

Ephesians - Commentaries by William Woldridge Fereday

Meditations on Ephesians, Ephesians 6:10-24, Meditations on (6:10-24)

THE mind of the Lord has been declared concerning the relationships in which we may find ourselves on earth. Another subject is now dealt with by the apostle—our conflict in the heavenlies. This flows out of the teaching in chaps. 1. 2. There our place is shown as risen together with Christ, and sitting in Him in the heavenly places, blessed with all spiritual blessings in Him. There we learn that, to enjoy our heavenly portion, conflict is necessary with those who seek to hinder.¹ The allusion (though the contrast is complete) is to the wars of the Israelites in Canaan for the enjoyment of what God had promised. In Josh. 1 to 4. we have God bringing them through Jordan (type of death and resurrection with Christ) into the land of promise. In the plains of Jericho, Joshua circumcises them (our circumcision is found in Col. 3); they keep the passover, and eat of the old corn of the land. Thus did they take their place as His people in Canaan, in accordance with the purpose of God. But the Amorites were there, determined and prