inferior to that of a Jew—that a higher place must be reserved for Israel and a lower one for the Gentile. The doctrine brought out now overturns all this. To a mind bred in Old Testament thought it was the apparent undermining of the plain word of God. How was so natural and strong an objection to be removed! It was a new thing for heaven, during Israel's rejection for the earth. Further, it is from not understanding "the mystery" and what the Church really is that the Popish or antichurch system has sprung up. But not

only so, Protestants too have departed from the Word of God on this subject through unbelief of our heavenly relationship to Christ and through love of the world—love of present honor and worldly greatness. They have not the faith and patience to wait for the day of Christ. A Christian is called upon to suffer now, to be cast out as evil, waiting to be glorified with Christ—not merely by Christ, but with Christ, to be with Christ Himself where He is. This supposes our place “without the camp,” (Heb. 13:11) that is, every form of worldly religion. Does not the world now take the place of being the Church of God? This is the part of Babylon; and though the strongest expression, and, if you will, the center of Babylon is found in Popery, that system of confusion is not confined to Rome. We do well to come nearer home, to examine what we are about ourselves, to look whether we be not drawn away into a grave misunderstanding of what God has saved us for. Do Christians generally realize that they are saved at all? Are they simply, thoroughly, abidingly happy in the consciousness of God’s salvation? Look at the hymns that are sung—think of the prayers that are offered. They are the aspirations of anxious, uneasy souls, who call themselves miserable sinners, because they have no conscious possession of the blessing, but only desires after it. Is it possible that it comes to this, that souls count it humility to doubt God? that it is a becoming and boasted part of the worship of God to express the misery and the bondage of redeemed souls on the day that proclaims that their sins are blotted out and their peace made? Where, in all this, is the simple, hearty rest in the knowledge of redemption as a completed thing? of sins being entirely done with for the Christian, as far as regards the judgment of God. Assuredly there remains always the need of our acknowledging our sins, and of judging ourselves; but this is quite another kind of judgment and of confession, the confession of souls which blame themselves so much the more because they have not a doubt that they are sons of God—hearts which are perfectly at peace and which express their happiness in songs of praise and thanksgiving to the God that has forever saved them.

Upon the foundation of salvation as a complete thing, the Holy Spirit leads on to the understanding of the Church. If you do not know and rest in Christ’s redemption as accomplished, yea and accepted for us of God, you cannot have a single true idea of the Church. This shows the exceeding wisdom of the Spirit of God in bringing in the doctrine of the Church here, after all question of salvation has been fully met and settled. “For this cause I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles” (vs. 1). He was a sufferer even to bonds for the sake of the Gentiles. Wherever a person takes his place truly as a member of the body of Christ, how can he have honor, or escape reproach and trial in the world? The proper home of the Church is in heaven; but on earth he who brought out this blessed truth is content to be a prisoner. “If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward” (vs. 2). Dispensation here means administration or “stewardship”—that for which he was held responsible to God. The Apostle Paul was the instrument chosen of God for bringing out the nature, calling, character, and hopes of the Church. Mark the ways of God. He would not develop it among the Jews, nor would He reveal it by Peter or James. It was revealed to them no doubt, but not by them. The Apostle Paul was the only one of the inspired writers by whom God made it known. Hence if there were the smallest truth in apostolic succession, Paul ought to be the root or channel through whom the succession comes, and not Peter, who was expressly an apostle of the circumcision. Paul’s apostleship was directly from the Lord and with the uncircumcision as its sphere. He was the grand witness that all true ministry must be direct from Christ. He may work by means. He may call a person to preach, and there may be persons whose gift is developed by means of teaching. The same apostle who derived his gift from the Lord, and who insisted upon this so strongly, was teaching others. He communicated the truth to Timothy, and Timothy was enjoined to teach others that which he had himself received. The Lord works by those who understand the truth well, to communicate the truth to those who understand it less. But still the principle remains, that all gift is immediately from Christ, and not derivative from man. There were outward and local appointments, such as elders and deacons; but that was another thing altogether. The elder might teach or not, and might do so formally and publicly, if he were a teacher; but his eldership was purely a certain charge communicated by the authority of the apostles, distinct from the question of gift. I only refer to the underived character of gift properly so called, which the Spirit distributes in the Church. It comes immediately from Christ on high (Eph. 4), and not through the muddy channels of the earth.

In this further statement the apostle Paul says, “By revelation He made known unto me the mystery (as I wrote afore in a few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)” (vs. 3). He had touched upon it in chapter 2, but now he is entering upon it more fully. “Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men” (vs. 5). Here you have a positive statement that the secret was a something not revealed in other ages— not that it was obscurely intimated or badly understood, but it was not revealed at all. It was a secret kept hid, as the apostle lets us know in Romans 16 “Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest.” It was only now divulged. It was not that the thing had been predicted by the prophets, and only now laid hold of by faith. In truth it was now made manifest, now published and taught; it never had been before. “But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith” (Rom. 16:26). There is no doubt that the “scriptures of the prophets,” (Rom. 16:26) alluded to here, are New Testament scriptures. It is, properly speaking, “by prophetic scriptures,” (Rom. 16:26) not referring to Old Testament prophets at all; and for this reason—“Now is made manifest, and by the prophetic scriptures.... made known to all nations.” Had the meaning been Old Testament prophets, what could have been more extraordinary than such an expression? He might have said, It was revealed to the prophets, but now it is understood. But he says, It is now made manifest. “Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (vs. 5). There were inspired men, not apostles, who were prophets. To both of these it was now revealed; but we cannot say that “prophetic scriptures” (Rom. 16:26) in Romans 16 extend beyond the writings of Paul, which develop this blessed secret of God. The unfolding of the Church ensued when the Holy Spirit was given after a new manner. “The Holy Ghost was not yet [given] because that Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:39). The Holy Spirit had wrought before, but He was to be poured out personally; and this is identified with the calling of the Church. At Pentecost, for the first time, we have an assembly that is called the Church of God. “The Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47). There we find what is called the Church or the assembly: a body which God intended to have Jew and Gentile without distinction; which state of things never existed before the day of Pentecost. And now we have Jews and Gentiles brought into this new order, new to both of them, to which the former revelations of God no longer applied as a direct description of their privileges.

And here let me warn you to beware of so taking the Scriptures as if everything God says there is about you and me and the Church. The Church is, comparatively, a new thing in the earth; it is exclusively a New Testament subject. If I said that saints were thus new, it were false; but if you say that the Church embraces Old Testament saints, you neglect and oppose the word of God, which confines the Church of God to that which began with Christ set at the right hand of God, and the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven to baptize all who now believe into this one body. What is meant by “the Church?” The assembly of souls gathered by the knowledge of Christ dead and risen, and by the Holy Spirit united to Christ, as the glorified man at God’s right hand. Such a state of things did not exist before Pentecost. There was no redemption accomplished before the cross. Christ stands alone as Son of God from all eternity—a divine person equal with the Father. But He became

man in order to die for men upon the cross; and risen from the dead, He enters upon His new place of headship to the Church, His body; the Bridegroom of the Bride. Atonement has been made and sin put away by the sacrifice of Himself; and there could be no such thing as becoming a member of the body of Christ till this was accomplished. The Church is founded upon the remission of sins by the blood of Christ already shed, and consists of those that are united with Christ to share all His glory, save that which is essentially and eternally His own as the only begotten Son of the Father.

Then comes in this special part of the mystery "that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel" (vs. 6). The promises of God to Abraham, and the promise of God in Christ, are two things not only different but contrasted. For if I look at the promise to Abraham in Genesis 12, "I will make of thee a great nation," (Num. 14:12) is this the Church's expectation? When Christians become great in the earth, it is when they have slipped out of their proper blessing in fellowship with Christ; but when Israel is made a great nation in the true sense of the word, they will be blest and a blessing as they never were before. The promise was given to Abraham, and will be accomplished in his seed on earth by and by. "I will make of thee a great nation.... and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." Here you have room left for the going out of blessing to the Gentiles; but mark, they are to be blessed in Abraham, and afterward in his seed. In Genesis 22, the promise is renewed to Isaac; and this is what is referred to in Hebrews. "By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies." Is this what we are looking for? I trust not. We want to be in heaven with Christ, and we shall be there through His love and the favor of our God. But Israel is to possess the gate of his enemies, and to be exalted above all people of the earth. In the Psalm we have a sort of commentary upon these expectations of the godly in Israel. Thus in Psalm 67 we have the prayer, "God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause His face to shine upon us (Selah); that thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations" (Psa. 67:1-2). The preliminary of the blessing to other nations is the answer to Israel's cry, "God be merciful unto us and bless us" (Psa. 67:1). All hope for the world as such depends upon the blessing of the Jews. Not so as to the Church, which God is now calling out. Its blessing does not hinge on the promises or the blessing of any people. Hence these Psalm do not apply; yet persons persist in diverting them to present circumstances. No wonder that they are bewildered. The fault is in their perversion of the word of God. "Let the people praise thee, O God; yea, let all the people praise thee." Now it extends to others. "O let the nations be glad and sing for joy; for thou shalt judge the people righteously and govern the nations upon earth" (Psa. 67:4). When that day dawns, instead of the groaning and travailing that as yet prevails, "Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us" (Psa. 67:6). Anything like this is very far from being the case now. It is the millennial state that is expected here, when the power of God will be put forth triumphantly, and God will acknowledge His people Israel, and other nations will be blessed in them. Now the Gentiles are fellow-heirs and of the same body. "Fellowheirs?" With whom? With Christ, and with the Jew in Christ. Whether Jews or Gentiles, they are fellow-heirs. Grace has put them on common ground. It is not now the Jews set on the pinnacle of the earth's blessing. On the contrary, as a nation they are dispersed, and God is judging them, not showing mercy; there is a complete obliterating of the old landmarks. And for this reason: the Jewish people were the real leaders in the world's enmity against Christ, and in the crucifying of their own Messiah. The cross of Christ terminated the distinctions between Jew and Gentile; and, founded upon that cross, God is building the Church. The vilest sinners upon the face of the earth, whether Jew or Gentile, God takes up; and out of their condition of sin and distance from God, puts them all upon one common heavenly level as members of the body of Christ. This is what God is doing now, and it is of immense importance to understand it, in order to enjoy fellowship with His ways. Besides the whole Bible becomes practically a new and yet more precious book when this is understood. Truth cannot admit of compromise, however rightly we may seek to be patient; the revealed mind of God necessarily excludes the notion of people having their own private judgment. Neither you nor I have a right to an opinion on matters of faith. God is the only one entitled to speak on these things; and He has spoken so plainly that it is our sin if we do not hear Him. But you cannot sever truth from the spiritual affections. Hence, if people do not carry out the truth of the Church practically, they lose it, and become bitter against it. God's mind about the Church always brings him who knows it into the world's enmity, and the special enmity of Christians who do not understand it. It was so with Paul preeminently, and it has been the same tale ever since as souls have laid hold of his testimony; and so it must be. The doctrine that Paul held, if taught by the Spirit of God, never can admit of a party, because the very center of it is Christ in heaven.

The apostle goes on with his statement; and this is the particular phase of the mystery that he brings out here—"That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of His power" (vss. 6-7). What is the effect of this truth The most humbling possible. "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (vs. 8). It brings out the value of Christ as nothing else does. He adds further, "And to make all men see what is the administration [not, fellowship] of the mystery." Be shows thus, that besides the aspect of the mystery towards the saints, it has also its application to all men, without distinction; to those outside the Church. Persons who preach the gospel necessarily preach Christ, but there are few who understand the character of the grace which unites the soul with Christ in the relationship of members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. This was a main part of Paul's work. Therefore he adds, administration of the mystery, "which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ" (vs. 9). Mark, it is not hid in the Scriptures, but "hid in God." "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God" (vs. 10). Consider what a wonderful place this is—that God is now making known a new kind of wisdom to the angels above by his dealings with us; and, by us, I mean all the saints of God now on earth. For let them be called by whatsoever name, every saint of God is a member of the body of Christ. All belong truly and equally to the Church of God. The only difference is, that we ought to understand what the Church of God is, and to act upon it; we ought to know what God intends, and how He intends His Church to walk. Christ is equally possessed by all; but all do not equally understand what the will of God about His Church is; how He would have us to worship Him, and to act upon His word together; how to help one another to carry out this glorious truth—God is manifesting by the Church His varied wisdom. Are we walking so according to the will of God for His Church, that He can point to us as a lesson to the angels of God? Such, and no less than this, is God's intention. You cannot, surely, get rid of the responsibility connected with it, by refusing to act according to it! It is not by and by, when we reach heaven, that God will manifest by the Church His manifold wisdom to the heavenly hosts, but now on earth, while the members of the Church are being called. "That now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God" (vs. 10). Does not this bring in a very serious consideration? It is not a question of what men think about us, and whether we are loved or disliked here below. Very sure I am, that if we are walking according to Christ, we never can be anything but hated by the world; and it shows that we value the world if we wish it otherwise. It is a most painful thing to feel that so it must be; but if I believe Christ I must believe this, and I ought to rejoice to be counted worthy to suffer in the least degree. But beside this, the Church is called to be the lesson—book for the angels

of God. When we think that God is overlooking with the angels that surround Him; that He is occupied with such objects as we are; that He sees in them the dearest objects of His affections; that He has given them Christ to be their life, and sent down the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, to take up His dwelling-place in them, and make them to be His temple, while they are in this world, what a calling it is. If an angel wants to know where this great love is, he must look down into this world and see it thus. You cannot sever Christ from the Church. But the wonderful thing is, that, before the angels of God, the astonishing conflict is going on—Satan and all his hosts endeavoring to mislead them, by putting them on a false ground, preaching righteousness in a thousand forms, in order to lead them away from grace and from the cross of Christ. On the other hand, there you have God working by His word and Spirit to bring His people to a consciousness of their privileges. But whether the children of God are faithful or not, perfect love dwells upon them and acts towards them (it may be in discipline); God is occupied with them, caring for them, always keeping this before His mind, that He will have them perfectly like Christ. Nothing can cloud this. Weakness may for a time dishonor the Lord, and destroy our own comfort, and help on the delusion of the world. All that may be; but the purpose of God, it shall stand; what God has spoken must be accomplished. Our weakness may be manifested, but God in His mighty love will complete His purpose. And this is the way in which He is teaching a new kind of wisdom that never was seen before in this world, to the principalities and powers in heavenly places. They had seen God's ways in creation, and at the deluge, and in Israel. But here was something that was not even in the Scriptures of God, which was not promised to man, a thing entirely kept secret between the Father and the Son.

Now it is come out. The Holy Spirit is the One who develops and makes good this glorious truth of the Church of God. How far have our souls entered into it. How far do we content ourselves with vague guesses at it, thinking that it is of no great importance? Willing ignorance of this truth arises from a secret love of the world. There is the feeling in him who declines it, that you cannot take it up in heart and walk with the world. You must thoroughly break with everything that the flesh values under the sun. You have a place above the sun with Christ, and the consequence is that you are palled on to submit to the sentence of death on everything here, to glorify the name of Christ and rejoice in Him, whatever may be the will of God about us. For no circumstances shut us out from the responsibility of being the witnesses of a glory that is above this world. The world ought to see in the Church the reflection of Christ. You may find a nun or a monk sweet morally, but all this may be mere nature, and not Christ. I do not say that Christ may not be there too, in isolated cases, spite of an outrageously wicked system. To faith, however, it is a question of doing the will of God and of glorifying Christ in the place of earthly reproach. God looks for the confession of the name of His Son at cost of everything. If the world heeds it not, is it in vain for the principalities and powers in heavenly places.

The Body, the Church, Body, the Church, The: 1

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

Jesus had shed His blood, was risen, and by the right hand of God exalted. If God had been glorified in Him, He also glorified Him in Himself, and that straightway. The Son of Man ascended up where He was before. He was glorified with the Father's own self, with the glory which He had with the Father before the world was.

Nor was His glorification without result to others. If on earth the Son of David could not disown the higher glories of His person, but rather led on the faith of a poor woman of Canaan to that infinite source of grace beyond, which, while it brought down to a real sense of the depth of degradation and woe, abounded but the more in streams of healing mercy; if on earth, "He could not be hid," what was the suited blessing that flowed down from the God-exalted Man, crowned with glory and honor in heaven? Were those He loved to taste no savor of His joy above? Was there to be no peculiar, no present, power of fellowship with Him, and worthy of Him Who was set at God's right hand "in the heavenly places far above all principality and power, and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world but also in that which is to come?"

On the contrary, it is precisely in this interval between His session on His Father's throne, and His coming to take His seat on His own throne, that the great mystery of Christ and of the church finds its place, development, and revelation. God, whose earthly purposes had been seemingly frustrated but really secured, though for a time in abeyance, uses the cross meanwhile as the basis of other and higher counsels (settled in His mind before the world was, but until now hidden in Himself), and thereupon exalts the crucified Lord of glory, and sends down the Holy Ghost, not only as the one and Divine witness of what and where Christ was, but as the gatherer, by His own presence here below, of an assembly from among Jews and Gentiles, brought into the participation of the heavenly glory of Christ—in a word, as the formative agent of the church, which is Christ's body, "the fullness of Him that filleth all in all."

Beyond just question, it is in reference to this new and heavenly assembly that scripture speaks of the closest identification with Christ, of oneness with Him as His body. By such a oneness, it is not merely meant that persons here and there, few or many, had been and are objects of love and quickening power of the Son of God. Life is not, nor does it produce this oneness; abstractedly, it finds and leaves the recipients of it individuals still. Life did not set aside for this world, for those who possessed it, the remarkable characteristic and divinely sanctioned separation of Jews from Gentiles; much less did it sever externally believing Jews from their unbelieving kinsmen according to the flesh, whatever the mutual sympathies, hopes, and conferences one with another, of them that feared the Lord. If there were devout Gentiles, and there is little reason to doubt that God in His mercy raised up such (witness Cornelius), before the gospel of His grace could righteously be preached, they served Him and worshipped Him, but as Gentiles nevertheless. There was no fusion of these with the godly Jews. The faith of one might be admirable in the eyes of the Lord Himself— "so great faith He had not found, no, not in Israel." Still it did not hinder his remaining a Gentile.

Faith therefore in itself did not, and could not, alter that, as regards this life. It was reserved not for the gift but for the Giver of faith to work a strange, unlooked-for, and total reversal of the ancient order. So as to the Jews, though they had the gifts and calling of God, if any believed, the faith of individuals wrought without a doubt a moral separation, and sufferings were the consequences; and the new life has affections as proper to it as are depraved lusts to the old life; yet were not the faithful Jews formed into a manifested holy company here below: they lived as Jews, they died as Jews. It would have been sin in them to have relinquished their prerogatives and standing as Jews, Even in the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus, the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, was not abolished. It existed still—nay, had

His sanction, when He forbade those commissioned in the days of His flesh to go into the way of the Gentiles, or to enter into any city of the Samaritans.

Now the doctrine of the Epistle to the Ephesians (Eph. 2; 3) is that, consequent upon the cross, an entirely novel and different work of God commenced: a work which, belonging to and awaiting its perfect display in the heavenly places, has an actual existence on earth, and most momentous effects in this present time. The point is not Christ dying for the Jewish nation, nor God thereby reconciling all things to Himself. It is not Christ's death for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, nor for the blessing of any Gentiles who may be saved during His future reign; none of which things perhaps would be questioned by a scribe instructed unto the kingdom of heaven. But the doctrine there enforced is that God founded upon the cross, and accomplished by the Holy Ghost thereon given, a platform and structure wholly without parallel in the millennial age, when the old outstanding differences will be resumed, as abundantly appears from the Psalms and Prophets. The apostle in Eph. 2:11-18 thus contrasts it with their previously existing relations, the one dispensationally high, and the other afar off.

(To be continued, D.V.)

Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians, Ephesians 2:11-22, Remarks on

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

HERE opens a very distinct section of the epistle. It is not God's thoughts of grace unfolded, reaching forth from before the world's foundation unto the inheritance of glory when all things shall be subjected to Christ, the Church being one with Him in His supremacy over them all. Neither again is it the means whereby God takes up souls that were dead under the power of Satan, and by nature children of wrath, one as much as another, quickening them with Christ, raising them up and making them sit together in Him in heavenly places. We have had this in the earlier part of chapter 2. But now we have the present working of the plans of God in the world. Chapter 1 gave us the counsels of God about them; chapter 2:1-10, the way in which He wrought in them; but now we have the manner of His plans upon the earth. Accordingly, this brings into very distinct relief the condition in which man had been before. There had been already dealings of God here below. After the flood, when the whole world had departed from God, and set up a new form of peculiarly malignant evil—the worship of false gods—the true God called out one man into a place of separation from all others, and made him to be the depository of the promises and the testimony upon the earth. This was Abraham, and Abraham's seed. Accordingly there it was that from the call of Abraham we find the scene of the workings of God's power, goodness, and government. But the cross of Christ terminated these trials. God might linger for many years after, as we know, in forbearance, but the fate of the Jewish nation was sealed in the cross of Christ; and from that very moment God began to bring out these much deeper purposes of His love. For the Jewish people, at the very best even, had they been converted and received the Messiah, would never have been more here below than an earthly people. They might have been regenerate, but they would have been earthly. The promises that were so fully and richly accorded them in the Old Testament had to do with the earth. I do not say that they had nothing deeper, or that there was not in the hidden mind of God something outside this present scene. But, I repeat again, they were an earthly people; they had the "earthly things" of the kingdom by the distinct gift of God; and it is in reference to this very circumstance that God declares that His gifts and calling are without repentance. He had given earthly blessings to the Jews, and He had called them out for the purpose of enjoying the land. It is in a condition of glory under their Messiah. He will never repent of His purpose, nor withdraw His gift. But meanwhile the whole history of Israel's rejection of God has come in; their worshipping of idols, and finally the crucifixion of their own Messiah; and for the time being they are dispossessed of their land, and scattered over the face of the earth.

But during the time of the dispersion of Israel, and even before it began, from the moment that their guilt was consummated, this heavenly purpose of God was gradually manifested upon the earth. But we must remember that the Church, beside being the object of God's eternal counsels, and having a glorious place in heaven along with Christ, for which we are waiting, has also an existence upon earth, and enters into the dealings of God here below. This is the point at which we are arrived in this epistle. We have had the deeper thoughts of God, but as the epistle does touch upon the ways of God on the earth, we should not have had a full view of the Church's place if it did not give us the dispensational succession here below. Accordingly we have the elements which compose the Church: "Wherefore remember that ye being in times past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called uncircumcision by that which is called the circumcision in the flesh made by hands." Here we are on totally different ground. It is no longer "children of wrath," (vs. 3) persons that were by nature one as bad and dead as the other; but here men are distinguished on earth: the uncircumcision on the one hand, and the circumcision on the other. So that you are on earthly ground, the ground of dispensational dealings, where you have God separating one part of mankind from another by His own will; not because the one was better than the other, but for the display of His own wisdom and purpose. The great mass of the Jews were just as bad in the sight of God as the Gentiles; and some of the Gentiles were converted, such as Job, while there were many of the Jews that perished in their sins. But for all that, God did put a difference between Jew and Gentile; and He says, "Remember that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh" (vs. 11). You were among the rest of mankind, left out of the call of God; you were not brought into a place of separate witness for God as Abraham was; you are called the uncircumcision by that which is called the circumcision. "At that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel" (vs. 12). They had no part in the polity of God set up in Israel; "and they were strangers from the covenants of promise." God gave glorious promises in the form of a covenant, and bound Himself to accomplish them. The Gentiles had no part nor lot in them. There were promises about Gentiles, but none to them. Israel were the direct parties concerned in the promise—they, and they only. And we must carefully remember what these promises meant. They were not made to Abel or Enoch, much less to Adam and Eve, though it is common to speak of the promise made in the Garden of Eden, but Scripture never talks of promise there. And if you examine Genesis 3, you will find the wisdom of God in this, for it could be in no sense a promise. To whom could it be a promise? To whom was it said? To that old serpent. No believer could imagine a promise to him. It was a threat of the extinction of his power. God was judging the sin which had just entered the world, and that is not the time when promises are made. It is strictly a revelation of God, not in the form of a promise at all, but a revelation which comes out in denouncing judgment upon the serpent, and which showed that the seed of the woman was to bruise his head.

"The promises," then, do not go up higher than Abraham: they are connected with the dispensations of God. It may be asked, Have we not promises? I answer, We have all the promises of God; but how and where? They are yea and amen in Christ Jesus. If we have Christ, we are Abraham's seed, and inheritors of the promises, though in a way totally differing from that in which the Jews had them of old, or will have them by and by. We come in on the ground of pure mercy, and as outside covenant altogether. There is no such thing as a covenant with the Church, or with us Gentiles. I do not mean that we receive not the blessings that are in the new covenant. We have all that is blessed in it, and better too; but not as Israel. They come under them as subjects of the promises of God; whereas we are sought and reached and blessed by sovereign grace—having a title to nothing, and yet some better thing provided for us. We come in as filling up the gap between the rejection of the Messiah and His reception by Israel by and by; and we form part of this parenthesis rather than the dealings of God here below, in a very interesting manner, as I hope to show. But here the difference is first brought out. He wants us to know what our condition was. We have right to nothing; we have not the smallest claim upon God; we had no such prescriptive place conferred upon us as Israel had through the promises. They had a place even as unconverted men in the world; and the day is coming when, being converted, they will have a signally conspicuous position in the world, an earthly distinction and glory which never was and never will be our portion. Do not suppose that we shall not have far better, but we shall never have such a place on the earth. We shall have one with Christ over all things; but then it will not be while we have our bodies here below. It is in the resurrection-state that the Church's glory is destined to be brought out, in all its fullness as far as manifested to the world. So that here he reminds the Ephesian saints of what their condition had been as Gentiles: "At that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (vs. 12). They had no hope. They were not expecting any divine intervention to deliver them on the earth: they might dream of what people dream still—a perfectibility of man upon the earth. They had no connection with God in the world; whereas the Jews had Him to direct all their movements—how they were to live, and how their inheritances were to be settled—God entering into all their domestic affairs as well as their worship—everything was entirely under the distinct ordinance of God. If they had God thus in the world, the Gentiles knew nothing of the sort. Out of this miserable condition, what are we brought into? Into the position that Israel had? That is treated of elsewhere. In Romans 11, the great point is to show that the natural branches of the olive tree were broken off, that we who were wild branches might be grafted in. The subject here is not the Church, but merely the possession of promises, and the place of testimony to God here below. These are distinct things. Every baptized person—that is, every one who outwardly professes Christ—belongs to the olive. All such have a special responsibility, as not being heathen (nor now Jews), but in possession of the oracles of God, and as bearing the name of Christ in an outward manner. But in Ephesians 2 there is a far deeper line: the apostle treats of the body of Christ and the assembly of God. And we must remember, that at the beginning of Christianity these two things closely approached each other: in other words, the assembly consisted of hardly any other than the members of Christ's body, true believers united to Christ by the Holy Spirit. But soon individuals crept in, not born of God, and of course not members of Christ, who nevertheless entered the assembly of God. Thus, by a Christian now is meant one who is not a Pagan or a Jew. Hence, in Romans 11, you read of branches being cut off; hence the branches that are grafted in are said to stand in the goodness of God, and warned to continue in it, lest they also should be cut off. It is a question of profession, of its danger, and its sure doom if faithless. But in Ephesians there is no such thing as cutting off, because there the main subject is the membership of the body of Christ. Some now talk of not rending the body of Christ; but there is no such phrase or idea in Scripture. You will find passages that insist much upon the firm standing of true believers, and others which warn of professors coming to nothing of themselves or judged of God. There is no such thought as cutting off a member of Christ's body. There are solemn warnings to Christians for preserving them from evil, but no such a thing as their insecurity.

Proceeding with the chapter, the positive side of the question appears. The Gentiles did not possess the privileges of the Jews by nature. "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometime were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one,"—both Jew and Gentile, "and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us" (vs. 14). There we have it plainly set forth, that the very institutions God set up in His dealings with the Jews are now cast down. God Himself has destroyed the middle wall of partition. He alone is competent so to do. It would have been a sin for any one else to have attempted it. On the other hand, you will find persons who, in their ignorance of Scripture, will argue that, because God had commanded these things once, He must sanction them always. Nothing can be more unfounded. It is entirely limiting God, and shutting their eyes to the plainest statements of His Word. Throughout a large part of the New Testament God Himself sets aside the Jewish institution, in all its parts. Doubtless there are moral principles that were true before the law—revealed ways of God from the first that always must regulate man's conduct with God; but these have nothing necessarily to do with the law. Under the legal institution they might be more or less embodied into the law and take the shape of commandments; but their roots lie far deeper than the law given to Moses. It is founded upon this misconception, that when you speak of the Christian's deliverance from the law, some think you are going to destroy morality, and overthrow God's holy standard of good and evil. But it does not become us to judge what is most for the glory of God. Humility is found in, and proved by, obedience; and obedience depends on subjection to the Word of God. The same act in different circumstances is a duty or a crime: the only unerring test for the believer is God's Word. It was a sin in the Jews not to destroy all the Canaanites: God commanded them to do so, the only one competent to judge, and entitled to command of His sovereign will. For a Christian now to do the same thing would be to mistake His mind. The world is bound to deal with murderers as stringently now as ever: God has not revoked in any wise the word He uttered as to the sanctity of human life. That is what God had set up long before the law of Moses, or any distinction between Jews and Gentiles. It is annulled neither by the law given to Israel, nor by the gospel that now flows out in grace to the world. Government among men stands upon its own foundation and was involved in the commission given to Noah; but the Christian is outside and above it all. He is called unto a new calling, and this we have here. "Now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (vs. 13). Our task is not the preservation of the world's order or the punishment of its disorder; but a new building grows up on the blessed, holy, divine ground of the blood of Christ, by which we are brought nigh to God. Nor is it only what we shall be by and by, but what we are now. We are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

Nothing can be more distinct, "For He is our peace;" (vs. 14) a most wonderful expression. Our peace is not merely a thing of enjoyment within us, but it is Christ outside us; and if souls only rested upon this, would there be anxiety as to fullness of peace? It is my own fault entirely if I do not rest in and enjoy it.

But even so; am I to doubt that Christ is my peace? I am dishonoring Him if I do. If I had a surety whose riches could not fail, why should I doubt my standing or credit? It depends neither on my wealth, nor my poverty; all rests on the resources of him who has become responsible for me. So it is with Christ. He is our peace, and there can be no possibility of failure in Him. Where the heart rests upon this, what is the effect? Then we can rest and enjoy. How can I enjoy a blessing before I believe it? And I must begin with believing before I enjoy. The Lord in His grace does give His people betimes transports of joy; but joy may fluctuate. Peace is or should be a permanent thing. That the Christian is

entitled to have always; and this because Christ is our peace. He is not called our joy, nor God the God of joy, but of peace, because He Himself has done it; and it rests entirely upon Christ. "He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us" (vs. 14). There prevails a notion (unknown to the Bible) that Christ was making out our righteousness when He was here below. Now the life of Christ was, I do not question, necessary to vindicate God and His holy law, as well as to manifest Himself and His love; but the righteousness that we are made in Christ is another thought altogether—not the law fulfilled by Him; but the justifying righteousness of God founded on Christ's death, displayed in His resurrection and crowned by His glory in heaven. It is not Christ simply doing our duty for us, but God forgiving my trespasses, judging my sin, yea, finding such satisfaction in Christ's blood that now He cannot do too much for us; it becomes, if I may so say, a positive debt to Christ, because of what Christ has suffered. It is not seen that the law is the strength of sin, not of righteousness. Had Christ only kept the law, neither your soul nor mine could have been saved, much less blessed as we are. Whoever kept the law, it would have been the righteousness of the law, and not God's righteousness, which has not the smallest connection with obeying the law. It is never so treated in the word of God. Because Christ obeyed unto death, God has brought in a new kind of righteousness—not ours, but His own, in our favor. Christ has been made a curse upon the tree. He has been made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Were the common doctrine on this subject true, we might expect it to be said, He obeyed the law for us, that we might have legal righteousness imputed or transferred to us. Whereas the truth is in all points contrasted with such ideas. Surely Christ's obeying the law was not God's making Him sin. So, in the passage that is often used, "by His obedience many are made righteous." How is His obedience here connected with the law? The apostle does introduce the law in the next verse, as a new and additional thing, coming in by the way.

Further, Adam would not have known the meaning of "the law," though undoubtedly he was under a law which he broke. What, for instance, could Adam in his innocence have made of the word, "Thou shalt not lust" (Rom. 13:9) or "covet"? No such feeling was within his experience. Accordingly, as we see, it was only after man was fallen that the law in due time was given to condemn the outbreak of sin. But Christ has died for and under sin—our sin. And what is the consequence? All believers now, whether Jews or Gentiles, in Christ Jesus are brought into an entirely new place. The Gentile is brought out of his distance from God; the Jew out of his dispensational nearness; both enjoy a common blessing in God's presence never possessed before. The old separation dissolves and gives place by grace to oneness in Christ Jesus. When did this begin? An important question, for it is really the answer to the question:—What, according to Scripture, is the Church? Ask many of God's children. Would they not say, The aggregate of all believers. But is this the body of Christ as shown us here? There were saints from the beginning, all who were born of God; but were they formed into an united assembly on the earth? Did anything under the Old Testament correspond to one body? It never was heard of, excepting as a thing promised, till the day of Pentecost. It awaited the cross of Christ. Therein God abolished the enmity. Before that God had commanded the Jew to be apart from the Gentile and our Lord maintained it most strenuously when He was upon earth. He forbade His disciples to go into any city of the Gentiles. He told the woman of Syrophenicia that He was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. She had gone on the ground of promises, but He shows her that she had no part or lot in the promises. Had she addressed Him as Son of God, would our Lord have kept her waiting? She appealed to Him as the Son of David; and as such His connection was with Israel. She had to learn the mistake of going on the ground of promises that she had no title to. And this is often the reason why people do not enjoy peace. They plead God's promises, but what if I cannot say that they are promises to me? Need I wonder that the answer tarries? Hence, too, there is in general little solid peace. How well for the poor woman, how well for us to know and confess what we really are! She owns that she was not a child nor a sheep at all. "Yet the dogs eat!" (Mark 7:28). She sees why it was that she could not get what she wanted on the false ground of privileges she did not possess. She is brought to own herself as having no promises at all; and then there is no limit to the blessing in the grace of Christ. "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt" (Matt. 15:28).

The two instances in which the Lord admires the faith of those who came to Him were of Gentiles—the centurion and the Syrophenician. Our Lord cannot gainsay His love, and they knew it. They pressed their suit consequently. It was in the midst of dense ignorance; but then the eye was single in the main, and the object on which it rested was a blessing beyond all thought. The blessing consequently could not be lost, and though it might be delayed, it was infinite.

So in this epistle we have the Gentile in a most deplorable condition of distance from God, and separation from all that God had chosen upon the earth. But the cross of Christ has annihilated all such distinctions. It has proved that the favored Jew was, if possible, more iniquitous than the poor Gentile. They had rejected and crucified their own Messiah; and if there were any among the Jews more urgent for His death than others, it was the priests: and so it always is. There is nothing so heartless as the religion of this world; and if it was so then, still more now. What so bad under the sun as spurious Christianity? It may be fair-spoken, and have a good deal of truth mingled with it: but it is without a purged conscience and without divine affection; and the more fearful will be its end. We need take care what we sanction at the present hour: the time is short. The Lord has brought out what His Church is. The will of man has raked up the law of Commandments out of the grave of Christ, and enacts it over again. This is what is found throughout all Christendom. It is inconceivable, except through realizing the power of Satan, how Christians can take up the peculiar institutions of God to His people, curses and all, in the face of such a chapter as this, where we find that all this is gone, even for Jews who believe, by the authority of God. It is a practical denial of the blood and cross of Christ. What a solemn proof of the ruined state of the Church of God! The truth is plain indeed: "Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace: and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby" (vss. 15-16). To this figure of one new man Christians answer. You will find that such a state of things never was known during the Old Testament times, nor even during our Lord's life on earth. It is only after the ascension that Jew and Gentile are united upon earth, and worship God on the same level. This is the Church. It is not merely that they are all believers, but they are members of Christ and of one another on earth. Of course, when we get to heaven, it will still be the Church; but it begins here, and that with Christ crucified and ascended to heaven. When He thus takes His place there, the work follows of forming the body in union with the Head. All distinction is gone, as far as its own sphere is concerned. The nature of the Church is most plain from this: "That He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby" (vs. 16)—which enmity was in the commandments of the law, which straitly and wholly separated one from the other.

But Christ "came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them which were nigh." All is attributed to Him, because founded on the cross; and it is Christ, by the Holy Spirit, who now proclaims this heavenly peace to the Gentiles once afar off, as well as to the hitherto favored Israel. Where this truth is unknown, men may preach Christ more or less, may be descanting much in general on the promises of God; but a Jew would do that; and to them especially it will be given by and by to sing the song that "the mercy of the Lord endureth forever"—the great burden of the millennial psalms. The practically Jewish position taken by most Christians makes them turn the Psalms of

David into the staple of Christian communion, and the expression of their own condition before God. All Scripture is, of course, given of God for the profit and blessing of the Christian. But am I to offer a bull and a goat, because of old it was commanded? To imitate Leviticus is one thing; to understand it is quite another. "By faith we establish the law," but we are not under it. So, speaking about my walk as a Christian, Paul says that sin shall not have dominion over me, for I am not under law, but under grace. How sad to see that the Evangelicals as a body now diligently preach the contrary! They may preach a measure of truth about other things, but they cannot preach the gospel, and they deny the Church of God. A Christian is under the law for nothing whatever, because he is under Christ dead and risen. Christ was under it once; but then I had nothing to say to Him. He passed out of it on the cross; and my association with Christ begins thenceforward. I am united with Christ in heaven, not on the earth. What has Christ in heaven to do with the law? Hence we are said to be under grace, not under law. Further, this doctrine is most practical. The walk is amazingly lowered where a mistake is made about it; and Satan tries to bring in the law after believing, if he cannot pervert it to hinder believing.

Here, then, it is peace that is preached, "to you which were afar off; and to them that were nigh. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (vss. 17-18). There, instead of the law which drew a distinction between Jew and Gentile, the Holy Spirit unites them on a common ground, and puts them on a common relationship as sons, having to do with the Father. This is our position. When God was acting as a governor, He chose a nation; He had His own servants. But now when He has a family, all that order of things vanishes. He has His children, and wants to have them near Him. The end of all the Jewish forms of holy places and days, of priesthood, and of sacrifice, was the cross of Christ. God has fully tried and given up any working upon men by a religion that is visible, or by sight and sounds that act upon the senses. The Holy Spirit sent down from heaven leads the children of God to draw near to the Father. How can a Christian acknowledge that this is what God has given to guide him, and yet be found taking part, were it only by his presence, in that which is positively Jewish? What God has provided for the Jew, and what He enjoins upon the Christian are very different things. We are not Jews but Christians. What He presses upon Christians is far more cutting to nature and more honoring to Christ than anything that He ever did or will give to Israel. He has brought us as His family to Himself, and through Christ we have access by one Spirit unto the Father—we both—Jew and Gentile. How far are we carrying it out? Are we to sanction the unbelief that turns back to the weak and beggarly elements of the world? or are we cleaving only to Christ, worshipping God in the Spirit? We may suffer; but happy are we, if it be so.

He adds further, "Now, therefore, ye [Gentiles] are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (vs. 19). They were brought out of all that condition of distance, and made part of His household, "and are built upon the foundation" (vs. 20)—not of the law—but "of the apostles and prophets" (vs. 20). What prophets? Of the New Testament only. God was not taking up an old foundation, but laying down a new one; and this new one He begins in Christ dead and risen. It is the foundation, not of the prophets and apostles, but "of the apostles and prophets" (vs. 20). The phrase in Greek means that these classes, the apostles and prophets, were united in this joint work. They were together employed in laying this common basis. Read chapter 3:5 of the mystery of Christ, "which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (ch. 3:5). These words set aside all controversy. So in chapter 4:11, "He gave some apostles and some prophets." Some of the New Testament writers were not apostles, and yet they were just as much inspired. We are said, then, to be built upon this "foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone" (vs. 20). Not merely prophecy or promise, but "Jesus Christ Himself" (vs. 20)—His person. It is what the Apostle Peter learns from the lips of our Lord: "Upon this rock I will build my Church;" (Matt. 16:18) that is, upon the confession of Christ as the Son of the living God. And so here you have Jesus Christ as the chief corner-stone. But it is not here, as in Matthew, Christ building; but these apostles and prophets are used in a subordinate way, because they were the instruments of revealing the Church. Thus Scripture confines the Church to that which followed the death and resurrection of Christ, and makes it depend on the Holy Spirit sent down to form them into one body upon earth. "In whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord" (vs. 21). It is not yet complete. "In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (vs. 22). God had once a dwelling-place on earth—the temple; and there He dwelt, not by the Spirit, but in a visible manner. Now God dwells on earth in a more blessed way still, even through the Spirit. The Holy Spirit constitutes the saints the divine habitation and unites them as one body. He dwells in the Church, making it thus the temple of God. It is not His indwelling in the individual that we have here. This also is most true and important; but, besides, He dwells in the Church: He makes the Church to be God's dwellingplace. What a truth! It is plain that God looks for it, that we should be walking faithfully in the truth, and according to Christ.

Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians, Ephesians 2:4-10, Remarks on

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

We have already glanced at the strong contrast drawn between man's condition in the first three verses, and the mighty intervention of God's grace that follows. We have seen the Gentile brought out in the dark portrait of abject moral corruption and senseless idolatry, the Holy Spirit laying everything bare in a few mighty touches. They were "dead in trespasses and sins," (vs. 1) thoroughly subject to the prince of this world. They were merely pursuing the course of this age, children of disobedience, without reference to God in their ways. There is no thought of bringing out in detail the frightful forms of human impiety, or the depravity and degradation to which man has fallen under Satan's instigation. Nevertheless, we have a far deeper view of the hopelessly evil condition of man here, than even when all the details of impurity, superstition, and rebellion are entered into at full length. In the word of God, how little the energy depends on the seeming strength of language! Still less is it what we find with men when they wish to put a thing forcibly. Of violent, exaggerated expression there is nothing in Scripture.

We have simply (and what a fact it is!) God Himself sounding the condition of man, no longer looking at the heart as if it were a question of restraining its desires, which He did under the law. But now it is the utter death of nature in the presence of God—the power of Satan substituted instead of God's government—man himself evidently and hopelessly ruined. But into this scene of death God enters—God who is rich in mercy. And the great love wherewith He loved us is just alluded to as the spring of all that He has done. "God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins" (vss. 4-5)—"we," whether Jews or Gentiles, but more particularly referring to the Jew here. At least he had contrasted the two in verses 2-3. In verse 5 he may possibly be bringing them both in; but if any are

particularly alluded to, it is the Jew, for he is as dead as the Gentile—there is no difference as to this. “Even when we were dead in sins, [God] hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace are ye saved), and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Having already entered into the general subject of regeneration, I would only just add, that although, now that Christianity is divulged, we have regeneration going on at least as much as ever, we have in fact the Holy Spirit stamping upon the regeneration of the present time a deeper character. For it is not only that there is life given, or souls quickened only, but they are quickened together with Christ. I doubt that this could have been said before Christ’s death and resurrection. There can be no hesitation that all the life which any saint ever received from the beginning of the world, was of and through Christ. “In Him was life” (John 1:4). He is the eternal life that was with the Father, and other life there is none for a sinner. There was a tree of life before man fell; not only a tree of knowledge of good and evil, but a tree of life. But this was only creature life that might have sustained an innocent creature to the end. But what if the creature fell? What when Adam became a sinful man? Would the tree of life avail for him then? Not for an hour. “So he drove out the man” (Gen. 3:24). God would not permit that man should touch the mere natural tree of life. For supposing he had eaten of it after sin, what would have resulted? Only a perpetuation of evil in a wretched, remediless condition of sin: an eternal existence in a condition alienated from God, from which there was no escape. So that although death came in as the sentence upon a guilty man, there is in a sense mercy in it, now that man is born into a sinful world, and is subject to every kind of misery, which an enemy has brought in, and which, if you look at death as a part of it, may be the just sentence of God upon man’s iniquity. But all this is laid hold of by Satan, and turned to his purposes, mingled with a bad conscience, on which Satan works, so that a man is filled with dread and horror of God. From this, God, by presenting Christ, delivers the soul. It is not only that the soul finds a life that is suited to its every need—it is not at all a mere perpetuating one’s existence in misery, but a life that ensures deliverance out of evil and all its effects and curse, flowing from God. in His grace, founded upon holiness; and a holy blessedness in the presence of God in that same Christ who brings in this life. There is also God recovered by the soul, as surely as He recovers it to Himself. It was not only that man by sin lost natural life, but he lost God; and it is not only that Christ gives me now a new and better life than the tree of life could give, but He gives me God; He brings me to God and puts me in the presence of God. He makes known God to my soul, and gives me to be sure of His love, of His interest in me, of His deep pity and even complacency: for God cannot only love in a natural way, but with a love of complacency and relationship.

This, then, is what we find in Christ; and although life could be spoken of in connection with all the Old Testament saints before Christ died and rose, still I doubt much that the Spirit of God could speak of the life which they received, as being life with Christ. Life by and in Christ it could not but be; but quickening with Christ goes a great deal farther. And this is what we have now. For God points us to Christ under the burden of our sins, under the whole consequences of that which my nature deserved because of its distance and enmity to God—its spirit of disobedience and self-will. All the evil was charged upon Him, and He was treated as if He were it all; as if He, in His own person on the cross, had the entire sum and substance of the evil of human nature in His own person. Of course, had there been a single particle of it in Himself, He could not have atoned for others—the judgment of God must have been upon it; but the total absence of it in His own person was what indicated His perfect fitness to be the victim. God was dealing with the whole height and length and depth and breadth of sin in the person of Christ upon the cross. But God raised up that same blessed One who went down under the wrath of God, and who, when He had tasted what it was to be forsaken, and God’s face hid from Him, did not and could not depart from this life without saying, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit,” (Luke 23:46) which showed the perfect confidence of His heart and delight in God. “Our fathers trusted in thee they cried unto thee and were delivered.” But He could not be heard till the full trial was closed. He was only heard from the horns of the unicorn. He must go through it all— unutterable sorrow and anguish, intolerable to all but Him; and yet to Him what was it not—all the wrath of God if the deliverance was to be complete and according to God. But He has done so; and He lets us know, in departing from the scene, that however He might suffer, yet His heart truly rested in God; and He confessed unwaveringly, not only that God continued holy, but that the Father was full of love. “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46).

But now we have another thing altogether—God interposing to deliver to the uttermost. He would not say that He quickened Christ absolutely. It is always qualified somehow, because Christ was life Himself. He was the eternal life with the Father, in due time manifested on the earth; and how say anything that would imply that He owed His life to another? He might say that, as man put to death in the flesh, He was quickened of the Spirit, but His intrinsic personal glory abides, which indeed gave its value to the whole extent of His humiliation and suffering unto death. The Father, too, gave Him as a man to have life in Himself. This was the perfection of Christ here below: He would not take it as His own right. He would not speak a word nor do a work that He had not heard from and in God. He was the perfectly dependent man. The same Gospel that dwells as none other does on His divine glory, shows us also His absolute dependence on God. On the other hand, how sweet to see in Scripture how God the Father watches over the glory of Christ! He would not say one word that could in any way impair the dignity of His Son. Here, therefore, it is said, He hath “quickened us together with Christ” (vs. 5). It was we that needed the life. Christ might have gone down into death, but He has quickened us together with Him. Christ had died in a more solemn manner than any mere man could die. He was emphatically the Holy One of God, the only holy man, and yet even so had He died. Of course no unholy one could die as He died. He knew what it was to taste death in all its bitterness, God’s judgment and wrath, as none other could; and yet He was one who felt it so much the more because He was essentially in the bosom of the Father. But this blessed One having gone down thoroughly under death as the judgment of God upon our nature and our sins, thereon ensues the mighty power of God, who has quickened us together with Christ. In a word, the life is in the most intimate association with Christ, and we are in union with Christ Himself, put to death in the flesh, but now quickened by the Spirit. As to the life that He had here below, it was given up and gone; and now He rises in a new life, in resurrection. It is therefore immediately added that God not only has quickened us together with Christ, but has raised us up together; and more than this, has made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Thus the full value that belongs to life as it is now in Christ is also given to us; so that we can be spoken of even while we are in this world according to the complete blessedness of life as it is now seen in Christ at the right hand of God.

Let us consider what such a marvelous thought as this involves—what it brings us into association with. We know what our old nature loves, and does, and is; we know too well what the life, or rather the death, of Adam, brought us into. What have we derived from our first father—what have we deserved and brought on ourselves, but sin, sorrow, suffering, sickness, death, a bad conscience, and a fearful looking for of judgment? All these things we have as the workings and effects of that existence which we have inherited, our sad heirloom from the first man. But now comes the new and supernatural source of life in the Second Man; and where shall we best know its character? Let us look up at Christ. How does God the Father look upon Him? Is He delighted in Him? He was always so; and was never more than when He traced Christ’s steps as He walked a man among men. But there was the terrible question of sin—our sin. Is it a terrible question now? Or has Christ in very deed answered it forever in the cross? Yes, it is the very thing that has given occasion for God to show His love as nothing else could.

How should I have known how much God loves me if I had not had such depth of need as an enemy of God, fathomless save to His saving mercy in Christ? I do not say it to lighten the sin of my enmity to God, nor to allow the notion that there was or could be the smallest title to the favor of God. But my hopeless evil becomes a measure of the depth of His love; and that because this brings Christ into the scene, and Christ as a Redeemer and Saviour on God's part—Christ the infinite gift of God's grace—Christ, who would be turned aside by nothing—Christ, who endured everything from man, Satan, and God's righteous judgment, that we might be saved after a divine sort. And so in truth we are. And what do we not owe the Saviour, and the God who gave Him? But what did not Christ bear? Our frightful ruin and sin has just brought out what God is in His great love to us, and what Christ is in His value and the mighty power of the life in which He is risen and gone up, seated, and ourselves in Him, in heavenly places. Do you still ask what the character of the life is that the Christian has got now? Look at Christ, and see how precious He is to God—how He cannot have the Blessed One, who is the full expression of that life, too near Himself. He has raised Him up, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places. In Ephesians 2 it is simply "made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (vs. 6). It is not added here, as in Ephesians 1, "at His own right hand" (ch. 1:20). I am not aware that such words are ever said about the children of God, nor do I think they could be. Do they not rather seem to be the personal place of Christ? But it is said, "in the heavenly places," (ch. 3:10) because it is to them, and not to the earth, that we belong. Israel, as such, in their best days, belonged to the earth; and so did we in our worst; but now it is not only that our names are written in heaven—though that very expression shows the wonderful love of God that destines and enrolls us to be above—that connects us with heaven while we are upon the earth—all that is true; but we have much more in Ephesians. There we find that, in virtue of our union with Christ, we are said to be not only raised with Him, but seated with Him in heavenly places. In a word, what is said of Christ Himself is true by grace of us, only excepting what may be personal in Him as God the Son, or used of the Lord in a necessarily pre-eminent degree. For after all there is a distinction between the Head and the body, even as such; though, on the other hand, the very difference shows the closest possible association: we are His fullness or complement.

We learn, then, from this that we have Christ's own title while we are in this world—nay, more than that, Christ's own life in us, by virtue of which we are said to be quickened with Him, yea, raised and seated in Him in heavenly places. But let us carefully bear in mind that all this is never said of any in purpose or election, but only where faith exists. It is not applicable to us before we believe: it would not be true of any person before there is positive, living association with Christ. What is commonly called Calvinistic theology, much truth as it embodies, is totally false on this head. One of its main features is the endeavor to make out that, the love of God being from everlasting to everlasting, our relationship is always precisely the same—that because God has the purpose of making us His children, He always regards us as His children—that if a man is elect, supposing he is still an infidel or a blasphemer, he is as much a son of God as when he is regenerate of the Holy Spirit and walking in the ways of God. It maintains that God loves him with exactly the same love (while he is, for example, a sinner or a swearer), as afterward. What among believers can be conceived more dishonoring to God and destructive to man than this doctrine? Manifestly the apostle is speaking here, not of persons elect merely, though of course they were elect, but quickened—that is, they had actually life. Not only was there a purpose of God about them, but they were then living to God as those who had faith in Christ. You could not say that a man has life before he has faith. It is the reception of Christ by the Holy Spirit which, on the one side, is called faith, and on the other life: You could not rightly put one before the other. If you could not say that faith was before the life, certainly life is not before faith. The first exercise of faith is the first also of life. It is the power of the Spirit of God presenting Christ to the soul. Hence it is said, "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live" (John 5:25). The living is there, if there be any difference at all, the effect of hearing, rather than the hearing the effect of living. This is very important; because none can say that persons are quickened with Christ until they are here to be called; and it is impossible to say that they have life till they have heard the voice of the Son of God. The first proof that a man is a sheep is that he hears the good Shepherd's voice. He is not thrown on certain, or rather uncertain indications, of life within himself, but on the grand, objective test and evidence which God demands—not merely what I am doing or not doing (the law asked this), but whether I receive and rest on the Son of God. Am I drawn away from all the sounds of this world, and is His voice attracting my soul? As sure as this is so, you have life. "He that believeth hath everlasting life" (John 6:47). "He that hath the Son hath life" (1 John 5:12). I prove that I have it by the very simple, sure, and blessed fact that I hear the voice of the Son of God. Thus only I have life—then only am I assured of being quickened and raised with Christ. This is an association with Christ after He had gone under death for our sins, which is the Christian character of quickening. We are also said to be seated in heavenly places because we have the life of Christ who is there, and we are spoken of according to the place which He has entered who is our life. So that Scripture does not merely mean that we are so in God's decree or thought when it says that He has raised us up and made us sit together in heavenly places. The reference is not to our future resurrection, but it teaches the present association of the believer by virtue of our union with Christ, who is in the presence of God. And in referring to this first part of it, the apostle says, "By grace ye are saved" (vs. 5). This is the source of all the blessing. And the expression is very strong. For what the form of the word implies is that the salvation was complete, and that they were now enjoying its present result. Salvation in Scripture is not always thus treated: there are whole epistles where it is never so spoken of. Thus, particularly in Philippians, salvation is regarded as a future thing—as not complete till we see Christ in glory. Salvation, there, is a solemn but not precarious process, which is now going on, because it is plain that we are not with Christ in glory, but in our natural bodies. And accordingly Christ is therein seen as a Saviour, not merely because He died and rose, but because He is coming back for my full deliverance and joy. This explains the meaning of the text which has perplexed people so much—"work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;" (Phil. 2:12) because, in the sense intended there, we shall only get salvation when we are glorified with Christ. Meanwhile, we are working it out with fear and trembling, remembering that Satan hates us because we are to be in glory with Christ. We are viewed as persons in this world, who know that there is not the slightest doubt that we are to have the prize, but we have to fight and run for it, though we ought to hold fast the assurance that we shall have it when we see Christ coming for us from on high.

But when we take up the language of the Ephesian Epistle, all is different. There salvation is regarded as an absolutely past thing: "By grace ye are saved" (vs. 5) not merely that it is going on, and is to be completed by and by; but we are saved, and cannot in Christ be more so than we are. Whereas, according to Philippians, Paul himself had not his salvation yet: "not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect" (Phil. 3:12). The perfection there spoken of entirely and solely refers to the time when we shall be changed into the glorious likeness of Christ: then he says, We shall be saved. If you applied the same sense of salvation to both epistles, you make the doctrine contradictory. Take again the Epistle to the Hebrews. There, too, salvation is always represented as a future thing. "Wherefore," it is said, "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him" (Heb. 7:25). God's people are meant, not the unconverted, as coming unto God by Christ. For whom is He a priest? For the believer only. Thus it is the saint that requires to be saved in the Epistle to the Hebrews; because salvation there applies to all the difficulties of our wilderness journey. The whole doctrine is founded on the type that we are now, like Israel

of old, going through the desert, and have not yet entered into Canaan; whereas, the characteristic teaching of Ephesians is that Christ has gone into Canaan, and that we are in Him there. It is because we are occupied with a part of the Word of God, and not the whole—because we see one truth strongly, and not the truth generally, that we get confused and faulty views, which lead to wrong practice.

The reason of these differences is most interesting. You have exactly in each epistle what is suited to its own character. In Ephesians the revelation is not of Christ as one interceding for us before God: this we have in Hebrews. Why is He a priest? That He may have compassion on the ignorant, and on them which are out of the way. This is exactly, as we journey here below, our danger: we are ignorant, and always exposed to the temptation of slipping aside through an evil heart of unbelief. Therefore we need the Epistle to the Hebrews. The doctrine of Ephesians would not of itself suffice to meet me in my weakness, difficulties, and sorrows. Supposing I had wandered, what is there to recall and comfort my soul in Ephesians? "That we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (ch. 1:4). Nay, but I have gone astray, and I cannot get any relief to my anguish from this. I may try to stay my heart on God's election and high counsels, but if I have a tender conscience, these alone will make me more miserable. If God really loved me so much, how comes it (the heart will reason) that I should so dishonor Him? In Hebrews I find nothing at all about my sitting in heavenly places, but Christ at the right hand of God, and pleading for me, after He had by Himself purged out my sins. The very first chapter starts with the glorious truth—that Christ took His seat on high only when He could go there on the ground that He had completely blotted out our sins, and this "by Himself," that is, to the exclusion of all other help. It was His own task, and He has accomplished it, and would not rest even in that, to Him, familiar glory, save on this ground. Therein we have a most sure foundation. But although we have the purging of sins through Christ, we are in a place of temptation where, through ignorance and weakness, and a thousand things that may arise, we are in constant peril of turning aside and slipping. What is to become of us then? What is to sustain and carry us through! God reveals this blessed Priest who cares for the soul—One who has the full confidence of God the Father; who has given the most entire satisfaction to Him—One who is seated at the right hand of God, and who there is unceasingly occupied with our need, on the ground that we belong to God, and are already redeemed, and that we have no more conscience of sin. We can perhaps hardly make out how it is that persons who are so blessed of God should be so weak and wretched; so little like Him who, at His own cost, has brought and secured us our blessing. But faith receives, and asks of God what He intends to be our strength and comfort in the midst of our weakness and dangers? His answer is, that Christ is there to plead our cause, as surely as the spirit is here to render us sensible of it. And it is through Christ's intercession at the right hand of God that we are brought to feel our need and failure. For we never judge it, without getting moral blessing through that judgment. All power of Christ resting on us is in proportion to the depth of the moral estimate produced in our souls by the Spirit of God in answer to the intercession of Christ; and it is part of Christ's intercession for us that we are made to feel when we have in mind and fact gone astray. In Hebrews, salvation could not be spoken of as a past thing. We know that we shall be fully saved, and that Christ is coming for it. And although it is appointed unto men to die, it is not necessarily so for the saint. We know that they may never fall asleep, as for certain they will never be judged, though all they have done will be surely manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ. But He has gone through death for them, and therefore there is no necessity that they should die; and He has endured judgment as none other could, and we have His own word for it that into judgment at any rate we shall never come. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment." The consequence is, that though we look for Him to come, we know that when He does appear the second time, it will be without sin unto salvation. He has so perfectly put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, that when He is thus seen the second time of them that look for Him, it will be "without sin," apart from all question of sin, as far as they are concerned—"unto salvation," and not unto judgment. Salvation and judgment are the two things above all others most in contrast. You cannot have judgment and salvation exercised upon the same individual. In Hebrews you have salvation connected with our Lord's appearing the second time.

In Ephesians, on the contrary, we are saved already, and there Christ's return to receive His people is not throughout referred to. In the epistles where salvation is said to be consummated by and by, there we have Christ coming to finish it. In Philippians he says, "Our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself" (Phil. 3:20-21). There we have our Lord changing this body of humiliation into the likeness of His glorious body, proving Himself to be the Saviour; because it is not a partial salvation, but a complete salvation for the whole man. But in Ephesians, where our Lord's coming is never referred to, this links itself with the fact that salvation is already supposed to be an accomplished fact, which we now enjoy. This is a way of looking at salvation rare in Scripture: it is generally looked at as something we have before us. People confound salvation with justification or reconciliation to God; but in Romans the evident distinction is drawn—"If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Rom. 5:10). Thus, we have the reconciliation, but not the salvation, in the sense spoken of there. "We shall be saved" (Rom. 5:10). He is living for us, and, as a consequence, we are being saved. The salvation is going on; and when Christ comes again in glory, then salvation will be complete. Hence, in Romans 13, we have the doctrine applied again: "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed" (Rom. 13:11). We have not got it yet; but it is nearer; and we shall have it all perfectly by and by. Before we believed, we were enemies and lost; then believing, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son. Now He lives for us; and soon He will come again for us, and then all will be complete.

Again, take Corinthians, and you will find the same doctrine there. Salvation is not regarded there as complete. Hence the apostle says that he is keeping under his body and bringing it into subjection. He will not allow any evil lust to get the mastery over him. He might preach to all the world; but if evil got mastery over him, how could he be saved himself? He puts it in the strongest possible way of his own case; and shows that preaching (of which some apparently thought more than of Christ) has nothing to do with a man's being saved, but life in Christ; for the grace of Christ manifests itself in holy subjection to God and self judgment of evil. These are the inseparable consequences of having the life of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit in the soul. "I keep under my body," (1 Cor. 9:27) says he, "lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." This last word I take in the strongest, and, indeed, the only scriptural, sense—that is, of reprobate. A castaway in the New Testament means not merely that a man was going to lose something, but to lose his soul, and to lose Christ. There are no instances in the epistles where the word is used in a modified sense: it invariably means lost forever, and it is neither faith nor intelligence to modify its force. It was not that Paul had any fear of being lost; but he transfers the case to himself, to make it more energetic, supposing that he were to renounce Christ and holiness. What is the consequence? He might have been ever such a preacher, and yet be a castaway; but no man that ever was regenerate could be a castaway; and so he does not say, Though I were born of God, I might be a castaway. Such a thing could not and ought not to be supposed. But he does illustrate most seriously, what, alas! has been far too common, that a man might preach to others and be a reprobate. We know that one of the apostles preached and wrought miracles; but the Lord never knew him.

This will show the importance of leaving room for salvation in every way that Scripture looks at it. In the largest part of Scripture it is not regarded after the Ephesian manner, but in the way I have been describing, in Romans. No question is fairly raised of falling away when the apostle speaks of salvation in this sense; but the fact is that all the result of the blessing—all the fullness of the deliverance, is not yet our portion. And who can say that it is? Here we in suffering still: then we shall be out of the scene of temptation altogether. In Ephesians, when looking at the character of our life, he says, It is entirely outside all danger, all temptation, and everything of the sort. "By grace ye are saved" (vs. 5). By this he means that we have been and are saved; that is, we have the present enjoyment of that which is already past and complete before God. It is a fact accomplished, because it is in Christ, and everything here is regarded as being in Christ, as, for example, our very peace. Hence He is called "our peace" farther on. Hence, too, so truly is the salvation viewed as being in Christ, that, the Saviour being seated on high, we are said to be, not in process of salvation, but completely saved, so as to need nothing more as far as this is concerned. In full accordance with this it was added, that God "hath raised up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." What plainer than the completeness of the salvation? How manifestly it has a character of association with Christ, that is entirely beyond all human conception! It is easy to conceive that such blessedness might be by and by; but the wonderful thing is, that this could be predicated of poor, weak Christians in the world now. If we dwell much upon human things, they become cheap and common, and we cease to wonder; but with this glorious work of God in His beloved Son, the more we think of it, the more we stand amazed before it. Observe, too, it is for this very purpose: "that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (vs. 7). That is, it is not merely God looking at us, and giving us what we need, but God acting for the indulgence of His own affections through His Son. God says, as it were, I want to show what I am, not merely to supply what you want. Thus, it is God rising up to the height of His own goodness, and acting from what He is, entirely irrespective of what we are, save that we become the occasion for God to skew His matchless love; and this, not merely now, but "in the ages to come," (vs. 7) or, I suppose, for unlimited time.

Nor is this all. There is a fresh guard against certain misconceptions by taking up or repeating the expression, "For by grace are ye saved," (vs. 8) with the addition, "through faith," a strong confirmation of what has been already said. We are not saved by the electing purpose of God, true and blessed as it is, but through faith in our hearts, through that divine persuasion which the Holy Spirit works in the heart of a man once an unbeliever. "By grace are ye saved through faith" (vs. 8). There is no such thing as God introducing one into the relationship of a child without the action of his heart and conscience. The Holy Spirit gives such a man to feel his own condition as seen of God, and yet what God is toward him in Christ. A cold parchment-deed, mechanical salvation there is not, any more than such a change of the old nature as could be a ground of hope toward God. But if human feeling cannot be trusted, neither can ever so orthodox a recognition of God's decrees. When God speaks in and of His Son, it is a real thing, and he who hears must more or less deeply have the consciousness of its solemnity. He is no longer unwilling and indifferent to Christ. He may feel sin, hate himself as he never did, just because he is under the hand of God and under the teaching of God, and the very things that you bring to prove that you are not one of God's own, is rather a proof that you are. If you were dead to God, would you feel what grieves Him? It is when Christ has begun to dawn on the soul that you begin to realize that you have been lying in all that is dark and loathsome, though a glimmer of hope breaks through the clouds. You are seriously conscious of evil things to which you were insensible before. This is an effect of God's mighty and gracious operation; but there is no such thing as life without faith or with unconsciousness. There will always be something that awakens new thoughts and feelings about God, a fear and a desire after God, a horror of sin and a hatred of self. All these things and more will pass through the spirit of him that is born of God, and what produces all these feelings by the Spirit of God is Christ—nothing else will. Otherwise a man might be attending a church or chapel—going to the best or the worst testimony. But he is there on this principle: he thinks it is his duty to attend perhaps every day. It is the notion of a religious service which he thinks he ought to pay to God, and that if he does it diligently, God will remember him on his death-bed and in the day of judgment. Such is one part of the duty man pays in the hope of escaping hell. But all this goes on the ground of man's putting God under a kind of obligation to himself. Man is doing something because of which he thinks God ought to show him mercy. What can more flagrantly deny both sin and God's grace? Now, it is "by grace ye are saved, through faith." And the meaning of being saved by grace is by what God is toward me in His Son, apart from a single thing deserving it in me. Are you willing to trust your salvation to God only, in His beloved Son? This is faith. "By grace we are saved through faith." If I mingle a particle of my own, it is properly neither grace nor faith, for faith renounces self for Christ, and grace is God's pure favor to me a sinner on the cross. When I listen to Christ, then the Word of God begins to deal with everything in me that is selfish and contrary to God, and I must not attempt to modify or accommodate the Word of God to my own thoughts, and thus to make provision for a little indulgence of the flesh.

I maintain, therefore, that the salvation spoken of in Ephesians is already complete for him that believes; so absolute, indeed, that none can add anything to it, because it would be adding something to Christ, and to what Christ has done. And this may not be, cannot be, seeing that it is all the free, unmerited, unmingled mercy of God. And this is the great thing for the soul. Am I able, without question of what I am, or what I hope to be, or what I ought to do for God, to trust Him now? Can I rest all that I have been and am upon Christ, without any promises or pledges of mine—without any hope or thought of what I may do, because God might take me away in a moment? Can I rest entirely and implicitly in Him? Think of the case of the dying thief, which is a living and notable testimony of salvation by grace throughout all ages. Others may have a work to do afterward, but there we have one who was saved by grace in the last hours of his life. And there is no other way. Had he lived for a thousand years afterward, he would not have been a whit more saved by grace than he was then. It is of great moment to bring our souls to the touchstone from time to time—whether we are resting solely upon the grace of God toward us, not upon what people call grace in us, that is, our faithfulness toward Him. For this is a common notion of grace. They mean a great change that has taken place in the heart in respect of God. This, however, is not what God calls grace, but what He has given gratuitously in the work that Christ has done for me. "By grace are ye saved through faith" (vs. 8). The Spirit shuts out all thought of man's contributing the faith or taking any credit because coming to Christ; for He says immediately after, "And that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (vs. 8). This probably refers, not only to the salvation, but to the faith; it was all the gift of God, and not man's production: "Not of works, lest any man should boast" (vs. 9). On the contrary, instead of being a question of our works, we are God's handiwork, the new creation for His own praise. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (vs. 10). There you have a most plain proof that there could be no carelessness as to the walk of the believer; but the same verse cuts off all thought that man's doing can be the ground or means of salvation.

Here, then, we have the believers the workmanship of God in Christ, and this "unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (vs. 10). This is a very remarkable expression, and one that we cannot too much weigh. It is not the good works of the law—not those which might seem so in human judgment, but an offering of a new character, heavenly and of grace, which was in God's mind

and all determined about us before the scene existed into which we are now brought. The same God that had a purpose of saving us and blessing us with Christ before the world was made, had a certain line of walk, a special course of action, in which He expected the recipients of such favor to walk. It is not the thought of the good that we ought to do as men, as a means of showing that we are willing to obey God under the law. It is not loving God, and one's neighbor as oneself simply, but another type and display of love altogether. It flows from our new relationships, and if it be exercised in loving God and loving those around us, it is according to the rich love which God Himself has shown us in Christ. It is not merely duty, let it be the very highest form of obligation. If a man were to walk merely in this, though ever so well, he would fall short of what a Christian ought to be, and they are not the "good works which God has before ordained that we should walk in them" (vs. 10). The law was brought in by Israel's presumption and self-conceit; it was not something that God had before ordained for His people to walk in. Therefore it is said in Romans, the law came in by the way (παρεισῆλθεν). It was a thing that entered temporarily, as a sort of parenthesis brought in for a special but very momentous purpose. And it has done its work, and the believer, even if he had been under it, was brought clean out of it and made alive to God. He has a new husband, and is dead to the old one. But here it is put in a very beautiful form, in harmony with the character of the whole epistle. As the calling, and the purpose, and all that God thought about us were before the world was, so even the character of the believer's walk was ordained before ever we came into the world, and is in its own nature entirely above it. It is a question of our manifesting God aright, as He is now displaying Himself, "Be ye followers of God as dear children" (ch. 5:1).

What a wonderful place is this that we are put into! We are created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them. We have a new character of life altogether, that the law never contemplated, and we have a correspondingly new character of good works.

Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians, Ephesians 2:1-3, Remarks on

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

We now enter upon a new portion of our epistle, if not so exalted in its tone as that which we have glanced over in chapter 1, equally important in its place and of the utmost moment to us. But then we must carefully bear in mind that what is of interest to us is not an adequate measure in looking at either the word of God or His ways. God never acts for anything short of His own glory. So that although we find many parts of the word of God which in the very closest way touch our condition, wants, blessing, and glory, we invariably fall short of the just scope and standard of the truth of God, if we limit our thoughts by its application to ourselves. Never do we reach the full extent of any truth in its bearing upon us, unless we also take into account its infinitely higher range as the revealed display of God's glory, character, and purposes. Hence it is, that although we find in the Scripture grace already shown to us, and glory that we are soon to participate in, yet how infinite the blessing, when we no longer look at it as that which is directly toward creatures so limited and poor as ourselves! When we realize that it is the grace and the glory of God, how all is changed completely! We then hear and find out this grand truth—He does speak of us and feel for us. He enters into all our little wants as well as all our greatest. But still if it were the least thing He meets in us, the supply of that want flows from One who has no limits; and if it be suited to our capacity for the present moment, it will not be always so. God will never rest in His love till He has not only given us by the Holy Spirit now to taste in measure the sweetness of the display of His own character, but made us in every way worthy of it. He has called us to be His children. The day is coming when not merely His love will not be ashamed so to call us, but when there will be no reason why it should be: when, on the contrary, everything that pertains to the family of God will savor just as much of what He is as, alas! now our poor, pitiful, worldly ways often tell a painful tale of self and not God.

In this chapter then it is, not the unfolding of God's counsels and magnificent purposes as they flow from His own mind—consequently going back to the beginning of time, and before creation had a place at all as a matter of fact, when all was but God Himself in the eternity of His own existence. Even then, as chapter 1 told us, before His hand had been put forth in anything, there was this blessed thought in His heart: He meant to have a people, yea, sons, out of the scene that was yet to be created, gathered by His own sovereign grace out of sin to be the partakers of His love and of His holiness, along with His beloved Son. This was His counsel. Chapter 1 showed us this, not only what was in God's mind from eternity, but the answer to it in the day of glory that is coming. For two great thoughts were brought before us there: first, the calling of God; and next, the inheritance that is yet to be displayed in the bright display of glory when Christ will take everything that God has made, and will be the acknowledged, glorified Head of it (all things, whether in heaven or on earth, being put under Him); and when we who believed in Him shall be called to the place of sharing that inheritance along with Him, our Lord and Bridegroom. Thirdly, we see an added and most weighty point—that the same power of God which raised up Christ from the dead is at work toward believers now. This was only alluded to passingly in the prayer of the apostle at the end of chapter 1. What we have here is, to a certain point, a kind of development of it. Chapter 2 is mainly based on His resurrection-power; nay, not this only, but, if I may so say, ascension-power. The energy which raised up Christ and set Him at the right hand of God, is now put forth on behalf of and working in those that believe in Him. We shall see the consequences of this. But now let us weigh for a moment what the Holy Spirit here brings out. It is the application of the mighty power of God to the believer. It is not, therefore, simply the purpose of grace, nor the execution of that purpose in glory by and by, but it is the exercise of His power after the pattern of Christ risen and glorified, and the application of it to the believer even now.

Hence we have necessarily first brought before us the condition of those in whom the power is put forth, what they were when it began to work in them. Accordingly it is only in chapter 2 that we begin to have any development of the actual condition of those with whom God is so nearly linked. Chapter 1 is mainly occupied with what God has in His mind, and what He will yet accomplish. Now we have the question raised and answered, Who are these people and what was their state when God could so deal with them? And it is most marvelous, that, when we come to hear His word, there is in no other epistle any portion that gives us so deep, searching, humiliating a picture of the desperate, degraded state in which those were whom God destined to be joint-heirs with Christ. The laying bare moral corruptions we have in Romans, fully proving what man is if he takes the ground of anything within him. Whether the favored Jew under the law, or the Gentile with his conscience, all is thoroughly discussed there, and every pretension of man is ground to powder. But in Ephesians the proof of guilt is needless. Man is viewed as so completely dead, that it is but the removal of the cloth from off the corpse. Therefore the apostle says, "You hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins" (vs. 1). It is not simply, How is a sinner to be forgiven, justified? but "You hath He

quicken who were dead in trespasses and sins" (vs. 1). The words "hath He quickened" are inserted, it is true, in italics, but it is the evident and necessary sense; without it, to an English reader, the sentence would be embarrassed. It is not till verses 4, 5 that we have the completion of the thought. It is plain that the quickening affects those that are called—"you," as well as those designated "us." I shall hope to show the meaning of the distinction presently, but I only refer to it now in order to guard against the notion, that there is no sufficient reason for inserting in English the expression "You hath he quickened;" (vs. 1) whereas it is implied in the language that the Holy Spirit used, or at least in the sense.

The grand fact remains. It is not merely a question of disease in the moral state of man; but they are "dead." What a blow to all the thoughts of man—to the notion that he is in a state of probation—that he is in a mere sickly state of soul; and if you only soothe and comfort and educate him, after all he is not so bad! Some people think there is a difference between believers and unbelievers in their unconverted state: this I deny. As to men being born, some of them more worthy of having mercy shown them than others, the idea is contrary to every word of God that treats of the subject. On the contrary, what the Holy Spirit insists upon is the real death and equal ruin of all. In Romans it is said that we were "without strength," (Rom. 5:6) but here we were "dead." The only way in which death is spoken of in Romans is as a privilege, the happy condition into which faith brought us when baptized unto the death of Christ. We are thus viewed as being dead to sin and alive to God.

In Ephesians, on the contrary, death was our misery.

It was the expression of God's mind about the extreme ruin in which we lay. We have both Jews and Gentiles (neither now first or last)—man as such—morally dead; so that it becomes a question of what God can do. God above, and man here below, are in the presence of each other; and if man is dead, thanks be to God! He raises the dead, and can and does quicken souls. I am not denying the immortality of the soul; but what Scripture calls "life" is not bare existence, but a blessed spiritual nature, given to a man who naturally was without it and merely felt or acted after a nature under sin. Such is the condition of every person until the Spirit of God has wrought this good work upon the soul. Our Lord reproaches Nicodemus for not understanding this. Even as a Jew he ought to have done so; but as a "master in Israel" (Dan. 1:3) was it not a shame that he should not know these things? When he heard of the necessity of being "born again," or on an altogether new principle, he imagined that the Saviour might speak of some repeated natural birth, which, if possible, would have been but the old thing over again. But the word "afresh" (ἀνωθεν) is exceedingly emphatic; and so is the opening out of the truth. Harken to this: "that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). Flesh never can become spirit. There is no such thing as changing the old nature, and making it new and holy. What the unregenerate soul wants is a new nature, or, as the Lord explains it, to be "born of water and of the Spirit" (John 3:5). It is the word of God figuratively presented thus, and applied by the power of the Holy Spirit to the soul, which is the meaning of the passage. Baptism may set forth that which is conveyed by it, but it is only a figure. Our Lord shows that there must be a new life imparted; and as we are told elsewhere, "Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth" (James 1:18). And this is brought out not only by James but by Peter also, where he shows that we are "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever" (1 Peter 1:23). We know positively from the Apostle Paul, that the washing of water by the word is God's own explanation of the figure. Again, what could Nicodemus know about Christian baptism? It was not then instituted; and the disciples' baptism was only a sort of modification of John's rite, that is, a confession of a living Messiah, coming or come on earth. But proper Christian baptism is founded upon the death and resurrection of our Lord. "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized unto Jesus Christ, were baptized unto His death?" Christian baptism is the confession of the death and resurrection of Christ, and was instituted by our Lord when He rose from the dead. Then, and not before, He told them to go forth, baptizing all nations, or Gentiles, in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. He laid down the grand, full, Christian revelation of the Godhead, into the power and confession of which the believer is brought by his baptism.

In the Scriptures just alluded to, we find clearly that where unfigurative language is used, the means of giving the new life is said to be the word of God applied by the Holy Spirit; and that when figures are used, water is what is chosen. But the sum and substance of the entire teaching is, that the testimony of God is the divine means of communicating life to the soul when applied by the Holy Spirit—that is, by faith. And if we want still further to know what specially in the truth of God is used to quicken those who are dead in sins, it is always, more or less, the revelation of Christ. My believing that the creature was made by God, will not quicken my soul. I might believe any facts in the Old Testament, and be assured of all the miracles, discourses, and ways of Jesus in the New, and yet my soul might still be unquicken. But believing in Christ Himself is a very different thing from not doubting things about Him. It supposes that I have, more or less, come to an end of myself; that I have bowed to the humiliating sentence of Scripture upon my nature, and that I own myself to be only a poor, lost, dead creature in the sight of God. Some men are proud of the affections we share with the brutes, and some still more deify themselves because of conscience; but even conscience was acquired by sin. Adam, before the fall, could not have told what good and evil was. He did not avoid eating the forbidden fruit, because he knew it was in itself evil; nor was there indeed anything morally wrong in its own nature in eating the fruit of that tree. But the command of God made it a test—a moral test that Adam would have known nothing about unless God had told him, "Thou shalt not eat" (Ezek. 29:5). Thus, for the purpose of exercising a child's obedience, it might be said, You are not to go out of this room; it might have been all right before. It was only after eating of the forbidden fruit that Adam obtained the distinctive and intuitive knowledge of good and evil; but he knew evil only by being under its power. Had it been said to Adam before the fall, "Thou shalt not lust or covet," he might have said, What does it mean? I do not understand. But the moment he listened to the devil, and took the fruit that God forbade, there was another element infused into Adam's nature that had not been there before. Unfallen, he had body, soul, and spirit; and then what Scripture calls "the flesh" after the fall. This is not mere "flesh and blood" (ch. 6:12). Our Lord had these (else He could not have been truly a man), but not "the flesh," which is the principle of self-will, or liking our own way, and not God's. This is sin, and what Scripture means by sin: that strong, restless craving to have what we wish, whether God wills it or not. Satan blinds the soul as to what is God's will, God's mind. This love of one's own will was not in the original nature of man. "The flesh" was gained through the fall, and shows itself in love of our own will and independence of God. Paul constantly dwells upon it, and it is what John (1 John 4) really calls "lawlessness"—rather than, as we have it, "transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). It is the wish for our way in despite of God's will and way, whether expressed or implied. It is the essence of sin, the sad inheritance of sinners, from which, thank God, the believer is delivered. So that, when a man receives Christ, he has still his old nature, not only body, soul, and spirit, and even "the flesh"—for this, too, he has still, and it may be, alas the occasion of many a slip and sorrow, if he be unwatchful; but besides these, there is a new nature that we had not before.

God has given us a new life, and this is just as distinct in its workings as the old life is. But God has quickened us and given us a new life. Look at a man: what is there? Self-love; a little bit of pride here, and of vanity there; love of one's own will everywhere—the characteristic of the sinner under all circumstances. Search and see, and you will not have to search long before you find that which betrays not Christ, but Adam. Look at the history of man, as given in Genesis, and there see what he is. He might be enticed by his affections. But why allow his affections so to work as to carry him into disobedience against God? Had God told him to listen to his wife? He ought to have acted as the head, and have reminded her of what God told them. And God's order is never forgotten with impunity. So man, having allowed the wife to take the lead, soon reaped the bitter consequences. But in Christ I have the exact contrary. What more remarkable feature morally can be than this?—A person, who, while He was everything, was content to be nothing; who, while He was man here below, never acted upon His own independent title; who always, under every circumstances, great or small, sought and was subject to His Father's will. "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49). says He, in Luke 2, when only a child. It was not only when He came publicly forward, but He had the consciousness of it always. And if I want to know what our Lord was as He grew up to mature years, there, too, I find it. And wherever I look at Him, this crowning feature shows itself in all times and circumstances—One that never sought and never did His own will. There, I say, is another sort of man altogether. No wonder the Holy Spirit says about Him, and Him only, "the Second man." All other men only were just so many reproductions of Adam—so many sons in his own likeness, after his own image. As far as they were men, viewed simply as such, they bore that one common character of Adam. But now comes forth another man; and from and in this dead and risen stock we become new creatures, having His life communicated to us by faith in Him. As by natural birth we have the life of Adam, so we have what would naturally flow from such a frightful beginning—the same self-will, weakness, boastfulness, dread of God, dishonesty and insolence towards Him. Such is man: such, too, is just what I find in my own self; and if I read the Bible aright, God will force me to own it. When quickening a soul, He always obliges it to take up the picture and say, That is myself, black as it is. Then, when a person is broken down under the awful discovery of sin within, and judges it according to God, this is what Scripture calls repentance. It is owning not only what we have done, but what we are also. How is it to be remedied "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). The Spirit has given a new life, and in this world, through the knowledge of Christ. Hence it is by the word of God ("faith cometh by hearing" (Rom. 10:17)), not by baptism, or any other institution of the Lord, blessed as they are. We must take care that we put things in their proper places. It is the Word brought home by the Holy Spirit that produces faith, and this not by mending the first, but by revealing the last, Adam. God has come down from heaven to accomplish this great purpose—to give me this new life—to deliver me from sin and self: and how is it done? It is the Holy Spirit who effects it by the Word of God. But here the apostle does not enter into the detail of it; he is merely telling out the grand facts: "you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins (the worst of all deaths); wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." Does it not show how active in evil was this kind of death? These dead were at the same time walking according to the course of this world; which, indeed, was the proof of their moral death. They had no desire to shape their walk according to God's Word. As Job says (ch. 21:14), "Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." And was not this the condition of our own souls? Can we not remember when it was a painful thing to have to meet God about our sins? I must have to do with God. And here is the solemnity of it. If I do not meet God now about the Saviour, I shall have to meet Him about my sins. And if I despise meeting the Saviour about my sins, meet God I must in my sins—to be lost forever. You put a sort of honor upon an enemy by paying attention to him; but you cannot more deeply insult a friend than by paying neither heed nor notice. So it is as to indifference about Christ. Perhaps we try to settle accounts with God once or twice a day—what a wrong to God and a wrong to my soul? If I have sins upon me—and in that condition we all are and have been naturally—what is to be done? It is easy to say what we have been doing—walking "according to the course of this world" (vs. 2). This is not merely gross things. Supposing that people were all as courteous and kind as possible—that there were no such things as jails and judges, nor convicts punished: supposing that men could be reasoned out of their wickedness, what would still be the condition of men? "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (John 3:6). Man, as such, never can see the kingdom of God. The only way by which I can be brought into His kingdom is by being born anew, and having that new nature which is of Christ and not of Adam. Baptism is the sign of it. Paul had already believed on the Lord when Ananias said to him, "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins" (Acts 22:16). There is the figure of washing; but the only effective means or instrument in the sight of God is the blood of Christ. "To Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood" (Rev. 1:5).

The thought, then, of quickening leads the Apostle to bring out the condition from which they were delivered. They were walking according to the course of this world; and not only so, but according to the devil. The title, "Prince of the power of the air" (vs. 2) was to set forth his all-permeating influence. As the air surrounds and penetrates everything, so does the devil the realm of nature—"the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (vs. 2). This was the way they showed that they were under his power by their disobedience. "Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past" (vs. 3). Why is it "we?" Why this change from "you" to "we?" When addressing the Ephesians who had been Gentiles, he uses the word "ye;" but he includes now in this moral sentence, "dead in trespasses and sins," (vs. 1) Jews as well as Gentiles. When God was measuring man by Christ, this was their state—not a single one that was not dead. And there can be no degrees of death. If a man is dead, there is an end of him. So that, although, if you look at men morally, you may draw distinctions, and say, There is a man going further and faster on the downward way than others, yet if you look deeper still, these distinctions vanish, and they are all indiscriminately ruined, yea, dead, in the sight of God. So he says, as proving this, "Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind" (vs. 3). No matter who we were, or what, he calls it all "the lusts of our flesh" (vs. 3). But some of them might have been philosophers, and some benevolent and moral, some gross people living in open and atrocious wickedness. But take the best of them, and judge them by this:—was it their life-breath and governing motive to do the will of God? Not at all. They might have been gratifying their own kindly nature; but God was not in their thoughts. Or it was a kind of bribing God to let them off. For in heathenism there was a tradition that a sacrifice was necessary; but it was corrupted and degraded and perverted in all sorts of ways.

Here, then, we have the common condition in which all, Jew or Gentile, were by nature. Yet he distinguishes "the desires (or wills) of the flesh and mind," (vs. 3) by which he means the grosser tendencies, and the more refined, intellectual desires. Supposing a man devoting himself to science, and making it his object, is this to do the will of God? Nay, but rather the indulgence of the desires of the mind, and as thoroughly self as with others who might be given up to the coarser appetites of nature. The grand thing is, that I have no right to myself—I belong to another. Am I doing His will? Then when we enter the relationships of faith, we are not merely the Lord's creatures, responsible to do His bidding as a natural duty, but redeemed by the blood of Christ, and alive in Him from the dead, that we henceforth live, not to ourselves, but to Him who died for us and rose again.

Let it be the choicest men that the world can boast of: this is their state—"by nature the children of wrath even as others" (vs. 3). What a word! Even the Jews, who had the light of God as far as outward light was concerned, were "by nature" the children of wrath, as much as the degraded, idolatrous stock-and-stone-worshipping Gentiles. So that there can be no more complete annihilation of all man's religious privilege as well as creature-standing, than what we have in this verse. It is not only that people have done wrong, but they were by nature the children of wrath. God did not make man so: it was man who chose the path of disobedience, who gave up God for the devil. He did not, of course, intend this; for Satan comes in as an angel of righteousness; but however he may work, this is the one result to which all are reduced without exception—"by nature children of wrath" (vs. 3). And what does God? For there is the absolute necessity that God should act in order to bring in one ray of light into the midst of this hopeless wreck and ruin. But people will not believe that they are ruined; they will think that it is a good world after all, and a state of things God has given man to cultivate, forgetting that God "drove out the man," (Gen. 3:24) and that all the inventions of man are only expedients to cover his nakedness, and to lead him to overlook that he is an exile from Paradise. Of course these inventions we can use if we do not abuse them. But let us bear in mind that, as Christians, our life, our home, is not here; we belong to another scene, where Christ is. We are not of the world; we are redeemed to do God's will, sanctified to obedience, to the same kind of obedience as our Lord's. Do we weigh and apply this earnestly, assiduously, conscientiously, within the bosom of the family of God, or wherever we may be placed in our Lord was life, and He was ever happy in the consciousness of His Father's love. The believer, too, has life in Him, and is loved as He was loved. God may use the ten commandments to crush a man in the flesh; but as a believer, he is called to obey as Christ obeyed, to walk as He walked; for He left us an example that we should follow His steps.

Here, then, we have this mighty intervention of God, who, "rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved); and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace, in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." Not only are we quickened—this would have been true, looking at any saint that ever lived on the face of the earth. But could you have said that all were raised up together with Christ? seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus? Is it not a fuller statement of the blessing that belongs to us as Christians now, which could not be predicated of any till the resurrection and ascension of Christ were facts? Our Lord says, "I am come that ye might have life, and that ye might have it more abundantly." Why does He draw the distinction between life, and life "more abundantly?" (2 Cor. 12:15). On what principle is it that Christ quickens at all? Because in Him, the Son, is life; and this life becomes the portion of the believer in Him: "For the hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and they that hear shall live." He was always the source of life to the soul, no matter when or where, though it was, of course, only in virtue of foreseen redemption that sinful men could receive it. Before His death and resurrection, however, it was simply life. But our Lord adds, "and I will give it more abundantly." The disciples that surrounded Him then had life because they believed in Him. But when our Lord rose from the dead, the first time He appeared among the disciples, He breathed upon them and said "Receive ye the Holy Ghost" (Acts 19:2). What was this? The Spirit as the power of life more abundantly (not as gift yet). He gave them life while He was here, and when risen He imparted it more abundantly, life in resurrection. What is the difference, people may ask, to us? Immense. But the difference in the mind of God is the main thing and how it bears upon His glory. Therefore, whether understanding it or not, I desire to bow and bless God, perfectly sure that there is a wise and good reason for everything He does and says. We are to be raised by and by from the dead: our bodies are still unchanged. The body of the believer decays and crumbles like the unbeliever's, yet he has the resurrection-life of Christ, this life "more abundantly" (2 Cor. 12:15). "As my Father hath sent Me, even so send I you" (John 20:21) was not a word merely for the twelve. No doubt they had a mission that none of us has. But while this is true, and none now can be put on a level with them as apostles, yet at the same time I maintain that they also had ministerial functions, apart from their special apostolic character, and in those, not in this, they have successors. Our Lord met, on that day when He rose, "the disciples," which embraces a far wider thought. It was the then Christian company, all that were there, whether men or women, if they were disciples. It was upon these He breathed. They were all to have His more abundant life. The effect is, that all are brought into liberty. Compare Romans 8:1-2.

I do not enter further into the very blessed accompaniments of this new life, but only remark that as to being raised and sitting together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, all is spoken of as being now true of the believer. There is no such mystical notion meant by this as that we are not on earth or in our bodies here. Everything in Scripture is the very reverse of extravagance. Mysticism is the devil's imitation of God's mysteries, and the mere mist of men's fancies. "Mystery" in Scripture means nothing vague, but truth the human intellect would never discover, which, when presented by the Holy Spirit to the new nature, is perfectly intelligible. Some things are of a profounder character than others, and there may be that which is beyond all knowledge, as, for instance, the nature of the Son of God. "No man knoweth the Son but the Father" (Luke 10:22); and it is not said of the Son, "He to whom the Father shall reveal Him." The Father maintains with holy jealousy the inscrutable glory of the person of His Son. But apart from this, the mysteries of Scripture are truths once locked up but now revealed and intended to be known, and in fact the portion and joy of the believer.

Bible Treasury: Volume 7, Calling and Hope of the Christian, The

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

The right application of the truth of the Church in both its calling and its hopes depends, more than many Christians are aware, upon the spiritual condition of the soul. I doubt not, indeed, that spiritual condition has much to do with all apprehension of divine truth, but of this beyond all others, for the simple reason that the Church's privileges are so boundless and so special that the mind of man and even the heart of the believer find no small difficulty in accepting them simply in their integrity. The very conscience of the believer makes a difficulty unless there be a child-like acceptance of the word and grace of God. We can easily understand this; for it is natural even to the believer to mingle the question of his own feelings of acceptance with the reception of the truth of God. He examines himself, but finds only unworthiness; he feels painfully, humiliatingly, day by day, his own shortcomings and positive faults. Such being the fact, it looks a hard thing to receive the astonishing truth that grace has given even him oneness with Christ.

Yet the great distinctive feature of the Christian's calling is found in these very words, "Together with Christ." Sovereign grace can alone account for it. As God claimed and exercised the title, at all times, to bless according to His good pleasure, so now He puts the members of

Christ's body in the place that seems good to Him. He looks for unqualified submission in our hearts. And in proportion as we are simple in bowing to God, His grace and truth open far more largely and more distinctly on our souls. Now the bearing of this will soon be seen as I make a few remarks upon the scripture just read. The subject is the Church's calling and hopes—the latter, of course, in connection with the coming of the Lord. The Holy Ghost opens the subject with a kind of allusion to Israel's place. They were the chosen people, but it was on earth and for the earth. I do not deny that there were elect men in Israel, upon whose hearts brighter hopes dawned. No doubt Abraham was but a sample of the faithful. And indeed in the dealings of God, before there was a people called, there were those who looked by faith beyond the earth, who saw what is brighter than earthly hopes. But here we have a different character of blessing: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." The heavenly places are clearly in contrast with Israel's earthly place. Now Israel looked, and rightly looked, to be thus blessed here below; indeed, it is to disparage the word of God to lose sight of this: God will make it good to them in a future day.

But we ourselves are in the same place as these believers, addressed by the Apostle Paul—"Blessed with all spiritual blessings.... in Christ." That little word, "in Christ," is the key to it all. In one sense a Christian is nothing in himself; in Christ he has everything. Let my heart only get hold of this precious truth. Christ now shows what a Christian is in the presence of God. No doubt, besides being the risen man, He is also God, the object of worship, equal with the Father. He has a divine right to all, yet is He pleased to possess all as the glorified man by right of redemption. He came into this world. He had the only claim as man, for He alone had accomplished God's will. He was the perfect manifestation of what man ought to be to God under law, and He was the perfect manifestation of what God is to man in love, He was above law—it was grace. If the law dealt with evil, it must destroy. Grace takes the supremacy. It shows grace to those who do not deserve it. Christ as under law showed perfectly what God's will was. Then He manifested what God is to man. It was His place to manifest perfect grace and truth. Christ takes the inheritance neither as man or God only, but as Redeemer. He suffered on the cross that He might have others to share it, others to say, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." It was only in resurrection that the Lord Jesus took all things. When upon earth He did not take the inheritance; He took sorrow, He took shame, He took suffering—every kind of hatred from man. He took God's judgment about sin. In this He was alone upon the cross, because there the wonderful problem was being solved, how sin could be put away. Christ abolished sin that God might justly justify, that God might manifest all His character.

Here, however, it is a larger measure than merely justifying. God blesses with all spiritual blessings in Christ. He had never uttered such language before. In the Old Testament there is not such a thought as Christ having members. You have a king reigning in righteousness, and nations blest through Christ that blessed One who will take all things from God. What we have here is quite different. It is God not only pardoning, and not merely justifying, but making Christians to be the members of Christ, of His flesh, and of His bones. Here we have language rising above everything that believers had before redemption. There is no disparagement of the privileges of saints before, but what I am anxious to show is that Christians are not generally alive to their own privileges.

The first thing to point out is this, "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Mark the language. It is God acting in this especial manner of relationship. He means to bless the believer as He blesses Christ. That is, not as Christ is blest as a divine person—that would be blasphemy. Here we have what is bestowed upon Him as man in heaven. "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them" is a kindred truth. Christ as the risen man is exalted on high, having glory conferred on Him as the risen man that by the grace of God had died. The risen man is also God, but we must never confound His deity with His humanity. As thus risen He said, "I ascend unto my God and your God, unto my Father and your Father." Here we have His and our God and Father, and the apostle shows that we reap infinite blessing from each of these relationships. As God of our Lord Jesus, He gives us to partake in the divine nature, holy and blameless before Him in love. He means to have men in heaven along with Jesus. To have that blessed glorified man there is not enough. He gives Jesus companions. These companions of His must have, of course, the divine nature morally. (2 Peter 1)

Again, angels are servants: they never rise above the nature of servants. The archangel even never rises above the place of a servant. The angels are called the sons of God in a certain sense, as all men are by virtue of creation. Angels are a spiritual class of beings, but they have not the intimacy of those born of God, the place of children, the Spirit of adoption, &c. Now I call your attention to this, because it is but feebly understood by Christians in general. It is not presumption to know that our sins are forgiven. I would ask any person who knows the name of Christ, who loves Him, On what ground is it that you take the place of a believer? On what ground have you received favor from God? Do you believe in Jesus as One that suffered for sins? I ask you, Has He done the work perfectly or has He not? There is no believer who would not at once answer, Yes—perfectly. Then as surely as you are a believer, you have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins. If you have not this forgiveness, when can you have it? Christ will not suffer again. Suffering and offering go together. They must go together in the mind of God. Once purged is the word for a Christian—once, because it has been done perfectly, done forever. Now I maintain that it is done for every Christian. Every Christian owes it to Christ to believe unhesitatingly that He has done perfectly the work of putting away sin. There may be failures. Far would I be from saying that a believer should not confess failure always. Daily failure calls for daily humbling before God. Still the fact of redemption remains unchanged. Take the case of a child: he may offend and offend grievously, but he remains your child all the same. The more you enforce on him that he is your child, the more is his failure felt, as it is the worse in itself. In the same way, instead of the holding fast our relationship, really weakening the sense of sin, it is the very and only ground of judging it aright. It is that which makes sin to be most exceedingly sinful.

We have here the full roll of Christian privilege. How striking it is in all this passage there is not a word said about our original condition as sinners. In the Epistle to the Romans it is quite another method. In Eph. 2 we have a deeper character of sin than we have even in Romans "dead in trespasses and sins," &c. But first we find God unfolding His counsels which refer to the Christian. It was a purpose of God in Christ before the foundation of the world, entirely apart from man's condition upon earth. We find here the very blessed truth that redemption is no mere remedy, it was the first choice of God. God counseled and determined in Himself, before there were any creatures at all; He determined to have beings in heaven capable of fellowship with Himself and with His Son. Then He allowed man to be tried upon earth. This took place with Israel, &c. When the wickedness of the world rose to its height in the cross of Christ, at that very moment when Jew and Gentile united to kill the Lord of glory, God answered their awful conspiracy by bringing out His richest grace. God showed through and in His Son a salvation that not only meets man ruined upon earth, but that would give man an everlasting portion with Christ in the presence of God. The Church consists not merely of persons pardoned and saved, of people looking to heaven; it has a deeper character of relationship; it implies union with Christ in heaven. This is what God imparts to believers now.

The next thing taken up here is that God not only brings us into this astonishing place of blessing, but opens His secrets: "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will." Thus, first of all, He makes us holy in Christ; next, He gives us the place of sons to Himself; and then He makes known to us what He is going to do. And what is that? To put the entire universe under Christ, to have all in heaven, all on earth, put under the glorified man. This is the first part of the secret of God's will; the next is, that the believers now—all believers in Christ—are made joint-heirs with Christ over this inheritance. Not that we are the inheritance: the Jewish people will be a part of the inheritance; but the peculiar character of Christians, that is, they are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.

As to this, the simple question is, What does scripture say? What is the teaching of God on this head? It is said to be a mystery, which means that which could not be found out by the wit of man, but what can be understood when revealed. "The mystery of Christ" consisted in this—Christ, the center of all God's dealings, and believers now united to Him. There is nothing wonderful in the Son of God being over all things. God the Father could not be said to confer anything upon God the Son as such: it would deny His supreme deity. But yet it is perfectly certain from scripture that Jesus now receives all from God the Father. A man is at the right hand of God!—a man is the object of heaven's delight and adoration! But more. By the Holy Ghost the Church is united with this glorified man, the spiritual Eve of the last Adam. The Church is the bride, the Lamb's wife, as it is the body of the glorified Christ who is Head over all things. Thus it is written at the end of this chapter. Christ is said to be "Head over all things to the church, which is his body." The Church is really associated with Christ over all things, "the fullness of him that filleth all in all."

The wonderful mystery is here made known—the Church called into oneness with Christ. Into this one body we are baptized by the Spirit now; and now is the time that the believer is responsible to receive it into his soul, and to manifest it in his ways. Of course it is a matter of faith; for, as to his body, he is the same as any other man. He can only triumph through Christ; but he has Christ in glory not only as his righteousness but his life, yea, one with Him. All that God confers upon Christ, Christ shares with the Church. The effect is immediate and immense. Suppose a person were to wake up to the fact that he was the queen's son, would it not have a mighty influence practically on him? So, to be given now to know not merely that a person is saved, but that he shares with Christ all that He possesses, that he is a member of His body, that he is viewed now as perfect by God in Christ: such is the position of a Christian. It is not that one does not take into account a Christian's failure: I do, but the way to feel our failure most is to hold fast our relationship to Christ. Upon Christian doctrine is founded Christian practice.

As the believer even now is set in this blessed place of enjoyment, God has sent down the Holy Ghost to dwell in him, in such a sort as never was before. There never was a time when the Holy Ghost did not work; He beyond all doubt is the active agent in all the dealings of God from creation downwards. There could be no power of God at work in man without the Spirit of God. But not the less do I maintain along with this, that the Lord Jesus Christ prepared the disciples for a greater blessing than either they or others had ever known before. He told them "it is expedient for you that I go away," &c. What could make up for such a loss? The answer is, "if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." It is contrary to Scripture or even sense to suppose that it was merely prolonging something they possessed before. Nay, there was a deeper blessing. It was the same Spirit that had made them born anew, but He was now for the first time sent down from heaven to dwell in the saints.

Who had ever been thus blessed before? Yes, there was One who had enjoyed Him thus. Who was that One person who had been the temple of God upon earth? It was Jesus. Upon Him, the Holy Ghost came not as a flame of fire, but as a dove, the witness of the perfect spotlessness of Jesus. The humanity of Jesus being absolutely pure and holy (Luke 1), there was not the least hindrance to the dwelling Of the Holy Ghost in Him. We can understand Jesus being bodily the temple or habitation of the Holy Ghost; but how could it be true of us, evil and defiled as we are by nature? Christ has so perfectly put away the sin and sins of a believer, that it is as though the evil, root, branch, and fruit, had never been. Hence the Holy Ghost has come down from heaven, and actually now dwells in the believer, as the proof and result of the perfect putting away of sin by Christ's sacrifice.

The saints of old were waiting for what was coming; they knew there were good things to come. "Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven." (1 Peter 1:12.)

Manifestly then there is a special blessing in the gift of the Spirit consequent upon redemption. When we know and weigh what redemption is, there will be less difficulty. It is a poor partial notion of redemption as an accomplished fact that makes people ask, Why should not God always act in the same way? The right understanding of its infinite work teaches us, that God sees such virtue in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ that He reserves a special blessing for that hour. The believer now is blessed with, and will share, His supremacy over all things.

What makes us members of the body of Christ? We are made so by the Spirit, and not by faith only. Of course, no one but a believer has this place; but it is nowhere said to be by faith, but by the baptism of the Holy Ghost. (1 Cor. 12) The saints of old time were not baptized into this one body. There was nothing of the kind. The Jew preserved his separate place; the Gentile might come in (as a proselyte), but there was no identity: still less was either one or other made one with Christ. In Christianity these distinctions disappear. There was faith among the Old Testament saints, but there was no "one body" yet; not even when our Lord was upon earth. He told the disciples that He was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. The cross of Christ, on man's side of it, was a joining of all men (Jew and Gentile) in wickedness; on God's side it led to a joining of Jew and Gentile in common blessing by grace. In Matt. 16, Peter answers Christ's demand with the confession, "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God." Christ says, "Upon this rock I will build my Church." What does He mean by this? Peter confesses His glory not only as Messiah or the Christ, but as Son of the living God. He was marked out the Son of God by resurrection from the dead. "He is the head of the body, the Church: who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead.

What hope is suited to such a calling? Jesus says, "Let not your heart be troubled. I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go, I will come again and receive you unto myself." The portion that Christ has is the portion of a Christian. Even now He is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. As He took our portion on the cross, so we have His portion in glory. He will bless the Jews on earth. God promised to do so. Whereas, He has in title blessed us with Christ in heaven. Some think the mystery was that the Gentiles were to be called, but this is plainly referred to in the Old Testament. The mystery goes much farther, namely, that all who now believe, Jews and Gentiles, should be united together as the one body of Christ, head over all things.

Our hope is for Christ to come and take us to be with Himself in the Father's house. This implies the highest scene of enjoyment even in heaven. Can any place there be too high for Christ? Assuredly not. The Father manifests His love for His Son thus. If God gives us such a place in Christ, we ought to believe it; and this is not merely for ourselves, but for every believer, for every Christian. This, and nothing less than this, is the portion of all who believe the gospel. Christ will come Himself, that where He is, there we may be also. We shall be with Himself, in that glory which is entirely above the world. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come." (Rev. 22:17.) To say "Come," depends not on great knowledge, but on His great salvation and love.

It cannot be too much insisted on that there is no difference between the standing of one believer and another. When you come to a question of faithfulness, there are degrees; but to suppose a difference in the whiteness of the robe, or the righteousness we are made, is to suppose a various value in the blood of Christ, or uncertainty in the power of His resurrection. There is no difference as to sin in one sense, all being equally dead in trespasses and sins. So there is no such thing as one saint being brought nearer to God by redemption than another; it denies the work of Christ. All believers now are equally, i.e., perfectly, made nigh as to standing, though bad teaching does much to darken the truth, and lack of spirituality hinders holy enjoyment, even where the truth may have entered. Besides, we are made one with Christ, but for this the gift of the Spirit was requisite.

Where Christ is before us, there is nothing we may not be able to do through Him that strengthens us.

The Purpose of God for His Sons and Heirs, Purpose of God for His Sons and Heirs, The: Part 3

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

But at a time of utter evil it suited God to divulge the secret of His purpose. From before the foundation of the world He chose us Christians, in Christ, that we should be holy and blameless before Him in love. He would surround Himself above with beings like Himself: holy in nature, blameless in ways, and love, their animating principle as it is His own. Such we shall be when His purpose takes full effect. We are sadly short now, yet is it verified in principle as to His elect. But God's purpose cannot fail; and Christ will make every word good when He comes to receive us to Himself and like Himself for the Father's house. Not as though we had already attained, or were already perfect; but we follow after; and God's purpose shall surely be fulfilled then. He that, knows what the Christian is destined to, judges any present measure in the Christian race and knows that he will have a more humbling yet blessed account to give the Lord in glory than any one's experience in a Methodist class meeting. Those who have entered more deeply into God's mind in His word are better aware what our manifestation to Him will prove. The faith of it has already brought down their high thoughts and imaginations, and shown us how weak and unworthy we are as saints, that no flesh should glory in His presence; and "that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

But God will surround Himself, not merely in heaven, but in its nearest circle of His own, with those capable of holding communion with Him. about everything that concerns His nature, counsels, and ways. Can anything be more wonderful than the place He designs for Christians? We ought to be therefore in course of, spiritual education for it now; but till we are like Christ at His coming, none can have yet arrived as a matter of fact at the fulfilled purpose of God. But then we shall be absolutely holy before God, and not a single thing to blame in us, according to the working whereby Christ is able to subdue all things to Himself. Instead of vanity or pride, there will be love that delights in God and His goodness without alloy. Even now are our hearts won to all this by divine grace, in partaking of a divine nature; but we justly feel how poor is our manifestation of it now, and how comforting is the purpose, that every son of God will be absolutely thus according to God's nature. So it is to be according to the fourth verse.

The fifth verse takes up another side of the truth. Predestination. is not quite the same thing as election, and here we have the Scripture account of it. We do well to stand clear of human exaggeration here. Election is. to fitness for His presence in a nature like His own. Predestination is to a relationship, as like as possible to His Son's. But scripture carefully excludes any such human inference as God's predestination to hell fire. It is clearly revealed that such must be the unending end of the wicked. When the everlasting judgment comes, and they are judged, each according to their works, the book of life has none of their names written there, and they are cast into the lake of fire. But there is no predestinating decree of God in the case. Their own sins fitted those vessels of wrath to destruction.

Notice that pious and learned men have made the mistake of confounding "son" and "child" in the Scriptures. But they, however closely connected, are not the same thing. To identify them is really to take no small liberty with the word of truth. Not that one means to deny that the child of God may be also called a son of God; but the N.T. shows plainly that the two words express different things. It is the apostle John that particularly dwells on our being "children" of God. "Why?" Because we are born into the family of God. Born of the Spirit, we are thereby children of God, children of His family. "Sons" is wrong in the A.V. of John 1:12 and of 1 John 3:1, 2. Beyond question it should be "children" as in 1 John 3:10, and v. 2. But when it is a question of being "sons," it is predestination that puts us into this place of relation. This was overlooked in the A.V. of Gal. 3:26, which should be, not "children," but, "sons," as in chap. 4:5-7. And so it should be in our ver. 5 of Eph. 1, where the word requires the adoption of "sons," not "children." There is never the adoption of children, but of sons. One must be by new birth a "child" of God. But God also predestined to adopt the Christian into the position of a "son" by Christ Jesus to Himself. All the Old Testament saints were "children," as we who now believe are also. But they were not the adopted "sons," as we may read in the argument that opens Gal. 4. On the other hand, we are all His sons now, whether Jew or Greek, and receive the Spirit of His Son. Every Christian is brought into that place of sonship. It is one of the new privileges of the gospel. The King and Queen do not consider the, highest nobles in the land to be in any such dignity. They may by courtesy be their trusty cousins; but they are not their sons. We Christians are adopted into the place of sons, and have the Spirit of God's Son sent into our hearts, crying Abba, Father. How wondrous, yet true! We are sons of an infinitely greater personage than the king, or any other that ever was on the earth. Such is the Christian by faith in Christ Jesus. It is not spiritual necessity as in ver. 4, but "according to the good pleasure of His will." God might have predestined to a much lower place; He was pleased to give us, for His own delight, the highest possible for a creature, "to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He made us Objects of favor (far beyond the one act of "acceptance") in the Beloved." This explains all. Thus only could we be thus blessed (ver. 6), whether in new nature or new relationship.

Yet the apostle comes down in ver. 7 to our need even in communicating this roll of privilege: "In whom (Christ) we have (a present thing) redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of trespasses." This is indispensable for the soul now. Otherwise we should be burdened and wretched, and unfit for the gracious working of the Spirit, or the enjoyment of Christ, or communion with God.

THE PURPOSE OF GOD IN THE INHERITANCE.

vers. 8-12

The earlier verses presented to us God's purpose about His sons, His heirs. This, I need scarce say, is the highest of all; for therein we are viewed. as perfectly brought into communion with His mind. This goes far beyond the inheritance, and we are before Himself. The inheritance is what we are set above in His grace. But the purpose of God about His sons directly concerns us in the nearest way, because it concerns Himself too. As men He has given us a soul and spirit by which we are distinguished, yet thoroughly responsible to Him. But as His sons we have now a new blessedness and a new responsibility. The old responsibility, we know too well, ended in total ruin. Man fell, and this practically led to, and means, every evil in nature and ways, because all is involved in sin, and flows from it. But now in grace He has taken us entirely out of ourselves (so to speak) as sons of Adam, and set us in Christ. God found none in heaven, still less in any other part of the universe, comparable with His Son the Lord Jesus. On the contrary, Satan led the world to the rejection and slaying of Christ; as the setting up of the antichrist will be his worst work at the end of the age. Impossible to conceive anything so evil, hateful, and rebellious as the antichrist. Even now are there many antichrists that prepare the way, who are all the worse because they once confessed His name. Of course, as the apostle says "they were not of us": had they been, "they would have continued with us." Their departure proved that none had part or lot with Christ. They abandoned their natural place in professing His name, and they became His greatest enemies, in direct antagonism to the One that God delights to honor, and loves supremely.

Already are believers given to know that they are set in Christ, associated in this ineffable way with Him to whom we belong. We may, however, be in the presence of God in spirit now. By and by we are to be there, in the very likeness of Christ, according to whose glory we are now called in every way by God. First, the heirs are brought out very distinctly; next, comes the inheritance. God, as to the heirs, had that purpose before the foundation of the world. But He purposed the inheritance also. It was not an afterthought. It was not after the ruin, but before the creation. It was immeasurably in eternity. Quite different was the call of Abraham. His was merely in time, but the call of the Christian was before time began. The very first purpose that God formed in His own eternal mind was to surround himself with beings of a totally different destiny from those that were to follow; beings that could know himself, and appreciate grace and truth; beings that needed it all, but at the same time whom He needed in order to gratify His own love, and share with them His thoughts and affections. And a wondrous fact too is, that He would have them to enter into that purpose of His now by faith. They were His secrets before redemption, but are here revealed in due time. It is what the apostle is now occupying us with in this Epistle.

It is observable in ver. 8 that His grace abounded toward us in all wisdom and intelligence, that such a communion should not be in vain. We do not hear about His rich supply in the earlier verses. There it is rather to tell us that we should be holy and blameless in love. But He would have us understand the inheritance, immense as it will be. Before, it was the imparting of divine nature, as 2 Peter 1 calls it, an answer to His own in holiness and blamelessness and love; for what else was suited to His presence? Not only so; but the new relationship must be just as fully in accordance with Christ. Nothing would satisfy His love but that which was after His pattern. The Son, the Only Begotten, was God, and of course therefore eternal. These were necessarily creatures, taken out of all ordinary conditions, but put into the immediately nearest relationship that God could vouchsafe. It was an adoption, a sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself according to the good pleasure of His will. Assuredly, it concerns every true Christian to know what his new nature and relationship are. God forbid we should ever neglect or forget these things. Can anything make one feel more deeply that all is ruin at the present time and how deeply we are fallen from our true estate? It is not meant that the purpose of God can be frustrated in the end; but where, among those that bear the Lord's name, can be found any adequate approach to what is here revealed to the saints? The rarest thing to find in Christendom is any answer to the description God gives of the Christian. Is it not so? What can we say to such a fact? At best we are only learning what it is.

So again this future and immense inheritance is so illimitable as to embrace all heavenly and earthly creation, all that is to be put under Christ and consequently under those who are united to Christ. Do Christians realize that they are to share it all with Him? Hence the form His grace takes in view of the glory of Christ. He would have us capacitated to apprehend it in all wisdom and intelligence. This last word is in the A. and the R. Versions called "prudence," an excellent thing in practical things. But in the present case it is a very insufficient word. What has prudence to do for understanding Christ's future glory. Clearly it stands here for "intelligence." God would have us even now acquaint ourselves with this purpose also. We need to know our personal blessing first; but next, what we shall share with Christ when He takes the inheritance of all things. Spiritual understanding is requisite but is also abundantly given for this express purpose.

We may be helped in this if we look at the first Adam. When God made the first man and put him into the brightest part of the earth, or paradise as it is called, everything was "very good" (Gen. 1); but the very best were collected by Jehovah Elohim in His power for the head of mankind. So He planted the garden for Adam with special provision, not for every use only, but for delight and enjoyment also. And as Adam was constituted the lord of the lower creation here on earth, he was enabled in God's goodness, through the wisdom and intelligence conferred upon him, to give the proper names to all cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field; for all these were subjected to him. This is the more important, because it is the appropriate sign of the dominion given him. In Adam there was no question of sin. Adam herein assumed nothing in pride: it was the Lord God that brought to him the animals to see what he would call them; and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, it had His sanction. As master by divine appointment, the right or title was recognized, as he had the wisdom and intelligence for that function. Divine goodness had pleasure in it.

It is of the more interest to remark this, because, as we generally know, men of speculative mind have dared to question that man was thus endowed from the first. But philosophers deny everything of divine grace and power. They assume that Adam, if he ever existed, was a kind of barbarian. They lack faith and its discernment to enter into the real difference of Gen. 1 and 2, being carried away by the nonsense of the Astruc guess growing into the pretentious theories of German skeptics. In Gen. 2 is the relationship of the creature, and, in particular, man's responsibility founded on the place in which God was pleased to put him. So Adam gave these names, and God recognized them. Very far greater are the things God has done in Christ for us.

A fair and beautiful scene it was with every creature in it that God subjected to Adam. But what is that compared with the whole universe of God; and every creature above and below, after all the ruin, gathered into united blessedness under Christ's headship, and ourselves associated with Christ in that place of honor over all things? God therefore caused grace to abound toward us "in all wisdom and intelligence" that we might be capable even now of entering with spiritual understanding into a scene so boundless.

Even real Christians count it wisdom and prudence to disclaim all definite thought about the future glory. And no wonder. For the mixture of law and gospel destroys the right use of both, and reduces revealed truth to uncertainty. To souls in this state these purposes of God are, and must be, unknown. They need to receive previously the word of truth, the gospel of their salvation. Were they at home in God's grace and truth, even in that respect, they would yearn after more, and the Spirit would lead them into all the truth, and show them things to come for Christ's glory. Surely God looks for this, that we should understand the grace He has lavished on us. Here He has made known "the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he purposed in himself for the administration of the fullness of the times" or, seasons (vers. 9-10). The importance of the word "mystery" is that it means, not something unintelligible as in vulgar usage, but, a secret that was never revealed in the Old Testament. Mysteries are entirely peculiar to what is called the New Testament, wherein they are made known from the Gospel of Matthew to the Revelation of John.

Hence the purpose of God about us, or about the inheritance, was nowhere revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures. It is well to recall the last verse of Deut. 29, "The secret things belong to Jehovah our God, but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." Now, God is pleased to reveal what He then reserved to Himself. The time was fully come; and these purposes of His are some of His great secrets. You will find for that reason that the Lord speaks about the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. In the Old Testament that kingdom was revealed, but not the mysteries of which the Lord spoke in Matt. 13, which turned on His rejection by the Jews, which forms the theme of chaps. 11 and 12 especially. Thereon follows the peculiar aspect of the kingdom of the heavens when the Rejected of men would go on high; and there it is that we know Him now by faith. The kingdom of the heavens assumed this new form when Christ took His seat on the Father's throne. And we may note that when He rose from the dead and was glorified, then more and more the disciples were brought into the understanding of the mysteries of God; and of those mysteries the apostle Paul was an eminent steward, as John also was.

All these were entirely outside the Old Testament; but they could be understood like other truths when revealed. For this we need, and we have, the Holy Spirit given to us. None of them could have been anticipated; but now that God has revealed them, they are for us to search into by the Spirit,

(Continued from p. 79)

The Purpose of God for His Sons and Heirs, Purpose of God for His Sons and Heirs, The: Part 1

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

The Old Testament makes it clear that God, even in His aspect of Jehovah, the God of Israel, never limited Himself to Israel. He made them His particular people. He made known His name, His will for a people on earth to Israel only. He abounded in every kind of privilege that could be to a people in the flesh. Israel as naturally, were the chosen people who belonged to Him here below. They were objects of favor and goodness and mercy in a way that no other nation received, except the people in the land of Palestine.

But even before that, God had His blessed intention to set up a kingdom that would in no way be confined to Israel. This we find explicitly from the Gospel of Matthew in the last section of the great prophecy on the Mount of Olives; at the end of this age will be the accomplishment of these last words. Not only will the godly remnant be formed out of the Jews as in chap. 24 down to ver. 44, and the heavenly saints, or the Christian company, which forms the central part from ver. 45 to 25:30, but lastly there will be the future sheep, or living believers, of all the nations brought into marked blessing and favor. The King bids them, not reign with Him like the heavenly saints, but "inherit the kingdom prepared for" them "from the foundation of the world." It is well to have this clearly, as a preliminary principle. Had we only this single prophecy, it is a plain proof that others are to be blessed, in their several places on earth under the reign of the Lord Jesus, whilst the risen saints reign over it with Him. It is a mere delusion that to the church belongs every elect soul from the beginning to the end, and that God has not varied companies, both for heaven and for earth, destined to be objects of His grace for His glory.

Far from me to deny that there is on earth now, the church, Christ's body, gathered out of Jews and Gentiles, wherein all earthly distinctions disappear. But those Gentile sheep at the consummation of the age are not the church. Scripture proves that God is so full of goodness toward man that He means to bless Israel after all their long unbelief and manifold iniquity; and that He will send the gospel of the kingdom among all the nations for a blessing to many before the end comes. The church will be glorified on high. Remnants from both Israel and the nations are about to be blessed on the earth in that day. The sheep of Matt. 25:32 are by no means all the sheep of God.

The popular divinity, if you believe it, says that there is nothing else but these sheep, and that they compose His church. Why? Because the church is assumed to be the one and only object of divine grace throughout all time. They have got their ideas out of tradition, following not the scriptures, but men no wiser than themselves. Do you ask if we pretend to any wisdom of our own? God forbid. What we confess is that God is true; and what we do is to be subject simply and solely to the word of God. Is it not the only right way?

The fact is, there will be, if we heed scripture, different companies of the blessed in heaven, as well as on the earth. It is mere traditional prejudice to conceive a single multitudinous throng. On the contrary there will be marked varieties both above and below, blessed with or by Christ. Nor can we know the glorious future for heaven and earth, but by the word of God; which is the one authority for all truth, past, present, or future. In the verses with which the Epistle to the Ephesians opens, we have a wondrous unfolding of divine grace at its very highest, and coming down to the lowest possible. The time too made it all the more striking, though eminently suitable as it must be for such a disclosure. Not a word had been divulged about it in the Old Testament as we are distinctly told in a subsequent part of this Epistle. It was a

secret kept hid in God from all previous ages and generations. Indeed it would then have been quite incompatible, whether in the earlier generation, or after the law was given to Israel by Moses.

When was it that God chose to bring out this, the highest, the deepest, and the most wonderful of His purposes? It was when Jew and Gentile, the world, had united in greater sin than it had ever before committed. Need one tell you what that awful sin was? Too well—alas! too little, men know it. To your souls that believe, it has been brought home by the Holy Spirit of God. That tremendous sin is the rejection, even to the cross, of the Lord Jesus. Yet such is His unbounded grace that the otherwise hopeless sin can be forgiven though it be the hating of the Father and of the Son without a cause (John 15:22-25). The worst of man, and the best of God, never came clearly out till the crucifixion of the Savior. The cross of the Lord Jesus was morally the end of probation. The whole of the Old Testament had been given long before that, people who alone were familiar with Law, Psalms and Prophets were indifferent learners of the New Testament. They liked the Old better. They said the old wine was good; and they stuck to it, as the Lord told them when their refusal of Himself came out more and more. It was very late when the Epistle to the Hebrews was written to set those of them who believed on their proper ground intelligently. They had been but partially on Christian ground, pretty much as most professing Christians are now. They had only vague notions about the gospel, Christian walk, worship, and hope. All was indistinct, not to say incorrect; and that is the state not only of Christendom, but of the children of God in it. Believers from among the Jews ought to have been teachers when Paul wrote to them his great Epistle. They had to learn better the very elements, “the word of the beginning of Christ.” They had not arrived at “perfection” or full growth, the due and definite truth of Christianity. There was not only a shortcoming, but a veritable muddle in their minds; consequently their conduct as Christians was mixed and vacillating.

Among those who are upright, how much depends upon their real hold of what scripture actually teaches! The Christian Hebrews feebly understood anything distinctive. Without denying that Christ died, rose, and went to heaven, the great truths that came out consequently were not developed as they should be, so characteristically different from what the Old Testament led people to expect. With Christ confessed they looked for everything grand, honored, prosperous, and delightful here below. But how did the cross of Christ and His going away to heaven consist with the expectation of Israel being now at the head of the nations and in the enjoyment of earthly glory? Even believers had that idea still. You will recollect that when the risen Lord was about to go to heaven from the Mount of Olives, they asked, Wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? They had little idea of the thorough break with Israel; still less that God was bringing in a wholly distinct purpose, and associations new and heavenly. This is what we find very fully in the Epistle to the Ephesians and elsewhere: an absolutely fresh revelation. The believers in Jerusalem were slow to learn. Nor does the Epistle to the Hebrews rise to the mystery concerning Christ and concerning the church. Even the heavenly calling therein treated was imperfectly known. Yet it was written late, though somewhat before the destruction of Jerusalem. It speaks of Mosaic covenant, ritual, system, tabernacle, altar, priest and offering, superseded by what was far better, earthly shadows by the heavenly realities. This was strange not only to the unbelieving Jews but to the Christian remnant. They thought that the old forms were rather to be filled with new power, and that grace would be given to make them living. They had not realized that the old divine service must pass away, and be succeeded by entirely heavenly things in accordance with Christ seated at the right hand of God on high. He is the truth, and must be brought not only into the heart by faith as He is now exalted, but wrought into the worship of God and into the practice of men that believe as a living reality here and now. To this and nothing less is the Christian called. He is, and ought to know from God through Christ that he is, a heavenly man, while here on earth. He has to act out this association with Christ above whilst he lives here below. The consequence is that the Christian seems, if faithful, the greatest fool going. That is what the world thinks of out and out fidelity to Christ. They can understand a Papist or a Protestant, an Anglican, a Presbyterian, a Methodist, a Baptist or the like. If you are ever so inconsistent with Christ, it may be excellent in men's eyes. Accordingly they scourged, imprisoned, stoned and slew the faithful witnesses of Christ; and Rome at length tortured them in every cruel way to kill or cure them of the truth, which seemed to them nothing but the most chimerical ideas. Do the children of God feel how far they have slipped away? It is to recall them to a better grasp of Christianity that I am speaking to you to-night. It were not much to talk about. what you know well enough yourselves My duty is to show in my measure some things you are but little acquainted with. Think me not proud or pretentious if I thus speak and earnestly urge. God forbid! He that would be true to Christ's name and word, and true to the church of God of which he is a member, ought assuredly and with all his heart to speak of the fruit of Christ in heaven brought by the Spirit to men on earth; for, if we believe it, we are called to speak it and by grace to live it. What indeed is the good of truth if you do not humbly seek to carry it out? Better not to hear and know it, than to have on your lips what condemns all your life and your worship. The truth now made known in the N.T. would not have been understood by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, nor by Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel. None of them could have so much as guessed what is now revealed. It all hangs upon Christ come down in reconciling love, yet utterly rejected not merely by the Gentile world but by the Jew most of all. Him God has received up into heavenly glory, and by the Spirit associates us with Himself there and now. Of Him and this, we are called to bear witness, in our walk, service, and worship. We care not to confess it boldly, if we shirk it practically; it is only our greater condemnation. Assuredly this is as true as it is solemn.

I cannot but believe God raised up brethren to recall themselves and their fellows to these truths, in all their necessary consequences practically; it is also my sad conviction that some lifted up with pride have brought these very truths into all kinds of confusion. Does any such reaction disprove the truth? Not for a moment. It proves how easily grace may be divorced from truth which then degenerates into knowledge that puffs up. The truth never got really into their heart, for one does not suppose they depart from what they know to be true. When grace does not direct and strengthen, it becomes a great danger for every one of us of losing whatever truth we have. All really turns upon Christ, and Christ now in heaven, who also brings out the now revealed character of God. For He does now assume a new character according to the position of Christ who died and rose. When Christ receives the earth, He takes up the Jewish people, and all the nations; and Jehovah shall be king over all the earth, one Jehovah and His name one. God will act in accordance with it in power and majesty. For the world-kingdom of our Lord and His Christ shall then have come, and He shall reign forever and ever (Rev. 11:15). The Spirit of God will make effectual what is then in hand, as He always does. “Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” In past history who can recall a single thing in which the Gentiles and the Jews agreed except to crucify the Lord Jesus? Otherwise they hated each other with mortal enmity. Yet they joined for once to cast the Lord out of the earth as unfit to live. Nevertheless the Lord is gone up into supreme glory on high, far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come. And all things being made subject, He is given as Head over all things to the church, which is His body—He that stooped to all ignominy in the cross. We cannot be Christians in faith without both. To Him in all depths we go as lost sinners to be saved; and when we have redemption through His blood, we that were far off are brought nigh in the closest association with Christ at the right hand of God.

Is it not a strange and humbling and prevalent fact that so few Christians should understand their own Christianity? Yet it is true that there are many brethren in the Lord who know more about the Jews than they do about their own Christianity. Pay close heed to this, lest it be your own case. It is always the truth most important for us, that the devil tries to hide away from us, and turn us bitterly from it. Nor is it only the bad things that he perverts, to hinder our blessing. For many true believers are kept back because they refuse to look for more than the forgiveness of their sins through the gospel. Now therein is God's righteousness revealed by and to faith; therein the sinner owns the riches of God's grace to his soul: but to stop there is altogether unworthy. And so many saints of God fall into this snare at the present moment, that it is well to see to it that we ourselves escape it. What is the good of occupying ourselves with what does not promote God's glory? Let us seek in all integrity to judge ourselves. Let us zealously seek to be taught of God. Let our eyes be fixed on the Lord that we may be filled with fervor of spirit, and purpose of heart, simple and thorough going. The question for our faith and practice is the attitude that God assumes toward us, and our relation to Him while Christ is above on His own right hand. How is the answer to this great truth to be carried out on the earth in the heart and ways of those who believe? Must it not be through faith working by love?

"Blessed be the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us." It was His God and Father that raised the Lord Jesus from the dead, and gave Him glory, that our faith and hope should be in God, His Father and our Father, His God and our God. As in the rest of the N.T. it is not the God of Abraham, etc.; but here "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is no longer the revelation of the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob; you naturally become more or less of a Jew in this case; and your heart cannot then rise higher than the promises made to the fathers. Hence so many believers now, like the Puritans in former days, talk of grasping the promises. This is to ignore and lower the privileges of the gospel and of the church. It loses sight of Christ in heavenly glory after redemption. Every Christian ought to appreciate the difference. At any rate, the foundation of Christianity is that the most wondrous of all promises is already accomplished. It is no longer the righteousness of God as near to come, or His salvation to be revealed (Isa. 56:1), but His righteousness is come, and His salvation is revealed. This supposes the Lord Himself come, and His work done for our sins, with an entirely new state of things. And this is the new creation in Christ which each believer gets by grace in the gospel. Therein is revealed the righteousness of God, and thereby salvation is no longer a hope, save for the body, but a reality now also brought into the soul. This reminds me of a text much misunderstood in the Acts of the Apostles (11:14). Cornelius in Caesarea was to send for Peter at Joppa, who should tell him words whereby he and all his house should be "saved." It was not merely nor at all words by which he should be "converted." Cornelius already was as much converted as you. He was as truly born again as anyone in Jerusalem. The chapter before describes him as devout and God-fearing, as a man that gave much alms, and praying to God always. Well for you and me to be in these respects, his match, if not his superiors. It is a total error to regard Cornelius then as a self-righteous person. This is the effect of ordinary Evangelicalism, Calvinistic no less than Arminian; because they alike confound conversion with the soul's salvation. It is theology, not the gospel. The N.T. makes the difference known.

The words of Peter were to tell how they were to be "saved," which goes far beyond conversion, and is the actual privilege of the gospel through redemption. Ignorance of this leads preachers to pervert the force of this scripture, and of the truth in question. It destroys for converted souls in our day what grace was giving Cornelius to learn through the apostle then. Cornelius like the O.T. saints was already born of God. He was, as we are told in Acts 10:37, not at all ignorant of the word published throughout all Judea, and sent to the children of Israel. What he wanted to learn authoritatively was that God intended the same word of His grace to himself a Gentile and others like him, in all the freeness and the fullness of the gospel.

He did not dare to take it without divine sanction. He saw it clearly enough for Israel whom he honored as the old and chosen people of God. He believed that Messiah had come for their blessing; but he was not one of God's people Israel. He needed to have the assurance for a poor Gentile. For soul-salvation means the knowledge of being saved now. When people do not know this as their present portion, they are in substance like Cornelius. They too need to hear words whereby they shall be saved. It is really to be brought personally into "the word of truth, the gospel of their salvation." Many converted persons do not know on the word of God, that all is clear between themselves and God, now and forever. This is soul-salvation. It is not only that a good many of our Methodist friends need to be saved in that way. Their system allows them but a scanty salvation, because they think it depends so much on themselves from day to day. Consequently if ever so happy to-day, they dread losing it to-morrow. This is not the salvation of God, but rather of man, or more particularly of John Wesley; who nevertheless did believe on Christ, and had the blessing far beyond his own scheme. For who can doubt that John Wesley is with the Lord, a blessed man as he really was, with short and imperfect views of salvation. I hope no Methodists here will be offended. Why should they be, because they are told plainly the truth? It is not mine, save that I believe it, but what God reveals in His word. It may soften matters, but is a sorry comfort, that we are all liable to mistake. Brethren, so called, are just as liable as others, especially if high-minded. Nothing keeps them or any others but God's word and Spirit. Thank God, in His rich grace, we Christians have both; and therefore should we be glad to prove more and more how perfect the blessedness is for our souls and to His glory.

(To be continued).

Administration of the Fullness of the Seasons, Administration of the Fullness of the Seasons, The: 3

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

Eph. 1:10

The administration, we have seen, awaits "the fullness of times," or the expiry of the various periods appointed by divine wisdom. All things are out of course, and waxing worse and worse, until Christ takes the reins. The only Righteous One is still an outcast from the world, though known to the church as crowned with glory and honor in heaven, while those who love the Lord of glory suffer here below. God's favored earthly people are a proverb and a by-word among all nations, and driven out from a country of which God delighted to be the landlord. And what has been, what is, the history of that people and land? Their oppressors, the Gentiles, have they walked in abasement or in pride? Have they honored the King of heaven? And how fares creation? Does not the whole of it groan and travail in pain together until now? And where is Satan? Is it on earth merely that he walks about, or is there spiritual wickedness in heavenly places? Well, there is a set time for each of these things; and these seasons shall have a full term. Satan shall lose his sway over the air and the earth; creation shall be delivered into

the liberty of the glory of God's children; the smitten Gentile image shall give place to an everlasting kingdom; Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit; the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them, and Christ shall appear and we with Him in glory. This will be the fullness of the seasons spoken of.

When the destined fullness arrives, how great our joy, beloved, to see Him, not only as the Melchizedek blessing God and blessing man, but actual Possessor of heaven and earth, all things therein being headed up in Him Who, though He be the most High God, administers as the exalted Man; to be too ourselves so near Him and so truly one with Him, that then we shall at length forget all save His love and His glory. And yet (O wondrous grace!) is it not so now, as regards His love? Are we not here and now members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones? Yet surely we may long for the day when, seeing Him, we shall be forever like Him, according to that working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.

Yes, all things in heaven and earth shall be headed up in Him, not things under the earth; but every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Worthily has He won such a place, that blessed One. And how true the word! "Who, subsisting in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but emptied himself, having taken upon him the form of a bondman, having come in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also highly exalted him, and freely gave him the name which is above every name" (Phil. 2:6-9).

It is false, utterly false, that Jesus took this place when He was born. It is true, that then was the fullness of the time come for God to send forth His Son. The very children were enslaved under the rudiments of the world, and all were shut up under sin. Man had proved himself competent to ruin himself under the law of God, only the more readily because it was good and he was bad. But was God's business done when the Son was here, come of a woman, come under the law? By no means. The Incarnation was but the means, not the end. Redemption was the grand point to which God turned. Therefore the Son was thus sent and come "to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye [the Gentiles, who had not been under the law] are sons" &c. (Gal. 4:4-6).

Turning to the higher and larger sphere of Colossians, we hear the same truth. In the Son of God's love we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins; "Who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature." Is this His highest title? Is this His Divine glory? No; but founded upon it. He is the first-born of every creature, not because He partook of flesh, nor because He was the holy Man Who triumphed over all the consequences of the first Adam's sin, and conquered him that led the first man captive at his will: in a word, not because He was here below, be it the most faithful and glorious, but because He was the Creator. He is the first-born of every creature, for by (or, in virtue of) Him were all things created. Here is His right to the supremacy in question. "For 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 through him, and for him: he is before all things, and by (or, in virtue of) him all things consist" (Col. 1:16, 17).

His primacy over all creation flows from His Divine creative power. He asserts it as man; but His title flows from another and higher source. But He is more than first-born of all creation. "He is head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead." This, as we have seen, is the glory especially dwelt on in the Epistle to the Ephesians.

Sin was here below. Man, who ought to have been the first, was the lowest morally; and creation itself, by reason of him, was steeped in the bondage of corruption. And those whom God was about to bring into the church, what were they? Alienated and enemies in their mind by wicked works. Hence, though the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, though all the fullness was pleased to dwell in Him, even this could not meet the evil and misery of man, nor the holiness and the heart of God. The light of God was there, His love was there; in Him was life, and the Life was the light of men. Alas! it was manifest that the Jews, that all, were irreparably blind, yea, dead.

"If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin. He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other hath done, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father" (John 15:22-24).

What was to be done? "Verily, verily," saith the Lord, "except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." His death could alone deliver. But this was ever before the soul of our blessed Master. "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished?" "This is He that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood" (1 John 5). Hence in the Epistle to the Colossians, chap 1:20-22, we read "And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, whether the things on the earth, or the things in the heavens. And you, that were once alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now did he reconcile, in the body of his flesh through death; to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight."

The church is reconciled even now. To the living members of Christ it can be said, "You did he reconcile." Creation is not so yet, though the blood of the cross is shed on which the reconciliation is grounded; it will be so in the fullness of the seasons.¹

At present no such administration takes place, though we here learn God's purpose that it shall. Christ is, no doubt, head of angels, of Jews, of men, of creation. But is He exercising these rights? Now it is of the administration when the periods are ripe that our verses speak. But none of these things are being yet gathered. On the contrary, there is yet to be a deeper crisis of rebellion than ever. It is now the time when all things are severed from Christ, or, if gathered, gathered only in the ruin and the wretchedness which the guile and power of Satan have introduced. It is also the time of another gathering, the gathering of the joint-heirs who shall be glorified with Christ. But this is the gathering of Eph. 2,2 not of Eph. 1. It is the gathering of the members of His body, not of the subjects of His rule.

Some, I know, have conceived that by "all things in heaven and earth" is meant the church. But first of all the expression "all things," etc., forbids the thought. The church never was and never will be "all things." And though now the calling is being effected on earth, it is not a gathering there, but out of it; and, even when complete, it is in heaven; whereas the gathering in Eph. 1:10 is a gathering, at the same time, of all things that are in the heavens and that are on the earth under the headship of Christ. Again, not only is the church an elect body, but in verse 11 we have members of it referred to as an additional thing to the heading up all things in Christ, "in whom also we obtained" etc. Further, in verse 22 we have "all things" again spoken of as put by God under Christ's feet, Who is given as head over all things to the

church; which therefore, far from being merged in all things, enjoys and shares His supremacy, as His body and glorious bride.

This is entirely confirmed by the verses immediately before and after verse 10: in the one case where the mystery of God's will is made known touching all things in heaven and on earth; and in the other, because we are spoken of as having the Holy Spirit of promise, Who is the earnest of our inheritance. Such is what we have in the mean time: not the possession which comes at the fullness of the seasons and not before, but the Spirit meanwhile, as the earnest until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory. For when that fullness arrives, it will be glory, His glory, and not as now the dealings and riches of His grace. The Lord hasten that glorious day!

Courtesy of BibleTruthPublishers.com. Most likely this text has not been proofread. Any suggestions for spelling or punctuation corrections would be warmly received. Please email them to: BTPmail@bibletruthpublishers.com.

Administration of the Fullness of the Seasons, Administration of the Fullness of the Seasons, The: 2

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

Eph. 1:10

"Therefore say unto the house of Israel, thus saith the Lord Jehovah, I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for my holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen whither ye went. And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am Jehovah, saith the Lord Jehovah, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. And I will also save you from all your uncleanness: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you. And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen. Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations. Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord Jehovah, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel. Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities, I will also cause you to dwell in the cities, and the wastes shall be builded. And the desolate land shall be tilled, whereas it lay desolate in the sight of all that pass by. And they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are become fenced, and are inhabited. Then the heathen that are left round about you shall know that I Jehovah build the ruined places, and plant that which was desolate: I Jehovah have spoken it, and I will do it. Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock. As the holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem in her solemn feasts; so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men: and they shall know that I am Jehovah" (Ezekiel 36:22-38).

This citation is the more observable, because it seems the one the Lord had chiefly in view in His conversation with Nicodemus (John 3). Jesus had laid down the necessity of being born afresh as the condition of seeing the kingdom of God; and to the question of the Jewish ruler, He answered, that except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter that kingdom. Flesh and Spirit admit of no modification in the nature of each, which remains distinct and unchanged. Hence Nicodemus was not to marvel if Jews must be born again in order to have part in God's kingdom; for the question is about the kingdom, and not salvation merely. When then Nicodemus still inquires, "How can these things be?" the Lord says, "Art thou the teacher of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, we speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?" Thus it is clear, that when the Lord spoke of the need of the new birth, the Jewish teacher ought to have understood; for so had the prophet Ezekiel shown.

Before Israel enjoys the earthly blessings in the promised land, Israel will be born again. Israel will be sprinkled with clean water, and will have a new spirit put within them. It is afterward they have the earthly things of the kingdom of God. "I will also save you from all your uncleanness; and I will call for the corn, and will increase it," etc. "And they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden." The important thing to notice, is, that in all this the Lord had not gone beyond the earthly things, or that which was essential to their enjoyment, i.e. the new birth. Of course, to have blessings in heavenly places a man must a fortiori be born again; but even the Jewish people, as we have seen, must be born afresh to have the earthly promises in God's kingdom. In speaking of the new birth, He had not gone beyond the range of earthly things and what a Jew ought to have learned from the prophets. "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?" On the latter, the Lord does not touch further than to intimate the lifting up of the Son of man, and the gift of the Son of God in God's love not to the Jews only but to the world: which things involve, as we know, the exaltation of the Lord into glory on high, and the union of the church with Him there, as the fullness of that heavenly Man. The lifting up of the Son of man was, so far as man's responsibility is concerned, the demolition (though in God's wisdom and grace the ultimate security) of all the earthly hopes of the Jews. For in Christ all the promises of God found their meeting-place; and if He had been received, they would have been made good to His earthly people. But He was rejected. Wherefore God also highly exalted Him. The promises remain to be accomplished, based as they are upon the blood of the Mediator; but before that accomplishment takes place, a new and extraordinary work goes on; namely, the formation of a body to share the glory of Christ above, when God's purpose is fulfilled of gathering all things, heavenly and earthly, under the headship of Christ, for the church shares that inheritance with Him. This, then, was the mystery of the will of God: not the kingdom of God, nor the new birth, indispensable as it is for its earthly promises. Of these the Prophets had spoken; but they were silent on the purpose of God which destined Christ and the church to rule over all things in the heavens and on the earth. The restitution of all things was not in any sense a mystery; but that was.

Be it observed by the way, that 1 Peter 1:10-12 does not at all refer to this mystery, but to other privileges which formed the burden of many a prophetic strain. The salvation of souls was certainly no hidden secret: "of which salvation the prophets," etc. They searched, no doubt, what, or what manner of, time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify; but it is manifest that the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow, testified before-hand by the ancient prophets, cannot be the mystery which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit (Eph. 3). Here were things testified before-hand, ministered unto us and not unto themselves; for it was so revealed to them.

But clearly these previously revealed privileges totally differ from another sphere of blessing which from the beginning of the world was kept hid in God. Nor do the Epistles of Peter once allude to our fellowship with Christ as His body. The mystery is nowhere introduced. We are regarded "as begotten again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled... kept by the power of God" etc. We are exhorted to diligence, sobriety, confident hope, obedience in holiness, and withal to pass the time of our sojourning in fear, knowing our redemption with the precious blood of Christ. It is not doubted that the persons whom Peter addressed were members of Christ's body; but it is certain, that the Spirit here dwells upon the blessings which spring from the resurrection of Christ; our incorruptible life in power, holy and royal priesthood, pilgrim-calling, and the like. He speaks not of our union with Christ in heaven. Hence also, when the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven is referred to, it is as the power of preaching the gospel unto us, never as the One Who constituted us, Jew and Gentile, God's habitation (Eph. 2), or Who baptized us into one body (1 Cor. 12). In other words, the mystery is not treated in the Epistles of Peter, whereas it is the main subject to the Ephesians and also to the Colossians.

Administration of the Fullness of the Seasons, Administration of the Fullness of the Seasons, The: 1

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

Christ is the true and only center of the purposes of God, as it is only by Him the Holy Ghost reveals them. Hence it is, and must be in the proportion of our Spirit-taught acquaintance with Christ, that the divine plans are understood and appreciated. When He is not steadily kept before the soul, what becomes of the study of scripture itself? It is no longer truth which sanctifies, but a barren theology which puffs up. And why has prophecy been perverted to unfruitful and injurious speculation? Because God's grand object has been lost sight of ("that in all things he might have the pre-eminence" one might perhaps apply here); and thereby the Spirit has been grieved, and has blown upon the busy exercises of man's mind. "He shall glorify me," said the Lord, "for He shall take of mine and show it unto you" (John 16:14). The moment the view of the glory of Christ is supplanted by researches into providence for instance, important as this may be in its place, the temple of prophecy degenerates into a countinghouse of human intellect; and the tables of those who traffic in mere erudition crowd its courts, until by the just judgment of God it is left desolate. But by His grace a better sanctuary is opened for those who have ears to hear and eyes to see Jesus crowned with glory and honor in the heavens. May we have grace to draw near through the rent veil, and there by our Master's side, with unshod feet and worshipping hearts, follow His eye and finger as they rest upon the spheres of His varied but harmonious glory!

"Since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, besides Thee, what He hath prepared for him that waiteth for Him." There the Jewish prophet necessarily stopped. "But," says the apostle (1 Cor. 2) taking up the words, "God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit." "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world [or, the ages] unto our glory." How often we hear a member of the body of Christ quoting the words, "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard it," to justify an ignorance which the Spirit of God takes pains to show us is no longer excusable. The things which God hath prepared for them that love Him are now disclosed. Our position is the contrast of that of the Jews. God did reveal them to us through His Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. True, these depths are not the things of man, and are therefore undiscoverable by human ken. But a Christian is called no longer to walk nor to think *κατὰ ἄνθρωπον*: if he seem to be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise. "The things of God knoweth no one except the Spirit of God." And what is that to the Christian? Everything. "For we received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." "We have the mind (*νοῦν*) of Christ."

So in Ephesians, God caused grace "to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself for the administration of the fullness of the seasons, to gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in the heavens, and which are on the earth, in Him in whom also we obtained inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose" etc. (Eph. 1:9-11). The great and precious revelations of the Old Testament, as Moses told the Jews (Deut. 30:29), belong, in an emphatic sense, unto them and their children. Jehovah their God had reserved the secret things unto Himself. Hence the force and importance of the verses just cited from this Epistle. His grace He caused to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence. He has made known unto us the secret of His will, according to the good pleasure which He purposed in Himself for an administration of the accomplishment of the set times. And what is this purpose of God? It is in one head, Christ, to sum up the universe, the things in heaven, and the things on the earth; in Him in whom also we were allotted inheritance. That is, the mystery of God's will consists of two great parts: first, Christ is to be the Head of all things heavenly and earthly; and secondly, the church is to be associated with Him in that inheritance. And so the apostle, having treated of the design of God to re-head all things in Christ, turns also at once to the collateral purpose of joining the church as heir with Him, first alluding to the Jewish saints brought into this relationship, and then to the Ephesians themselves, the Gentile saints whom he was actually addressing: "that we [i.e. the Jews now believing] should be to the praise of His glory who are pre-trusters in Christ; in whom ye also" [i.e. Gentile believers], &c. When they heard, they believed the gospel. For they had no previous revelation or hope like the Jews.

In the closing verses of this chapter we have the same two-fold truth, with this difference, that it is not in connection with God's future purpose respecting the heading up of all things in Christ when the appointed times are completed, but with Christ's present exaltation at the right hand of God. Nevertheless, here as before, is seen the double glory of Christ. God hath given Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all. And thereupon chapter 2 enters into the manner of God's display of His grace in His kindness towards Jew and Gentile in Christ Jesus.

If we turn to Acts 3 it is clear, that the times of refreshing and the restoring of all things were no secret of God's will. Peter speaks of this restitution of all things as the familiar hope of the Jewish nation. God had spoken of this by the mouth of His holy prophets since the world began. It therefore must be a distinct thing from, however closely connected with, the mystery of Eph. 1:9-11. Let us take one of these prophetic testimonies, and the difference will be plain.

(To be continued, D.V.)

Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians, Ephesians 1:15-23, Remarks on

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

We have now the Holy Spirit leading the apostle into a remarkable prayer flowing out of the subject (or, at least, a part of it) already brought before us. It will be found that all is in the most orderly connection which it is possible to conceive, even when revealed to us; an order that we never could have conceived, unless God had made it known, but which, once communicated, approves itself immediately to the spiritual judgment. For the blessing which the enraptured apostle had poured out in the earlier verses flows, we have seen, from a twofold title of God: "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (vs. 3).

Accordingly in this epistle there are two prayers, answering to this double title. The first prayer is given in the portion now before us, and pertains to His title as the God of our Lord Jesus Christ; and in chapter 3:14 we have a corresponding prayer, which answers to the second title, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Both clearly have Christ as the foundation and center; but, then, Christ regarded in a wholly different point of view. In the former of the two Christ is viewed as man, as one who calls God His God; in the second of them, Christ is regarded in His still more intimate relationship as Son, who therefore brings before us the Father. We, too, have communion with God in both respects; we have to do with Him as God and as Father. It is said in John 4, "The hour is coming and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth." But then our Lord adds, "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). There is an immense difference between the two things. As the Father He is seeking worshippers, communicating the unspeakable favor of bringing them to the knowledge of His love. He forms their hearts after the display of Himself in Christ, causes them to overflow with thanksgiving and praise, and thus constitutes them worshippers in spirit and in truth. But then it is added, that God is a spirit. Whatever the form in which He might have manifested Himself in Judaism, for special reasons—whatever displays of His judicial majesty, in tangible ways, Himself properly hidden, He is a spirit, and consequently He must have spiritual worship. Thus it is not merely the exceeding love that is seeking and making and gathering our worshippers, but it is the necessary character of the only worship that He admits now. From the moment that He reveals Himself fully, He can own nothing but real worship in the Spirit. The day of forms, rites, and ceremonies is totally passed. Hence it is not only that He does not look for them, but He scorns them; He treats them as a libel upon His nature, a slight on His Son, and Satan's substitute for the power of the Holy Spirit. They that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. I think it important to bring out the connections of the blessed Word of God so as to show that the distinction pointed out is not imaginative. Alas! that men should be beguiled to invent, in presence of the untold treasures of the Bible. All we have to do is to bow before what is given us there. We may have, no doubt, to learn; but where the truth is known, what a mercy to be entirely delivered from the vain desire or the need of any invention! It is natural to unsatisfied man to seek out exciting novelties. But God is infinitely above man, and His Word rich beyond all thought; so that all we have to do is to submit our souls to Scripture, assured, too, that the revelation of God, old as it is, offers practically that which is ever new to the heart.

In this epistle we have these two prayers; the first of them introduced by the apostle, who says, "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints" (vs. 15). Now, inasmuch as our love would bring in the thought of something on man's part that would give importance to us, although he is about to speak of love to the saints, he introduces the matter by "faith," because this throws us not so much on our love to Him as His love to us. "Wherefore," he says, "I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus," (vs. 15) and then gives the consequence of this, "and your love unto all the saints." This is a very important word in judging of our love. We are all apt to form a circle, even among the saints of God—to have those that we prefer, those that suit us best, whose thoughts, feelings, habits, are more or less the same as our own, or, at least, are no great trial to us. But, then, this is not love to the saints. There is more love to ourselves in it than loving them. The flesh likes what is agreeable to us—what does not cause us pain, what is, perhaps, a gratification to the amiabilities of nature. All that may be where there is really no exercise of the new nature, no mighty power of the Spirit of God working in our hearts. We have always to test our souls, and ask how we stand in this. Is the prominent motive and object of our hearts the Lord Jesus? Is it with Him and for Him that we think of and feel towards all the saints.

I fully admit that love towards the saints cannot, and ought not, to take the same shape towards all. It must be in the energy and intelligence of the Spirit, varied according to the call upon love. While one ought to love even a person who is under discipline, it would be a very great mistake to suppose that your love must be shown in the same way as if he were not. You do not cease to love him; indeed you never are in a position and spirit to exercise discipline with the Lord where there is not love; righteous hatred of the sin, indignation it may be, but real charity to the person. It would be better to wait upon God if it be not so in our hearts, till we can take it up in the spirit of divine grace. There must be, of course, a dealing in righteousness; but even in dealing with one's child there ought not to be such a thing as chastening in a passion. Anything that merely arises out of a sudden impulse, is not a feeling that glorifies God about evil. Therefore, in cases of discipline, there ought to be self judgment, and great patience, too, unless it be something so flagrant that to hesitate about it would be culpable weakness, or want of decision and jealousy for God; for there are some sins so offensive to God and man that they ought, if we are sensitive to His holiness and obedient, to be met with grave energy and, as it were, on the very spot. The arena of the sin God would have to be the scene of its judgment according to His will.

Supposing something done in the public assembly, false doctrine in the midst of God's people, if there were the power of God, and a heart for His rights, it might be due to His majesty to deal with it without delay. This is sufficiently plain from the Word of God, where in a case of direct hypocrisy and lying against God, we find the promptness of the Holy Spirit through the apostle, in the very presence of the Church, which at once judged the fraud that was attempted to be practiced upon Him who dwelt there. I deny there was want of love in this: rather was it the

necessary accompaniment of divine love acting, through the Holy Spirit's might in the assembly, or at least, by Peter, as the special instrument of His power therein. It was a stern judgment, doubtless; but it was the fruit of intense desire for the saints of God and of horror that such a sin should get a footing and shelter among them, and the Holy Spirit should be thus foully dishonored, and be grieved with the whole Church, if it were connived at. But in ordinary cases the same love would wait, and let time be given for the fault to be owned and repented of. In nine cases out of ten mistakes arise from precipitancy, because we are apt to be jealous for our own reputation. O how little have we realized that we are crucified and dead with Christ! We feel the scandal, or something that affects the public mind: this is not the power of the Holy Spirit, but the selfish egotism that is at work in our hearts. We do not like to lose our character, nor share the sorrow and shame of Christ in those who bear His name. Not, of course, that one would make light of what is wrong: that never could be right about anything either great or small. We ought never to justify the least wrong, whether in ourselves or in others, but accustom our souls to the habitual clearing of the name of the Lord, even if it be about a hasty word. If we begin to be careless about little offenses, there is nothing to preserve us from great sins but the mere mercy of God. If love unto all the saints were working in our hearts, there would be less haste.

We sometimes misconstrue things, and endeavor to give, as we take, a very somber impression, where evil was but in appearance. Let us beware of judging according to the first blush, where the reality may prove to be otherwise: it is not righteous judgment. We should seek to judge things by a higher standard, and in the light of God. In these serious matters we are bound to be sure, and never to yield to suspicion. All judgment, if it be according to God, must proceed upon what is known and certain, not upon what is a surmise—too often the effect of an unfounded pretension to superior spirituality. We find the importance of this constantly; and were our souls more simple about it, fewer mistakes would be made.

Christ has the first place where the heart is true; and next, "all the saints" become the object of our love. If there are two cases of persons in fault, and the one were a prime favorite, and the other but little liked, the latter is in imminent danger, I need hardly say, of going to the wall. My object of aversion would labor under a cloud which obscures the truth, no matter how evident it might be to the dispassionate; whereas, on the contrary, the favorite would derive that which outweighs the proofs of guilt, from the unwillingness on the part of his friends to pronounce anything wrong about him. Both these feelings are thoroughly at issue, in such circumstances, with the mind of God. Indeed, both favoritism and prejudices are utterly condemned by His blessed Word. "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (James 3:17).

"Love unto all the saints" (vs. 15) is enjoined because they are saints. To love them because God has separated and brought them into an eternal relationship with Himself, is the only true and Christian love to such. Our great difficulty always is that our thoughts, feelings, actions, should flow from this ground. Do not mistake me. I do not mean that it is wrong to have friends. Our Lord had. He loved John as He did not love the others, and yet there was a sense in which He loved them every one alike; as His saints, they were beyond comparison precious in His sight. He might prize the faithfulness of some of His servants; He might have to encourage, reprove, correct all round; and we must leave room for all these things. There is the grand basis of love to all the saints; but it is clear we are not bound to open out matters of a personal nature to every one because he is a saint. For example, saints are not always the wisest of men; and while we are not to disown their saintship, we are not bound to lay bare our difficulties, or to seek counsel in what may require ripe spiritual judgment from those who could render no help whatever in the case. Love there must be always. This brings in the value of that divine principle, "esteeming others better than ourselves." This I hold to be true of all saints. It might be a man that had not two ideas, and yet have Christ before his soul. He might be very ignorant and very foolish—hasty perhaps in spirit, strong in prejudice, weak in his sympathies, and worthless as a counselor; but if there is evidently a soul that cleaves to Christ, and values Him above everything, can I not, should I not, esteem him better than myself? Do not I see there is that which admonishes my soul—which refreshes and edifies so much more than if he were merely the staunchest friend and the wisest adviser? In the least saint of God there is that which both cheers and humbles the heart. I am not to esteem a person for a quality which he may not possess: God does not, could not, put such a phantom before us. On the other hand, it is well to bethink ourselves of the preciousness of every saint as such. Show me the very weakest and most trying of them all—yet we may and ought to cultivate a real, genuine respect for them as God's children. There is not only God for them, but what is of Christ in them; and this may commend them above all other considerations to Him who values communion with the Father and the Son.

On the contrary, in thinking of ourselves, ought we not to feel how much there is that is unlike Christ? May we ever be especially alive to that in which we break down and grieve the Spirit of God! This would have the effect of lowering and putting down our own self-esteem. Could we think so highly of ourselves, if we felt as we ought our exceeding and, alas! frequent failure, in presence of the rich, perfect grace of God to our souls? Whereas, if we had before us in others, not their failure, but Christ's love and life on and in them, and the glory to which they belong, what would be the effect? "Love unto all the saints" (vs. 15). It is Christ discerned in the saints, which is the power of the love He would have going out towards them. Under certain circumstances, with a person whom you trusted God might bring out as a saint—whom you have prayed for, and whose good you have sought in any way, yet at the given time it might be a sin to associate as a Christian. I am speaking of one who had by filthiness of flesh or spirit brought dishonor upon the name of the Lord. But though we may for the time abstain from all the expressions of loving intercourse, yet love always finds a place in which to show itself, though sometimes it may be only in the presence of God, and not manifestly to the human eye. So that, as to the manner of showing love, we must search the Word of God. But the general principle cannot be doubted, that God would lay upon our hearts all the saints. He has them all upon His own heart, and He will have us to cultivate this largeness of family affection.

Accordingly Paul, who entered into this in a measure which even the saints addressed perhaps knew little of practically, adds, "Wherefore I cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him." There is the title so often referred to—"the God of our Lord Jesus Christ" (vs. 3). He is about to speak of the divine dealing with man and even with Christ as man; for of course it is only in that sense that one could so speak. But if dealing with us accordingly, working mercies through the risen man and fresh blessings suited to this character, yet He is "the Father of glory" (vs. 17) as being the great Head and Fountain of all heavenly blessedness, the One from whom it all came to His own name and praise. This at once lets us into the secret of the prayer. Glory is the main thought—not the only, but the most prominent, feature of the prayer. Hence then the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, purposes and works by Him to give certain blessings to us; and it will be found that the basis of the bright pillar of blessing is Christ risen and glorified at the right hand of God. If you look at the prayer in chapter 3, there is not a word about His being there exalted, "far above all principality, and power, and might;" (vs. 21) for its subject is not glory at all—not what God has done: it is not anything conferred upon Christ, but Himself and His love, the sum and substance of my blessing;

as it is said there “that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith” (ch. 3:17). Here the prayer in chapter 1 is the contrast in every way of that in chapter 3.

In the latter, love is the parent idea, and not glory. It is well to bear in mind always this wonderful connection of love and glory; because the one would not do without the other. And although glory be its bright manifestation and effect, yet love is still deeper and is never fully known except in the immediate presence of our Father. The kingdom is not the evidence in our case of the love of God; the proof of it on our behalf is that we are to be with the Son in the Father’s house, and that we shall appear with Christ in glory. Who brings us there? The world knows nothing about the Father’s house. It is a scene outside the earth that no eye of man here below can possibly enter into. But He will also display us to the world.

Hence it is that in John 17 you will find that the glory which the Father gives the Son and which the Son gives to us because of His all—perfect love—this glory is in order that the world may know that the Father sent the Son and loved us as He loved the Son. But mark, the glory there, as here, is set prominently forward. As we have the prayer of glory in Ephesians 1 and the prayer of love in Ephesians 3, so the glory that is given in John 17 is to prove what otherwise would not have been so clearly made known to the world. Men here below may see the glory, but they cannot enter into the love. The world will gather from our being in the glory with the Lord Jesus that we were loved with the same love wherewith the Lord Jesus was loved. Glory expresses itself outwardly, but love goes deeper still and brings into the scene where the Father reveals Himself in His beloved Son. This is what I may call an intimate, family scene outside the world, the heavenly rest and home. It is not merely brightness, glory, majesty, or power. All these things will have their full display; but there is something deeper than all and which lies at the root of all. It is the love, though it be the least entered into, yet at the same time was really before all, and that to which all will turn. It is the highest of all, and it is eternal. The kingdom may terminate—the love never. The display before the world will have a beginning and an end. But as the love will never end, so it always was in the bosom of God the Father.

Thus we have the prayer that “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him.” There might be a little difficulty if it were simply “the knowledge of Him” (vs. 17). The proper meaning of the word is “the full knowledge of him” (vs. 17). They already knew Him, but He prayed that they might know Him more. He wanted them to be fathers in Christ, and what constitutes a father is a deep and growing knowledge of Christ Himself. The Spirit of God alone could give them this entrance into it; but it was in the full knowledge of Him. “The eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe.” We have three things here brought before us. First, “the hope of His calling” (vs. 18).

Now I conceive that there he is referring in measure to what we have already found in the early part of the chapter. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, according as He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love” (vss. 3-4). At any rate, I think verse 4 is before his mind’s eye here. Verse 5 brings in His place as Father. “The hope of His calling” (vs. 18) is founded on the full blessedness that pertains to us according to that purpose of God which is already ours in Christ—already made known to us and received by our hearts—the calling of God that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love. But then if this be the hope of His calling (for everything is made to flow from God Himself), he adds, “and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (vs. 18). There clearly he refers to what we found in the body of the chapter: the inheritance and not only the calling. The calling was the effectual work of God’s grace, and the riches of the inheritance rather the glory suited to such a calling. But, besides this character of glory, there is first the hidden portion suitable to being chosen to be holy and without blame before Him in love—called to be the reflection of His own holy, loving nature, which, of course, we have got in the life of Christ, and which we shall have perfectly developed when changed into His image, from glory to glory. For His calling has its own proper hope of what we shall enjoy in His presence.

Then there is, secondly, the inheritance. He wished them to know the riches of its glory, to know it better. But he uses a remarkable expression—“the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (vs. 18). You must carefully guard against prevalent error on that subject, namely, that the saints mean the inheritance. This is not at all the force of the phrase; nay, I have no hesitation in saying that it would falsify the chief blessedness of the Church’s calling. If we look at the Old Testament, we find that Israel was His inheritance and His people; and that God, by virtue of Israel, took possession of the land. When the day comes for God to be king, and more than king, when He takes under His government the entire universe, how will this be done? Will it be by Israel? No; but by virtue of His heavenly saints—the Church of God. The expression seems to be purposely large. Most decidedly it means the saints changed or risen that are in the likeness of Christ, in an entirely heavenly condition. Such is the mode in which God will challenge and assume the inheritance by and by into His own hand. When He took Canaan, He did not come down and possess it by heavenly power, but by means of His people. But when God expels the wicked spirits from any connection with the heavenly places—when He puts down all power upon the earth—everything that contradicts Himself, and reduces the whole universe into subjection to the name of Christ, what people will take it in His name as Israel entered on the land of Canaan? The risen saints. Hence the meaning of the words, “the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (vs. 18). The common notion that the saints constitute the inheritance is unscriptural. For most carefully throughout the New Testament, the saints are always represented as (not the inheritance, but) the heirs, “heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17). They are nowhere treated as the inheritance, but, on the contrary, what is revealed as the inheritance, means the things in heaven and things on earth; and the Church is always sedulously separated from them. This I consider to be a point which cannot be left as an open question; the testimony of the Word is too abundant and precise. We ought never to allow what is clearly revealed in Scripture to be debatable or uncertain, because doubt always has an injurious effect upon the spirit, no less than it insults God and grieves His Spirit. Another’s certainty will not do for us; but we need not hesitate to speak plainly where we have no doubt of God’s mind upon a subject. And when we look at it in this point of view, it quite falls in with the structure of the chapter. As we have found “the hope of His calling” (vs. 18) in the first clause answering to what we had in the earlier verses, so the “glory of the inheritance” answers to the middle verses of the chapter. God means to have the whole universe blest and happy under Christ; not merely glory given to Him in heaven, or a people subject to Him here below. We have here an incomparably larger view of what God intends. Christ is to have universal blessedness and glory, all things in heaven and earth being put under Him; and we have obtained in Him this inheritance.

The remaining point is “the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places.” Why not draw attention to the power that was put forth when He made the world? When Israel are addressed, He speaks of Himself as the Jehovah-God who clave the

Red Sea, and brought His people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

But what to us is the Red Sea crossed? The resurrection of Christ; not the incarnation nor even the cross of Christ, though we could not do without either. The cross, though the most essential of all things for God's glory and our need, does not give us the power of God. It shows us what God calls His weakness, and if I look at Christ there, He was "crucified through weakness" (2 Cor. 13:4). It was One who submitted to everything, who put Himself in the power of His creatures; who went down under the judgment of God and sank even under the puny hand of man. But when we look at the resurrection, all trace of weakness is forever past away and nothing is seen but the most triumphant power of God; a power far beyond anything connected with either the law or creation. It was a question of going down into the grave not merely of a man, but of that man who had borne in His person the sins of every soul that believes in Him. And so completely was God glorified about these sins that He takes up the despised, rejected, forsaken man from under the unheard-of burden, and puts Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places.

We have there the astonishing contrast between the grave in which Christ lay and the glory into which He is now exalted, still as man—the glorified man, far above all creatures, be they ever so high or blest: above creatures which were far above man in one sense and never known taint or fall: above the principalities, authorities, dominions, powers on high, the heavenly orders, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but in that which is to come. There will be the display of angelic hosts then, when the Son of man shall come in His glory and all the holy angels with Him. But He is raised above them all now. To be above them as God would be nothing new; He is so always. But He has carried humanity above them; He is there exalted in our nature—risen, of course, but still the nature of man. He has given us present association with the throne of God. For the application of all this is given to us here—"the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He wrought in Christ, when He raised him from the dead." It is not merely the exceeding greatness of His power towards Christ, but towards us in Christ. The power that wrought in our deliverance from Satan, that gave us our place of saints before God, is the self-same power that raised up Christ from the dead and put Him in the most glorious place in heaven. Is there anything difficult after this? If we knew we had at command the power which called the world into being, should we not laugh at impossibilities? But we have an energy greater than that—no less than what raised up Christ from the dead. The word of God positively tells us so. Why then are we so weak? Because we so feebly believe it. The great mass of God's children never hear about it at all. But even they, who through the mercy of God have heard, how little do they enter into it! It is one thing not to deny it doctrinally, another to apply it and live in it, not only for great straits or heavy blows, but for the ordinary train of daily duty, of that which becomes us as saints, subjecting ourselves to the will of God. We forget, if we are in circumstances of difficulty, if in the midst of foes, if we have to do with unseen enemies, what it is the apostle prays for us. That we may know the exceeding greatness of His power towards us who believe, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead. If the power of the Holy Spirit so wrought in Paul, it was but the answer of the servant to the Master's heart, who was so pleading above, that we might know the power that is above all obstacles. No saints could know this till after the resurrection was accomplished. It is to usward who believe—strictly to the New Testament saints, called in after the Lord's death and resurrection. Supposing that a deliverer were expected for anything at all, it would be perfectly right to cry for that deliverer—to feel that he was long in coming. But when he came, do you think it would be proper and suitable to urge him to come? It is the mistake people make now. They take up the language of the Psalms and apply it to Christian experience. But you could not have in the Psalms the revelation of that which we have here. God's love you surely have previous to the resurrection of Christ; but there was no such thing as that power at work which raised up Christ from the dead. Their mistake is profound who pervert the Old Testament so as to make it the language of our experience. It would be a sin if one did not use the Old Testament for our own profit and good; but that would be abusing, not using, it.

This, then, is the measure of the power at work towards us—the same power that wrought in Christ. How are any of these things to be known according to God? "In the full knowledge of him" (vs. 17). You will never learn any truth in power excepting in the deepening knowledge of Christ. It is the lack of this which is the cause of weakness among us; bare doctrine is not connection with Christ. When the flower is separated from that which is its source, its sustenance and support, it becomes a dying flower from that time. We have that which is lovely and full of blessing in Christ; but if we are to know it such, to prove its truth, to enjoy it always, it must be in taking these things as connected with Christ. Let me look at Christ, and I see there the very life that God has given me, and the hope of it too, even as to the inheritance. Who would dare to say, it is presumption for Christ to have it? Nay, but it is what is due to Him. God loves and delights in Him as man so well, that He could not keep back a single thing that He has made from Him. He is the heir of it all; and we, hidden in Christ, can enter into the fullness of His calling, and into the inheritance, because we merge in union with Christ. And as you can only know the calling and the inheritance in this full knowledge of Christ, so it is also with "the exceeding greatness of His power" (vs. 19). The measure of that power is, what God put forth when He raised up Christ "from" the dead, "and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places" (vs. 20). He has given Him the supreme seat of glory. No matter what could be conceived of the highest angel or archangel, Christ has received a higher dignity, and this place He holds in present association with us while we are here. It is One who not only owns us and is kind to us, and uses the greatness of His glory for our good, but far more. The sovereign that is exalted to the throne can use the throne for the good of his subjects, and the glory of those whom he desires to honor; but there is no positive, immediate, personal association with him. This is what the Christian has with Christ. Nothing less than to be one with Christ is what we have here. Therefore it is added, that this blessed One, under whose feet God has put everything, He has also given to be head over all things to the Church. It is not said, "head over the Church," (vs. 22) but "Head over all things to the Church." The Church shares His place of headship over all; as His body, but still in inseparable union with Him. The glorified Man has universal exaltation over all the creatures of God; and this He shares with us, and will soon manifest as our portion with Him. The Christian is now a member of Christ's body; now, therefore, by the Holy Spirit, in the most intimate association with Christ, not only as having life in Him, but as enjoying oneness with Him who is the supreme exalted Head over all. He is a member of His body; and although it was not to Eve directly that God gave the dominion, yet did she share it by His will. It was given to Adam, but by association Eve had it along with Adam. So the Church has it as the dependent and associated Eve of the heavenly Man, the last Adam. This gives us at once a bright view of what our calling is, and why God looks for complete separation from the world. In the time of the Protector in this country, it would have been improper for any one that held to the royal family to seek or even accept a post of honor. So with the Christian now. We belong to One who is hidden away from the earth—exalted now into this universal headship. The world that we see is not yet put under Christ practically, though to faith all things are; but we know that He is exalted, "head over all things to the church" (vs. 22).

We belong to Him, and He would have our hearts lifted up above all the present scene. The Church is "His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all" (vs. 23). It is the complement, or that which fills up Christ, looked at as man risen from the dead. As Son of God He, of course, requires nothing to complete His glory; but as man He does. He would no more be complete in His resurrection-glory without the Church, than

Adam would have been without Eve. And God has, in the counsels of His glory, so ordered it. He meant, from all eternity, that when His Son became this blessed, glorified man, He should share for His own honor and praise all the glory He had as the risen man, with those who were by nature poor, dead sinners, but now delivered from their sins, and made one with Christ on high. By the Spirit now given He communicates the knowledge of it to them while in the world, that they might be in spirit and ways entirely above the world.

Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians, Ephesians 1:13-14, Remarks on

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

We have already seen that the apostle, in verse 12, introduces the believing Jews as being brought into all the blessings spoken of in the previous portion. Then, addressing the Gentile saints at Ephesus, he says, "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise" (vs. 13). It may be profitable to enter into a further development of the Holy Spirit's presence and action. Men soon departed far from the truth of God. Before the three last centuries we know that a thick cloud of darkness hung over Christendom. But even since the light that shone at the Reformation, Christians have been struggling to realize in their own souls that they were born of God and justified in Christ. One fully admits the immense importance that a soul should be thoroughly established. But were regeneration and justification intended to be the sum and substance of the Christian's research, efforts, and desires? On the contrary, are they more than the very threshold, or at most, the foundation on which a Christian has to build? Does not God look for it, that being born again, instead of occupying ourselves with continual searching after signs and tokens that we are so, we should be making progress in Christ? To be born again is the first essential work of the Spirit of God, without which there is no life towards God, no possibility of advance in the things of God. It is the universal condition in order to any soul's having part in the blessing of God at all times and in all dispensations.

Hence, when Nicodemus came to our Lord, wishing to be taught of Him, our Lord at once begins there. The Rabbi owned that Jesus was a teacher come from God, by whom He wanted to be taught. But our Lord stops him in a peculiarly solemn manner: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Nicodemus, astonished, asked how such a thing could be? Our Lord, however, meets his unintelligent question with a re-assertion, only in still stronger terms: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). There we have clearly the explanation of what it is to be born again. It is to be born of water and of the Spirit. Nicodemus still expresses his amazement at this, that a Jew, a moral, religious Jew, who was no heathen, had the law and seemed to have been peculiarly honored of God, should need to be born afresh; that he himself, a master in Israel in a pre-eminent sense, should thus be met by what was really a rebuke to him, that pressed the necessity of a vital change, which so far from having realized, he did not even think to be necessary. This was indeed a thing that arrested Nicodemus at the very start. Our Lord, however, shows that he ought to have known these things from the prophets themselves. Mark this, because it is a thoroughly satisfactory answer to those who wish to connect the being born of water with baptism. He who is acquainted with the views taught here cannot fairly think that there is any depreciation of that institution of Christ. For I hold, that, nobody ought to be owned on Christian ground till he is baptized with water. I do not mean that he may not be a believer; but if he have not submitted to baptism in the name of the Lord, he is not yet ostensibly off Jewish or Pagan ground. And our Lord elsewhere insisted on the necessity of being baptized as well as believing. (Mark 16)

But important as baptism may be as the appointed sign of death and resurrection in Christ, yet our Lord did not directly refer to the rite with Nicodemus. For He says—not, "Art thou a disciple of Christ's?", but — "Art thou a master of Israel and knowest not these things?" (John 3:10). That is, as a Jew he ought to have known this. How could he know Christian baptism as a Jew? To such an one this was a novelty; it did not even exist at the time. How could that be known which was not yet brought out? He ought to have known what was meant by being born of water and of the Spirit, and to have felt the absolute necessity of it. What then was meant? This, that no matter where, when, or who, everyone who should see or enter the kingdom of God must be born of water and of the Spirit, must have the Holy Spirit communicating a new life to him. And how is that life produced? By an ordinance? No. By Christian walk? No. By what means, then? By prayer? Nay; but by the reception of God's Word revealing Christ. Therefore it is written that we are "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever" (1 Peter 1:23). With the testimony of Peter there is that of James also: "Of His own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures" (James 1:18). The instrument employed for God's begetting us is "the word of truth" (vs. 13). So that water is clearly used in this passage in John 3 as figurative of the Word of God applied by the Spirit. The two are joined together that it should not be supposed it is merely the Spirit using an ordinance, but rather applying God's Word with quickening power to the soul. Therefore, when speaking about believing, it is said, "How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" (Rom. 10:14). It is necessary the Word should be preached. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Compare also 1 Corinthians 4:15. It is no matter what positive passage of Scripture you take up, all teach the same thing. Our Lord insists that every one who enters the kingdom must enter by that door. What, then, is to become of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Some may say that circumcision is equivalent; but do not believe the dream for a moment; if so, what would become of so many before or outside both circumcision and baptism? All these explanations are mere clumsy guesses at Scripture. Even if there were no real difference between baptism and circumcision, when our Lord lays down the new birth He refers to neither. He does not insist on a rite with certain exceptions, but an absolute and universal spiritual necessity. He is not speaking of the comparatively modern rite of baptism—of that which, as it came late into the world, will not abide in it. For there is no ground, that I know, to suppose that during the millennium baptizing people with water will proceed. It is a rite peculiar to Christian times, at least baptism into Christ's death.

But John 3 speaks of what every person must pass through without qualification or exception, if he is to see and enter the kingdom of God—what was as true of the thief upon the cross as of Saul of Tarsus. All children of God, past, present, or future, are born again; all have this new life given to them. There is the communication of divine life to them. But as far as regards those who hear the Word, it is plainly through the Holy Spirit using the Word as a means of life. It is emphatically the presentation of Christ. In John 4 we enter on another operation of the Holy Spirit. "If thou knewest the free-giving of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water." The living water is plainly the Holy Spirit, whom Christ gives. Here it is not the quickening operation of the Spirit, indispensable for all times and under all circumstances, if any souls are to belong to God; but it is a special

privilege that Christ bestows personally. And you will find in the discourse of our Lord which follows, and is connected with what He had said to the woman of Samaria, that the Holy Spirit is given to believers now as the means of worshipping their God and Father in Spirit and in truth. Thus we have in John 4 a totally different operation of the Spirit from what was urged in John 3, and to whom did our Lord disclose this? To a poor, wretched, abandoned woman; not even a Jewess, but a Samaritan. Our Lord is there showing the grace that goes out to the very vilest. God was now no longer, as before, putting the law forward. He displays Himself as a giver: under the law God is rather a receiver; He asks, demands, insists that the creature render Him the honor due to His Majesty. In the gospel, God is the giver of His own Son. Instead of seeking something from guilty, lost man, He confers His very best on one who did not even ask Him. "If thou knewest the gift—the free-giving-of God (what a new sound to the Samaritan!) thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." This is what He does—He is giving the Spirit, the power of eternal life. The consequence of this most precious opening out of the truth is, that we have the Holy Spirit in us as the spring of communion and power of worship. It is not so much as using the Word of God to deal with us in our natural uncleanness and to communicate a new life which cleaves to God and hates sin, with new feelings, new desires, new wants, which are only answered in Christ, and which every regenerate soul must have, if it were a poor nun, or a superstitious priest going through the mass. Yet if one were born of God, he could not but have a yearning after what he had not, and find, in the long run, Christ the object that attracted his soul—Christ the contrast of all that was found on earth or anywhere—Christ the only One that suited him, and the One, too, whose glory it was so to bless him. Of what would this be the proof that he was born of God. For there is no proof but what may turn out a delusion save this—that my wants turn me to Christ, and make me find in Him the only One that can satisfy the soul.

But in John 4 it is not the case of a proud ruler of the Pharisees who is made to feel the need of regeneration, but a depraved woman, that had lost her character, to whom no one would have spoken, except—wonderful to say—the Son of God! It is to her that the Lord brings out this great truth, the gift of the Spirit: no longer merely acting morally on the soul or quickening, but Himself dwelling in the heart, the Holy Spirit—the power of divine fellowship and worship. What a joy! The Holy Spirit dwelling in believers, the Father seeking such to worship Him. Do you know this? Or are you still trammelled by what is now past, what once existed, and then had the sanction of God? By the rule of a past dispensation for an earthly people? By rites which no longer have the slightest value in His sight who reveals Himself as Father? The day of forms and ceremonies is entirely gone. How often people say, We do not attach importance to such things? The truth is, that they are now a very bad thing, and contrary to God's actual order. It is not only that fine sights and sounds should not be an object in worship, but it is a positive sin to seek or admit them. It is, in principle, a going back to idolatry and a condemned world. Therefore, in John 4, our Lord brings in "The hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23). There is the truth enunciated about worship. At Jerusalem the splendor of ceremonials had been at its height; but now all this is over, and any one fighting for it now unwittingly rebels against Christ. Our Lord shows that it is no longer in that mountain nor at Jerusalem that God should be worshipped—there was just about to dawn a new condition of things. But what does God value now? The true worshippers adoring the Father in spirit and in truth. Who are they? His children. "The Father seeketh such to worship him" (John 4:23). He is gathering children, forming them for His own praise, putting the Holy Spirit within them to give the consciousness of their relationship with Himself, and, having this, to draw near to Him as their God and Father.

It is plain, then, that the notion now of having a mixed worship of people, some converted and some not, is a direct contradiction of Christianity. It could not be otherwise before the cross. There was then no such thing as God separating His children from those that were not thus related to Him. It would have been a sin for a believing Israelite to have said to an unbeliever, I cannot worship with you, because you are not born of God. But now the sin is to join in God's worship with those who are not His children; and for this simple reason, that the Father is seeking true worshippers, and none but such, to worship Him. I do not mean that it is a sin for those not converted to be in the same place as spectators and hearers. But the attempt to join every body in the worship of God is a fatal delusion, dishonoring to Himself and destructive to the souls of those that are not true worshippers. But people have not faith to stand separate from the world. They like to have the countenance of men; and of course it is trying to have to act decidedly. We are warned of God that if we seek to please men we should not be the servants of Christ. We must run the risk of paining them, but faithful are the wounds of a friend. Some confound hearing the gospel or other truth with worship. But they are totally different. In worshipping God, Christians offer up to God services of praise and thanksgiving. Worship is what goes from the believer to God; whereas in the gospel or other ministry it is a message coming down from God for the good of souls, for the instruction of believers, or for the conviction and salvation of unbelievers. But whether it be one or other addressed, it is always that which comes from God to them, and not what goes from them to God; so that the confounding of these two things is a serious evil. Among many the thing which makes them attached to the old walls and routine is not the prayers, but because they hope to hear something good in the sermon. They entirely thus pass out of the condition of worshippers. Worship is the true expression of the heart's praise and thanks by the Holy Spirit, whether by an illiterate man or not. We know in the case of the apostles that they could not speak correctly (Acts 4); but, for all that, they were the chosen vessels of such a power of God as never visited this earth before or since, in men of like passions with ourselves. And I believe it is so still and always will be so. God chooses the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. Although there may be a Paul brought in occasionally, these are the exceptions, and God never intends that the exceptions should become the rule.

Thus, besides regeneration, which is the first operation of the Spirit of God, there is the further gift of the Holy Spirit. "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation" (vs. 13). They were born of water and of the Spirit. They heard the word of truth, which we find in this very epistle set forth under the figure of water. "That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" (ch. 5:26). It is not only that the Church is washed by the word, but the poor sinner is born of the word when he believes the gospel—born of water and of the Spirit. But was it merely that they were born of water and of the Spirit? "In whom also, after that ye believed (or having believed), ye were sealed with that holy spirit of promise" (vs. 13). It is very startling to many to find that, after they have been born of the Spirit, there is such a thing as being sealed by the Spirit. That is the reason why men invented confirmation. They felt from the Scripture that there is something over and above being born of water. Therefore a religion of forms first made baptism to regenerate everyone, and then confirmation to crown it. But forms are no better than idolatry: it is putting something in the place of Christ. After the apostles left, this grew apace—ceremonies, done by the hand of men, were substituted for the power of the Holy Spirit acting on the souls of men. Finding from the Word of God that there were these two things, regeneration first and then the subsequent gift of the Holy Spirit, they adopted two different ceremonies—in one sense very properly, if there should be a religion of forms at all. But it is a total mistake of the very nature of Christianity.

Yet the truth remains that there were two different operations of the Holy Spirit. The first is, when a man is brought to a sense of sin. What makes a man abhor himself? He is born of God. He has no happiness at all, perhaps, but a deep sense of ruin; yet his heart cleaves to God. That man is born of God—truly converted: no comfort as yet perhaps in his soul, but his heart is open to listen further to the word of the truth, the gospel of salvation. He believes it. What then? He is sealed of the Holy Spirit, as a believer, not only in Christ, but in the gospel of our salvation—the work that Christ has done. For I do not think that you can have a soul sealed with the Holy Spirit, unless he enters into the work as well as the person of Christ. This accounts for the fact that there were persons born of the Holy Spirit who never were sealed. For instance, the Old Testament saints were believers in Christ; they all looked for Christ. All were born of God, but not one was sealed with the Holy Spirit. To be born of the Spirit and sealed with the Spirit are very different things, which may or may not be united in the same person. All must be born of the Spirit, but it is never said that all must be sealed with the Spirit in order to enter into the kingdom of God. Wherever the Holy Spirit speaks of the sealing of the Spirit, it proves the contrary. Who was the first person said to be sealed with the Spirit? Our blessed Lord Himself. He had it in a way peculiar to Himself. When was He sealed? When redemption was accomplished, and He went up to heaven? No; but when Christ was upon earth. “Him hath God the Father sealed” (John 6:27). It was as Son of man He was sealed, and as Son of man on earth before redemption—without bloodshedding, because He knew no sin: there was no guile found in His mouth. He was absolutely sinless: He could have the Holy Spirit abiding on Him entirely apart from blood, because He was the Holy One—the Saviour. He needed no work—no blood—no redemption; but yet He died, and there was blood shed and redemption effected. Why so? That we might be sealed—that we, who had no natural title to be brought nigh—that we, in whom the Holy Spirit could never take up His abode, might have the same Holy Spirit who dwelt in Him abiding in us.

This is what our Lord gradually brings out to view. “Thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water.” Therefore it was that the Lord taught the disciples to ask for the Holy Spirit; and this, after they were already regenerate. Yet he tells them to ask the Father for the Holy Spirit. (Luke 11) Is it the same thing now, seeing that He has given the Spirit? Am I to ask for the Holy Spirit, when I have Him dwelling in me? It would have been the most flagrant unbelief after Christ was in the midst of the disciples, had they asked God to send Christ. And now, when the Holy Spirit is sent from heaven, and given to be in us a well of water springing up into everlasting life, what is it for persons to entreat for the Holy Spirit to be given?—for Christians to be praying for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit? It is a practical denial that the Holy Spirit is sent down from heaven, and is dwelling in us. It is quite right to pray that we may not grieve Him, and that we may not quench Him. To pray that we may be strengthened with all might according to His Spirit in the inner man is according to the Word of God; but we ought not to say one word that implies the Holy Spirit is not here when He is. A most grievous cloud of darkness rests on the minds of many children of God as to this subject. They do not believe their privileges; they do not know that the Holy Spirit dwells in them. Does not the Holy Spirit feel this? If you had one caring for you day by day, and you were to write, either reproachfully, or doubting his care of you, it would show that you did not feel what was being done. There is a mist over your eyes, and you are asking for the very mercies that are already given. This is neither wisdom nor faith. It is quite true that we may ask God to bless the gospel to the unconverted and to regenerate them. But people pray for a pouring out of the Spirit—a different thing from conversion, and only mentioned in connection with the Holy Spirit’s being given, first to the Jews, next to the Samaritans, and thirdly to the Gentiles. From that day to this, there is not the smallest ground to ask God for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It is an unintelligent prayer, founded on unbelief of the truth that the Holy Spirit is poured out. Even God Himself could not add to the blessedness of the gift He has already given. There was a great difference between a Jew, a Gentile, and a Samaritan; and therefore it is mentioned expressly in connection with the three. The Holy Spirit never will be poured out again upon the Church. It is ignorance of the ways of God to look for it. He has been poured out upon the Church as truly as it is possible for God to give. But when the heavenly saints have been taken to be with Christ at His coming, there will in due time follow an outpouring of His Spirit on a new people, when the Jews and Gentiles will be brought as such distinctly to the knowledge of Jesus. But as long as the Church is on the earth, there never will nor can be such a thing. Can it be repeated, any more than there can be another dying of the Lord Jesus upon the cross? Nor is this a mere matter of speculation. It is connected in the deepest possible way with our worship.

You will find that faith in the presence of God’s Spirit, or unbelief of it, is that which puts to the test saints in the present day. It behooves us to look to it well that we really do enter into the mind of God about it. Let us understand that which constitutes us Christians is not only that we believe in Christ, but that we are now sealed with the Holy Spirit. This was the decisive proof of a man’s being a Christian. Peter thus alleges the fact: “Can any man forbid water, that these should be baptized which have received the Holy Spirit as well as we?” It was not merely that they had believed; but God had given them the Holy Spirit, and could they dare to refuse persons in whom the divine Person dwelt, on whom God had conferred such a signal grace? Such is the ground of all Christian unity—the presence of the Holy Spirit. The question is not merely, Is there life?, but, Have you believed that the Holy Spirit dwells in you? It was the possession of the Spirit, and not life merely, that was made the turning point. It was not until they had received the Holy Spirit that the Gentiles were acknowledged as part and parcel of the Church of God. (Acts 11) The Church is not only bound to accept life, and to believe that there is life in the soul, but is also authorized from the Word of God to wait till there is such a manifestation of it, as to be plainly manifest that they have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them. There never was such a thing as owning an assembly till there was recognition of their being on common ground with the Church by the reception of the Holy Spirit.

All this makes the true way of dealing with saints now very manifest. The Church would be justified in expecting this manifestation of the power of the Spirit. It is not true charity which does not look for it. “In whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory” (vss. 13-14). Without dwelling on the last verse, I would make this remark again—that as the seal of the Spirit could not be till the work of Christ was done (the Son only being sealed upon earth who needed no redemption, but who came on the contrary, to redeem us to God), as we now, on the footing of redemption, receive the Holy Spirit to dwell in us, so we receive the earnest of the inheritance. This last, I believe, to be as peculiar to the Church of God since Pentecost, as the sealing of the Spirit. As the disciples were not sealed with the Spirit, so neither had they the earnest of the inheritance till the Holy Spirit was sent down from heaven. This earnest is the power of the Holy Spirit giving a believer now present joy, present anticipation of the glory to which he is going. This may be hindered in many a believer’s heart by a want of knowledge of the truth, or by the workings of the flesh, worldliness. But still it remains true, that, now the Holy Spirit is given, a believer ought to look up and pray to God if there be anything that hinders his entering into the joy of His blessed inheritance, that it may be detected and put away. I am quite sure that the caring only for being born of God has acted greatly to the injury of the children of God; it has stopped them short, as if the only object were, that the children should learn this and no more. But our business is, having believed, to go on and learn other truths, and above all, Christ Himself. So it is precisely that the Holy Spirit’s regenerating a soul is to occupy the soul with the fact that it is regenerate; but being born of God, we have to go forward, to enter into the blessed truths of God, which cluster around both our

redemption and our future glory.

As the seal, the Holy Spirit is the witness of the perfectness of our being cleansed from our sins—the effect of the work of Christ. That operation of the Spirit is meant which supposes the work done, and that we are set apart to God on the ground of redemption. We are sealed because redemption is finished. If I look at glory, it is not finished. Therefore the figure is changed when he speaks of our inheritance. “Sealing” would not do in connection with that, because we have it not as a fact; we are not yet put in possession of what we are to have along with Christ. Hence the Holy Spirit is spoken of as “the earnest of our inheritance” (vs. 14). The same Spirit who seals us is the earnest of our bright future “till the redemption of the purchased possession.” First of all, we have the privileges of divine grace that chose us in Christ; predestined us to the place of sons; took us into full favor without a single question, “in the Beloved;” gave us redemption even now in Christ through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins. But no sooner has the Holy Spirit thus established us in the full knowledge of God’s love to us, and the present effect of it in putting away our sins, than He brings before us the inheritance. Hence comes in the relation of the Holy Spirit to these two things. And as there are two great parts in God’s choice of us personally, so the Holy Spirit takes a double relationship. He is the seal of the grace and blessing that we have in Christ, and He is the earnest of the glory we are going to have with Christ. These are the relations of the Holy Spirit to the individual believer. All the general dealings of the Spirit have a secondary place compared with His ways with the soul individually, which, requiring some further development, has now received a measure of notice.

Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians, Ephesians 1:4-14, Remarks on

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

We have already seen the twofold title in which God blesses His saints now; in both the form of the blessing being found only in Christ. Had God merely revealed Himself as the God of Abraham or Isaac for instance, He would not ensure a blessing beyond that promised to the fathers. Now He does. Instead of having merely the Jewish blessing before Him, He has Christ in His eye, whom He raised from the dead and set at His own right hand, where He never put David nor any one else. It is a place that belongs to Him in virtue of His personal glory and His suffering unto death. We may sit with Christ on His throne, but that is a very different thing from Christ’s sitting at God’s right hand. Now it is as the God of the Lord Jesus Christ that He blesses it is the full blessing that would be suitable to Christ Himself as the object of blessing. Grace puts us as common objects with Christ in order to be blessed by God who blesses after this manner and measure. Nor this only. He is the Father of the Lord Jesus, and as such also He blesses us. So that these two characters, the very highest possible in which to look at God, are those according to which we are blessed. The characters of God, both as God and as Father, as they deal with Christ, issue in a blessing, a commensurate blessing which He gives to us. Hence there is no limit. He has blessed us “with all spiritual blessings,” (vs. 3) and moreover too, as we saw, not on the earth, the comparatively lower part of the universe, but in the highest scene of God’s power, “in the heavenly places;” (vs. 20) and in order to crown and complete all, it is “in Christ;” secured in His person.

Verse 4 particularly belongs to the first of these characters in which God has revealed Himself, as verse 5 belongs rather to the second. “According as He hath chosen us in Him (that is, in Christ) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love” (vs. 4). Now it is as the God of Christ that He thus blesses us; not as Father but as God. In verse 5 it is as Father, because we there read, “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself” (vs. 5). There at once is that which answers to the character of the Father. It brings in special relationship to Him. “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children;” (vs. 5) not merely chosen, but “predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of His will” (vs. 5). Now that language is not used in verse 4. He does not say that He has predestined us to be holy and without blame before Him in love. Neither does He say that He has called us into this wonderful place according to the good pleasure of His will. And the reason is most manifest. When we hear of the good pleasure of His will, we have language suitable to sovereign special love—that which He displays in order to manifest His own favor. But when we hear of “holy and without blame,” (vs. 4) it is God who has chosen us for it. It could not be otherwise. If God would have any brought near Him, and so near as to be in His presence in heaven, if chosen in Christ at all, somehow they must be holy and without blame before Him in love. And all is really of His grace. The one verse flows from the necessary character of God as God; the other flows from the special relationship into which He enters towards us through our Lord Jesus. Choosing us is a necessary part, because it is evident there was no one but God to choose. It was before the foundation of the world, when God alone was. Man had no voice nor choice in the matter. It was purely God acting from Himself. It was a matter of God’s own choice that He would have others to be in heaven besides Himself. But if they were to be near Him and before Him, how could they be so with sin upon them? Impossible. How could God have persons, even in the most distant part of His dominion, with sin upon them? Still less could it be in heaven, the throne of His majesty. The day is coming when all evil must be banished into the lake of fire. How much less then could He tolerate sin in those who are to be brought into His very presence? It was the positive necessity of His character and nature, that if He chooses to have persons with Him in heaven, they must be there “holy and without blame before him” (vs. 4). But that could not be all: it must be “in love,” because nothing could be more miserable than that they should not be able to enter into His own affections. Merely to be in the most blessed place of creatures without taint, without anything that could sully the presence of God, would not be enough. Man was made to have a heart, to have affections, and there could not be happiness in creatures, who know what affection is, unless there were that on which affection could rest. If God had such beings brought into His presence, and necessarily without sin in any form, it must be in love also. He will give them a nature not only capable of being before Him without reproach and fear, but also answering to His own love. “We love him because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). In Christ alone that love is known; but St. John so speaks of God and Christ, that there is great difficulty in deciding which is meant. He uses “Him” thus indiscriminately, and slides from one into the other. This flows from their oneness: “I and my Father are one,” (John 10:30) which is said by John only.

Here we have God’s choice of us personally. For it is not merely to have a people, as if it were some vague thing, or as if there were a certain number of niches to be filled up in heaven. There is no such notion in the Bible. It is persons He chooses. There cannot be such love without a person to be its object. And if it is true even among men, that love is not a vague feeling—which is rather a fancy—much more is it true with God. He loves us individually. Hence He has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, to show how entirely it was a thing independent of our character and ways; and if so, it must always flow back to God in a way according to Him. And so it does. If there is this

choice of God in Christ before the foundation of the world, He will have them before Him in such a way as God alone could. He will never have what is unworthy of His love and presence. Hence then it is said, "that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (vs. 4). This is not merely holiness, or blamelessness, or love, any or all in part. Hence it does not refer to what we have been. If we look at a person now, we shall find grievous faults in him. Even as a Christian, he is very far indeed from being what is due to God. He is ashamed of himself—grieving over the little his heart responds to the favor God has shown him. And would this suit His presence? Will God be satisfied with that which even a Christian finds fault with? Impossible. It is not looking at the complex man here, but at what He makes us in Christ, His Son. In the saint now there is that which is very unsaintly indeed, unlike God and His beloved Son: pride, vanity, foolishness, all kinds of evil ways and thoughts that never flow from Christ, and have no kind of resemblance to Him. But for all this, are they not saints? God forbid they should not be. And yet this is the steady thought of God. He has chosen us in Christ that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love. How can that be? The answer is because God looks at us here according to that which He gives us in Christ, and nothing less. All is ignored in this verse save that new nature which flows from His own choice, His own grace. He has chosen us to be so, and He will have us so perfectly, and nothing else, when the time comes for us to be in His presence. But even now it is true in the essence of the thing, inasmuch as we have the life of Christ in us. Can I find any fault in Christ? If Christ is without blame in love, in the very nature of God Himself, He is precisely the life of every Christian, let a man be called by what name he may among men.

But even this is not all. Blessed as it is to answer to the holy character and nature of God—and that is what every saint will do by and by in the glory, and what every saint ought to say in the spirit of his mind now—yet this is not enough. We might be there holy and without blame before Him in love, yet simply as servants. Her Majesty the Queen may surround herself with servants to do her will; she may bring one and another into her presence, and they ought of course to think themselves greatly honored by being thus made the ministers of her pleasure, though no family relationship of course exists between them. But nothing less than this will do in heavenly things. This is the wonder of God's grace. In the very next verse we have the fact that God is not only acting from Himself to call into this wonderful place, to be the reproduction of His own moral nature and character. God is holy and without blame, and He is love in His own nature. This belongs to our life now, and will belong to us altogether when we are brought into heaven by the power and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, shortly. But it is not as mere servants, but as sons we shall be there—consciously as sons: not merely standing there, like angels, as ministers of His pleasure, but there as those who take an interest in what He is interested in. We shall feel not merely for Him, but with Him. We shall have a common interest with Him—the same kind of feeling, if I may use the same illustration, that members of the royal family have with the crown.

This is what the Holy Spirit brings before us in verse 5. We are planted in Christ before God, and we have a holy and a loving nature. But besides this, there is a positive relationship formed; and that relationship, in which we are brought to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is nothing less than being sons according to the pattern of the risen Son of God. As the eternal Son of the Father, none could have such a place with Him. The very thought would be repulsive to a renewed mind. But Christ was pleased to call us His brethren when He rose from the dead, and not before. And it is on earth, the place of our sins, where we have been servants of Satan—it is here that, through the faith of Christ, we leave behind us all that we were and enter into this blessed and glorious and most intimate relationship with God. "He hath predestinated us unto the adoption of children." The word predestinated is a more special one than "chosen," which signifies God's electing us out of the world. None but an unbeliever could fancy that every one is to be in such a place as this, or that men who have lived in blasphemy against God all their days are to be holy and without blame when they die. God has a choice, and our business is to bless God for His great love—not to judge or find fault with His ways. "Who art thou that repliest against God?" (Rom. 9:20). That is the answer of God to all vain thoughts and reasonings. But then if He chooses according to His nature and holiness, He has predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto Himself. So that now we find the special privilege and glorious relationship of sons before God in His presence by Jesus Christ. He might not have done it, but it was "according to the good pleasure of his will" (vs. 5). It is not merely that He would have persons and that He chose persons; but here is a peculiar display of His pleasure, and therefore He puts them in this blessed place "to the praise of the glory of His grace wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved" (vs. 6). This 6th verse shows us that which answers to both the verses before. I think "to the praise of the glory of his grace" (vs. 6) takes in both the choice of verse 4 and the predestination of verse 5—the character of the choice of God, and the special favor of the predestination of the Father. "To the praise of the glory of His grace wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved" (vs. 6). "Accepted" is rather a cold word to express what is meant here. It is not what persons doctrinally call acceptance, which is rather more of the nature of reconciliation. But here it seems to me there is the fullness of divine favor, which goes far beyond merely acceptance. It is God making us objects of favor according to all that is in His heart, and in order that this should be most fully brought out, He says, "in the Beloved," not merely "in Christ." There was one object that satisfied God, that met every thought, every desire of His heart; and this was Christ, the Beloved One, of course in a sense in which none could be so in Himself. In order to bless us fully, God has made us the objects of His favor in this Beloved One, and all is "to the praise of the glory of His grace" (vs. 6). This takes in all the heights and depths of His grace who is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, blessing us in Christ. In fact He could not go farther. Could He show favor to any one so much as to Christ? Just so He loves and blesses us. He could not do more and He will not do less. He has risen up to the fullest character of love and blessing in the way wherein He regards us in the Beloved.

But, then, what was our previous state? It is said, "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (vs. 7). It is only alluded to passingly, but it supposes that we were wretched slaves of Satan. In the same person, in whom we become the objects of such favor, we have redemption. God does not in the least degree forget what our condition was when He thus blessed us. He is aware that we had to be brought out of all we were, for indeed we had nothing but sins. With only the previous verses, there might have been the idea that such blessedness and glory could not have been mixed with such as we were. But he adds, we have redemption in Christ. Still, he never touches on redemption and forgiveness of sins, till he has brought us into the height and depth of all privilege flowing from God Himself: so entirely is all question here of what man is out of sight, that we only as it were incidentally get hold of the sad truth of his condition. It might not have been known from the first few verses that persons so blessed had ever been guilty of a single sin. But here we find that they needed to be redeemed, to have their sins forgiven; and the same Christ, in and through whom we have all our other blessings, is He in whom also we have "redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." There is a difference between "the glory" and "the riches" of His grace. "The glory of His grace" (vs. 6) takes in all these privileges referred to before. The Holy Spirit has brought out in the seventh verse the riches of His grace—the means and provisions for us as poor sinners. But this would not suffice for God, if He is acting so as to show not merely His rich resources in dealing with poor wretched individuals, but the glory of His grace. He would show His own character—what He is, and not merely provide for what we were. The praise of the glory of His grace flows from what God feels, and in consequence will do, in order to manifest Himself for us. Observe, before we have done with this, that later we have another redemption, that "of the purchased possession," (vs. 14) two very different things. We have

redemption as far as the forgiveness of sins is concerned: we are waiting for redemption as concerns the inheritance, which depends on the coming of Christ in order to take it actually under His government. The purchased possession has to do with the inheritance, not merely with what affects our souls. As regards the soul, we have redemption now as completely as we ever can have it; which we do well to bear in mind. The soul cannot be more forgiven than now, nor could God do more to put away our sins than He has done already. He has given His Son, and the blood of His Son was shed, and it is impossible that God Himself could do more to blot out sin from before His face. What a comfort for our souls! If we think of our sins, we may also enter into the comfortable assurance that all is gone from before the face of God. We may fall into sin: it does exist; but it is a matter of self-judgment, instead of a fearful looking for of judgment by and by. There is just the difference. As a matter of divine judgment, sin is gone in Christ; as a matter of self-judgment, it is always there if we slip into it. Nor is self-judgment ever thorough until we know that God's judgment of sin is ended for us in the cross. Under the Old Testament there was no such self-judgment because of sin, as there ought to be under the New. We find accordingly that although God never could treat any sin with indifference, yet is it often left without a word of comment. But this is not light dealing, God leaves the thing to speak for itself. He exercises so much the more the hearts of His children. If they are in a willful state, they may use the fact of sin to make light of their own evil ways; otherwise conscience is brought into exercise. It is not until the full condition of man comes out in the cross of Christ that we see what God's judgment of sin is. Since then we first hear of "the flesh" in the sense in which the New Testament speaks of it. You may find the expression in the Old Testament, but it never wears the same strong, determined, full character of wickedness as it does in the New. It had not yet proved itself, and God always waits till a person or thing proves its real character, before He pronounces judgment. And we ought to learn from God as to this. The patience of God in judgment is one of the most marvelous of His ways; and we ought to be, as to this, imitators of God. He awaited the cross of His Son before the full character of man's iniquity was fully brought out. Under the Old Testament we read of things borne with because of the hardness of men's hearts; but in the New Testament there is a different measure, and no evil tolerated for a moment. The mind of God is pronounced upon evil: the darkness is past, the true light now shines. There is no hiding either of God or man; all is out; man is lost. God is known not merely as a lawgiver, but as a Saviour-God; and if I do not know Him thus, I do not know Him at all. "This is life eternal: to know thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."

From all this we learn that the full character of evil has only now come out. The Old Testament commanded that evil should not be done; but, as we shall see in the next chapter, the full issue of the trial comes out here: and what is the issue? That man is dead—morally, spiritually—dead in trespasses and sins. God perfectly understood the character of man before, and He wants us to understand it. We needed redemption and we have it; forgiveness and we have it. But we are waiting to have the redemption of the purchased possession. This takes in the whole creation of God, including, perhaps, our bodies too, as a part of the creation of God. But the redemption of verse 7 is a closer thing, and we are put in a position now of thoroughly judging ourselves, because we know that we shall not be judged of God. He puts us thus into a common interest with Himself; put us on His own side, to take His part against ourselves. And this is what repentance means; and therefore it is called repentance towards God.

But the next verse opens up another subject: "Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence" (vs. 8). It is not said, "abounded toward us in forgiving us," because the forgiveness is simple and complete. But when we hear of "wisdom and prudence," (vs. 8) it is a question of God's counsels about His Son. So to speak, you are able now to enter into My thoughts, and understand them when I speak. You are delivered from anxiety about your sins, and are free now to enter into My purpose. "Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in himself" (vs. 9). And this secret of His will is "that in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in Him: in whom also we have obtained an inheritance" (vss. 10-11). We have clearly here, in this central verse, the fact that we are capacitated (the question of sin being settled in our souls) to hear what God has to say to us about all other things. He has not now merely to tell us what He is going to do upon the earth, as He dealt with Abraham. The relationship is higher than that which was made known to the patriarchs. Now He abounds toward us in all wisdom and prudence. Whatever brings out God's character and glory, He makes known to us. He treats us, not as servants, but as friends. He has one thing nearer than aught else— what He is going to do for His Son: and He imparts to us the secrets nearest to His own heart. If a person say, I do not want to understand mysteries, I answer, You do not want to know what God wishes to teach you. Unbelief always shows itself in some character of hostility to God. He, in His perfect wisdom, gives the comfort of salvation, and then opens out these other things. "Having made known unto us the mystery of His will" (vs. 9). This does not mean something you cannot understand, but what you could not know before God told you. Do not turn away and say, All I want to know is to be saved. We ought to desire to know all God desires us to learn. The word "mystery" means what God was pleased to keep secret—something that He had not before revealed, but quite intelligible when it is told. "Mystery," in popular sense, is totally different from its use in the Word of God. There are many things very wonderful in the prophecies, but they are not called mysteries. Brought out now for the first time, it is the mystery of His will. There are many mysteries explained in the New Testament as those of the kingdom of heaven. Babylon, too, is called a mystery. The mystery here is, that God means to unite all things in heaven and in earth under the headship of our Lord. He does not mean to have the heavens, as they are now, completely severed from the earth, but to have a united system of heavenly and earthly glory, all under Christ—this is the mystery of His will.

But there is another part of it—He means to have us to share it along with Christ. Thus there are two great parts in the mystery of His will. The first is Christ, and the second is the Church: and therefore it is said in this very Epistle, "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church" (ch. 5:32). It is not "the Church" only that is the mystery, but "Christ and the Church" (ch. 5:32). The Church, however blessed, is but a subordinate part of it. That she is so at all is solely because she belongs to Christ, the heavenly Head of all things. "That in the dispensation of the fullness of times" (vs. 10)—when all the various times of God that are now running on have exhausted their course—when the time of the groaning of the earth is over—when the time for Israel to be blinded is over—when the time for Satan being allowed to torment men is over—the time when the Gentiles are allowed to rule as if God were taking no notice, and the Church of God to be broken in weakness here below. All these things are now going on—man himself subject to sickness and death—all creation groaning. But God Himself will put an end to everything of the sort. He means to bind Satan and deliver man from his power—to have Israel blessed and united under their Messiah—the Gentiles blessing God, and God sanctified among them—the earth itself no longer the poor, groaning, miserable earth that it is, but the curse removed, and the wilderness rejoicing and blossoming as the rose. All these things God will yet accomplish; and when the various times that now intervene are accomplished, He will change all, bringing forth Christ as the head, center, and means of every blessing. Christ is the strong man that is to bind Satan—the bruiser of the serpent's head—the Lord of heaven and earth—the Messiah of Israel, and Son of man ruling supremely over the Gentiles. All these things are to be accomplished most simply and efficaciously, but not by the power of men—not even by the spread of the gospel.

If men had a just sense of the present state of the Church, they would put on sackcloth and ashes instead of blowing trumpets. What we have to do is to humble ourselves before God, because of what we are and see around us, even in the best. It requires a great deal of patience not only to bear and be borne with, but to go on in love. If we really have a heart for God and for His children we shall feel these things deeply, and shall seek the blessing of those who are led away by it, yea, thoroughly and heartily, remembering that the blessed day is coming when Christ will be exalted as the Head of all things, heavenly and earthly. While it becomes us to humble ourselves, we need not be disheartened. We know that our hope is one that maketh not ashamed. It is not founded upon what the Church or any society is going to do, for our hope is Christ. We know that God has made known unto us the secret of His will. Where there is not an exercised conscience, this truth May not be rejected; but it is not realized nor applied in such a state. God's blessed cure for the world's disorder is Christ brought out for His present hidden position, and the moment that He is so, what a change! All things in heaven and earth are united in Christ; and when that day comes, we shall enter visibly on our inheritance. We have the title already, but are not in manifest possession. "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will; that we should be to the praise of His glory who first trusted in Christ" (vss. 11-12).

We have first of all (verse 5) our predestination as children and now as heirs—heirs of glory now and the inheritance, Christ being made the head of the universe. The prevalent interpretation is to apply it to Christ's position now. People imagine that "the fullness of times" (vs. 10) here means the same thing as in Galatians 4, but "the fullness of the times" differs widely from "the fullness of time," (vs. 10) which meant merely the time which closed with the incarnation of Christ, or was completed by it. Christ's birth is a very different thing from Christ's exaltation, as the Head of all. Deadly error is at work, putting the Son's incarnation in the place of redemption. Our union with Christ is made to depend upon His bare incarnation, not upon His being risen from the dead and entering upon His headship thus. But if Christ's union with us is founded upon His being a man, He unites Himself with human nature and there is no special union between the Christian and Christ, because humanity belongs to the whole race or man in sin. This naturally leads to the further heresy of making Christ take up humanity in its fallen condition. God looks that we should be making advance in His own ways. He calls us to diligence and desire of heart to enter into our privileges.

It is said, again, "That we should be to the praise of His glory who first trusted in Christ" (vs. 12). The meaning is, before the Jews (of whom it specially speaks) behold Christ in the appointed time and way. "They shall look upon Me whom they have pierced" (Zech. 12:10). Now, he says, we are those who first trusted in Christ, whose hope was founded upon Christ before He is seen and believed in by the rest of the nation. The "we" in verse 12 does not go beyond believing Jews. "In whom ye also trusted" (vs. 13). The "we" and the "ye" refer, the one to Paul and his fellow-believers out of Israel, the other to believing Gentiles, such as the Ephesians. If this be so, the meaning is "that we [Christian Jews] should be to the praise of His glory who first trusted in Christ." The nation of Israel will not be exactly "to the praise of His glory" (vs. 12). They will be the subjects of His glory. "Arise, shine, for thy light is come and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee" (Isa. 60:1). His glory will work for their salvation; but "the praise of His glory" (vs. 12) is that there were those out of that unbelieving nation who received Christ before they saw Him. Blessed those who receive Christ when they behold Him, but still more blessed those who, though they have not seen Him, yet have believed.

Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians, Ephesians 1:1-3, Remarks on

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

It must be manifest to the most casual reader of the epistle that we are upon very high and holy ground here. Let none suppose that this is to impeach other portions of the inspired scriptures. But who can deny that in revealing His mind, God has been pleased to employ different instruments and with various measures? He could, if He pleased, have written all by one; He could have revealed Himself by all according to the full height of His own glory and nothing else. But we may be quite sure that the ways of God are as admirable in the forms which His revelation takes, as in all other things which He has made for His praise. These diverse manners of developing His nature and character, His counsels and ways, display His glory in an infinitely more blessed light than if there had been one unvarying blaze of brightness. And the same wisdom, which works best for His majesty and praise, is precisely that which is suited to the wants, and efficacious for the blessing of His children. Need I say, that a revelation, while it is from God, is for His people? No doubt, it does glorify Himself; but God, when He speaks, has an object in view, and provides graciously for those to whom He addresses Himself. The revelations of God, therefore, necessarily, while they flow from God, and are worthy of God, presuppose, and are adapted to, the condition of man. Now this, far from, in the smallest degree, lessening the divine glory which manifests itself in the successive parts of God's word, on the contrary, enhances it infinitely, and proves that it is His, by nothing more than its wonderful suitability to poor sinners, brought out of their low estate, in His rich mercy, and adopted into His family by faith in Christ Jesus.

Now, of all the epistles of Paul, I am not aware of any one which rises so high as this to the Ephesians; and one cannot doubt that there was a harmony between the condition of these saints themselves, and the manner and measure of the Spirit's communications to them. We find it so elsewhere. In addressing the saints at Rome, they were not called a church; they were in a very infantine state. There were blessed saints of God there, but the assembly was not founded by an apostle. Years passed before ever an apostle went to Rome. God saw well that this very city of Rome would arrogate to itself enormous claims of a spiritual character. Therefore He took care that in more inconsiderable places, such as Corinth, He should have an apostle to found churches and labor there for a considerable time; while the great center of the world's glory was unvisited by an apostle till there were many assembled there, through persons going there from one cause and another. When we consider the circumstances of the Roman saints, we can understand the propriety of an epistle addressed to them which most strongly resembles a comprehensive scheme of Christian doctrine from the very A B C. And hence the very first thing that we have proved there, after the introduction, is the total ruin of man, and of man looked at in every point of view—man examined and weighed in the balances of God, from the flood downwards. After man had possessed a knowledge of God of an outward sort, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God. In fact, we have the origin of idolatry shown; and also the time after the flood before idolatry came in. The verses that I have referred to in Romans 1, bear upon the time when there was simply man possessing the knowledge of God. But man departed from it, corrupting himself; and we have the awful picture of human depravity traced in the early chapters. Next, we have philosophic man,

and then man under the law: man in every point of view, before the subject of redemption is treated of; or anything is said of the way to be justified. The reason is this: the apostle never having been there, the saints at Rome were comparatively ignorant, and required to be instructed in the nature and completeness of the fall. They needed to learn what the history of man was, as God looks at and thinks of it. Therefore we have him seen as ruined in every way, and no help for him in the creature, the law, or anything else. The result of it is, that all are gone out of the way "there is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10). In a word, every mouth is stopped, and the whole world become guilty before God. Then, and not till then, we have the provision God has made in His righteous mercy for man, in chapter 3 and 4; and from chapter 5, consequences shown and difficulties met, winding up with the triumphant conclusion of chapter 8. Thus we have a weighty summary of Christian doctrine, beginning with the actual condition of man, Jew or Gentile, and leading up to the firm footing God has given in Christ, dead and risen, to him that believes. But in all this you have, most important as it is, only the individual. It may be man lost or man saved; but you have nothing about the Church. It is what pertains to those who are members of the Church, but no such thing appears as the assembly treated as an assembly. Man's ruin and redemption is the theme, with the effects of redemption, and the order of the dispensations, and the practical duties flowing from all. But in Ephesians how totally different! Here, comparatively speaking, man disappears, and God is viewed as acting from Himself.

Hence there is no preface nor proof of what man's state is. This is not necessary, nor is it the starting point of his teaching there. In Romans it is; and nothing can be more simple. But in Ephesians, instead of our being raised up from the pit of corruption, in which man lay buried, the very first thing the apostle does is to speak of God in heaven. It is God showering blessing upon man, and not man brought up to God. It is God shown in the ways of His grace and the thoughts of His heart before even there was a world at all, entirely apart from all questions of Jews or Gentiles. It is God forming a scheme of glory and blessedness for His own praise. God delights in the display of His goodness, and this for the purpose of blessing, and the very highest, fullest character of blessing. Hence you will find that it is not simply God as God acting towards man, but He has Christ before Him, and hence there is no limit to the blessing. He would have some channel of grace toward us to the full content of His own heart. Now there is no object that could draw out and sustain the delight of God, none that could be in itself an adequate object to look upon with complacency but one, even Christ. As for the angels, He charges them with folly, and yet were they holy. If He scanned lower than the angels, what is there but a world lost in sin? Thus there is but one capable of satisfying the heart and affections of God — Christ Himself.

Having therefore introduced this great truth — God blessing, and Christ the object before God, through whom God is going to bless according to all that is in His heart, now we find that He names Himself as a Blessor in a twofold way. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." These two titles are the key to the epistle. And I must be permitted to press strongly the importance of weighing words in Scripture. When we have to do with mankind, we must not make man an offender for a word. But God needs no excuses for His word. Whatever allowance we might make for the slips of one another, with Scripture the occasion can never arise. When we draw near and listen to Him, the only proper attitude is to bow and worship. And therefore in this epistle, which is so full an expression of His love, the apostle opens it thus, "Blessed be the God and Father" (vs. 3). He could not write to the Ephesians without breaking out into the praise and Worship of God. Elsewhere you will find him blessing God, but where he does so, as in 2 Corinthians 2:14, there were special circumstances that called it out. But not so here. At Corinth there was a blessed intervention of God's grace, breaking down the proud hearts of those wayward disciples, making them ashamed of themselves. But in Ephesians it was apart from passing circumstances, save that he saw them in such a condition of soul that they were capable of going on with God, entering into His thoughts and counsels. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (vs. 3) was not because of some special mercy or comfort; but it flows from what He always is to us. For this very reason many saints may be unable to enter in. Some are apt to be particularly alive to, and touched by, sensible tokens from day to day, and now and then peculiar providential interventions of God. Perhaps they are in great trial, and God brings them a fresh blessing too out of it. But here the Ephesians were so simple and willing to go on with God that the apostle, instead of being detained by their state, could but speak in praise and thanksgiving. It is very blessed when there is such happy communion given in having to do with one another.

It is true, again, that before he enters upon what I shall endeavor to develop, he introduces himself as an apostle. He does not say "servant" here; in writing to the Romans he does. "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:1). He was indeed Christ's bondman. Why should Paul be writing to them? He was His servant. Did not they belong to Jesus? There was no such thought as "independency" sanctioned in those days — no, such practice as little districts or assemblies belonging to this man or that; but the Church committed everywhere to the Lord's servants. He is a true servant who is able to realize that he is the servant of Jesus Christ; and he will serve Him best who most realizes what it is to serve the Lord. "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called [to be] an apostle" (Rom. 1:1). He was an apostle by the calling of God. At this time there was no such thing as a congregation giving a candidate "a call." Paul was an apostle called of God, and they were saints, called of God, and they knew it. It was very sweet for them to think they had been thus called. They were in their measure treading the path of Christ, and the apostle was His servant and an apostle also. His object was to bring his apostleship into relief. But they at Corinth were in danger of beginning to stand in doubt of him, and of thinking that to Jerusalem they ought to look. He thoroughly owns the common place of a brother; but if persons like the Corinthians were raising their heads too high, he says, "An apostle" simply, without adding "servant." If a dispute arose about the point, he shows the reality of his call. In addressing the Galatians I have shown elsewhere that there is peculiar force in his introduction of himself—"Paul, an apostle (not of men, neither by man)" (vs. 1). Here you have controversy at once, but of divine temper and strength. There were false principles in Galatia, and therefore he uses energetic, urgent language in writing to the saints. They were adopting Jewish notions about earthly succession. The apostle therefore takes the very highest ground, and shows that while he fully acknowledged the twelve in their place, he would not, in what touched the truth of the gospel, give place by subjection — no, not for an hour; so that the whole Epistle bears the stamp of the unqualified reassertion of the call of grace and its heavenly character, founded upon the death and resurrection of Christ.

In Ephesians he has no object of a controversial kind, nor of laying down the Christian foundations of truth, as in the case of the Roman saints. But he does put forward his apostolic function — "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ" (vs. 1). He shows fully out of what it sprang — that same "will of God," out of which flowed their own blessing. He is about to trace, first the individual blessing, and then the corporate. It is quite a mistake to suppose that the former is a deeper thing than the latter. On the contrary, our highest blessings are connected with what we have as individuals. Fully acknowledging the blessedness of what is corporate, what we have individually is higher still; and it is the way of God's Spirit to begin with this before entering upon what is common. Hence I think he here addresses "the saints which were at Ephesus, and the faithful in Christ Jesus," as such. They were the Church there, not only gathered formally, but intelligently so. They had had the Apostle

Paul there, who had been God's instrument in that work. There were twelve men who believed before Paul went there; but they never received the Holy Spirit after the Pentecostal sort till Paul's visit. It is the personal presence of the Holy Spirit, founded upon our faith in Christ dead and risen, that brings us into this church character. But the Holy Spirit, besides making us members of Christ's body, the Church, also gives us the consciousness of our relationship as sons with His God and Father. He addresses "the Church of God at Corinth" (2 Cor. 1:1) as such, when he is speaking of points that concern order and discipline. Here he is going to look at Church in a far higher point of view; yet he begins with what is individual: "To the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus. Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ" (vs. 1-2). Then he introduces the twofold title of God already referred to — the same that our Lord announced when He rose from the dead, and sent the first message given to His disciples, by Mary Magdalene: "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God" (John 20:17) — not "to the Almighty God," (Ezek. 10:5) or "to Jehovah." Our Lord stood in a twofold relation to God; He was Son of God, not only as a divine person, but as man in the world (Luke 1); besides His highest personal glory which shines through John's Gospel, "That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). This last title refers to Christ, viewed in humanity in this world; and it is therefore stated only in the Gospel of Luke, which is pre-eminently the human biography, if I may so speak, of Christ. But it might not have been known, unless God had told us, that He carried that same relationship as man into His resurrection. He teaches us that death and resurrection gave Him title in God's righteousness to put us in His position. So that He could for the first time say, in the fullness of meaning which those words convey, "I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (John 20:17). He is now not merely "my Father" and "my God," but "your Father" and "your God." The death of Christ had completely obliterated all that was against the children of God; the resurrection of Christ, after redemption was accomplished, enabled Him to give them His place of resurrection and sonship before God. And what a wonderful place is this! To think that now, even while we are in this world, our Lord would have us to know that we are sons, in and through Him, before our God, and that we are instinct with resurrection life—"alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord;" (Rom. 6:11) that we stand before God without a single charge or condemnation, and this, because He had taken by grace the "same condemnation" (Luke 23:40) with the guilty on the cross. He was the "holy thing"—we unholy, altogether undone. But on the cross He was made sin for us, and entered the same condemnation—made it His own on the cross; and now there is none for me. I am brought into the same place that He had as the risen one before God. Of course I am not speaking now of His divine glory. The notion of the creature, no matter how blest, being in any other position than that of looking up to God and worshipping Him, could not enter a renewed mind. The Lord Jesus was Son in His divine nature from all eternity; but as man, too. He was Son; and also as risen from the dead. And by His death and resurrection He brings us in before God and His Father, having the same position as Himself, so far as to be sons, absolutely without sin in our new nature, and freed from condemnation before God because of the old nature already judged. The new nature requires none to die for it, but the old did, and all is done. In Christ crucified, God condemned sin in the flesh, and to faith all the evil is gone; the blessedness of Christ is now made ours, and we can look up and say, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (vs. 3). One great mischief that is done to the practical power of Christianity is the putting off the blessing, which the Holy Spirit attaches to us now, till we leave this world and get to heaven. Suppose you were to tell the great mass of God's children on the earth, You are "blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ," (vs. 3) they would think it enthusiastic or mysticism. They are not prepared for such truth, and, in general, either do not inquire what the verse is, or evacuate it into some mere emotional sentiment. They have no notion that it is a present fact, true of all Christians. We are not displayed in it yet, nor is it a question of feeling. May we believe it! Feelings may deceive me, but faith never can. If I see a thing, it is merely my eye that sees. If I believe a truth on God's word, I am looking at it, in a measure, so to speak, with God's eyes. The world has a notion that faith only implies confidence as to a thing which is not sure. This is not the meaning of "I believe" in the things of God. My own vision is a poor range of sight; but what of God's eye! The believer stands upon the highest ground; he rests upon the certainty of what God says. Happiness, too, is the result; for when you believe, you soon begin to feel. If you believe that God has blotted out your sins, you before long, if not at once, begin to enjoy it. If I look at myself, I shall always see something wrong. How is this? My sins all gone, and yet, if looking within, I see so much that is painful, loathsome, humiliating. The putting away of sin is not a thing that goes on in my heart, but a mighty work that God wrought in the cross of His beloved Son, on which He calls me to rest, because on it He rests. Am I looking for its sign and token in myself? If so, I shall never have an assurance of it on the right ground. If I think that my sins must be forgiven because I am a changed character (as men speak), can I ever have an hour's real peace. The result must be, that the more one judges himself, the less happy he will be. What God puts before His children is this—that they should be thoroughly happy in the certainty that their sins are gone, through the blood-shedding of Christ, and yet that they should spare nothing they find within them; judging themselves day by day, because Christ has been judged for them, and God has blotted out their sins, and they cannot endure trifling with that which cost the blood of His son.

Here, however, the first great thought is this: "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (vs. 3). It is not redemption, though of course based upon it. I am here upon the earth, and yet I know that I am blest there where Christ is at the right hand of God. Not only have I blessings there, but I am blessed "with all spiritual blessings" (vs. 3). The highest blessing God can confer is that which He gives every child of His in heavenly places in Christ. In these few words you stand at the height of God's wonderful counsel about us and love for us. He has thus blessed us according to the fullness of His value for Christ. The expression "heavenly places" (vs. 3) is in contrast with the portion of the Jews, who were blessed in earthly places. Looking at Ezekiel 36, that is seen which brings out more distinctly the character of our blessing in contradistinction to theirs. "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you and ye shall be clean. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God." Thus, there are spiritual mercies mingled with their blessings; but they will be in the land of their fathers, which God is to make good to the generation to come. It is chiefly learned but unspiritual men who make confusion about these matters. If people were only simple about Scripture, they would not fall into such mistakes. The prophet says, "Ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers" (Ezek. 36:28). Nothing can be plainer than this. He is to bless Israel on the earth—in their soul too, no doubt: but the sphere of this blessing is the Holy Land. It is His earthly people, not the Church, as we shall see lower down. "I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen" (Ezek. 36:30). Evidently the blessing is in earthly places. I should not find fault with good men trying to give this a spiritual turn, and to preach the gospel from it, provided they do not blot out from it the hopes of Israel by and by. Primarily the people there are Israel, and they are to be blessed in this manner. We see the land of Palestine now, desolate like a wilderness; but "the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose" (Isa. 35:1) in that day. There are certain blessings that apply to the believer now, it is true. To the "water" and "Spirits" in a wonderfully enlarged and deepened scope, our Lord alludes thus in John 3, but I object to the inference that God has abandoned His people, and that this prophecy about the earthly places should be confounded with our heavenly title: The earth and earthly blessings are here dwelt upon by the Spirit of God. Why should we be jealous about the Jews or the earth

either? God has shown us such overflowing and surpassing favor, that we may well delight and thank Him that the earth is reserved for His ancient nation.

Now, if we turn from this—the predicted blessing of Israel upon the earth—to our own proper blessing in Ephesians, how totally different it is! “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (vs. 3). It is God revealing Himself in the fullest manner conceivable. Who was it that knew God, and who was the object of God’s love as none had ever known Him or had been before? If ever there was one who knew the full meaning of the word, “My Father,” it was the Lord Jesus. And who but He knew the depths of “My God?” Now, that Blessed One, by redemption and the gift of the Spirit, has capacitated the believer in Himself to enjoy the same privilege with Himself. Just in proportion as we receive it with simplicity and judge the old nature (which never enters into it, but only comes as a thick cloud over our blessing), shall we enter into the realization of our blessing. Israel’s hope is not inward only but outward, in earthly places to be made the most exalted people here below. The scene of our blessing, on the contrary, is in heavenly places, and we are blessed there now in Christ. In a word, a Christian is as one who belongs to the family of the sovereign. There might be reasons of state to make it desirable for the Queen’s heir to pass as a stranger through a foreign land, unknown and unregarded. So with the Christian. He is not of the world nor of the age. His body is of the earth, but that which makes him to be what he is as a son of God, has nothing to do with the present scene or circumstances. He belongs to a glorified Christ altogether. When God begins to deal with Israel, it will be another thing. The attention of the whole world will be directed towards them. There was a time when, even in the midst of all their sin, the people of Israel exercised an enormous influence in the world, spite of their being a small nation, and having only a narrow slip of land to dwell on. Their priests and kings gave up the true God, and God has made them to be the witnesses of His judgments. But the day is fast coming when they that smote will acknowledge their rejected Messiah, and then will shine the real splendor to which Israel is destined of God. He will fill them with blessing of every kind here below. All the nations of the earth will bow down to Israel; kings and queens will be their nursing fathers and mothers. Christendom, despised as a proud and effete political engine, and more and more degenerating into apostasy, will be set aside like Vashti; God will bless His people of Israel, the Esther of the great King, with all outward blessings in earthly places, not revealing Himself as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, but as the Lord God Jehovah, Most High, identified at length with the lowly Jesus of Nazareth. Is that the way in which we are spoken of here? Not at all. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. A Jew could not understand what it would be to be blessed in their Messiah. But to be joint heirs with Christ, not only blessed by Christ, but in Christ, is an idea that could not possibly enter the most intelligent Israelite’s mind. In a word, their portion will always be under their Messiah, to be blessed by Him as an earthly people. But ours, who believe in Christ now, will be to have the same blessing which God the Father confers upon Christ risen from the dead. What has He done for Christ? He has raised Him up, and put all things under His feet. But all this He will not take alone. He is waiting for His bride—for those that are now being called out of Jews and Gentiles to the knowledge of His name. So that our Lord, while personally exalted, holds it in abeyance because He is waiting for the companions to share it with Him; heirs by His grace, not merely of the fathers, but of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.

Nothing can be larger or higher than the blessing spoken of here. Christ will have His heavenly ones above, and His earthly ones below; each fully blest though in different spheres. May I commend the truth brought out in Ephesians 1 to the serious study of God’s children? While it becomes us to hear the word of God, it claims from us earnestness of purpose and searching into it as for hidden treasure. We must not expect to be really and fully blessed through the word of God, unless there be diligence of soul.

clickbible.org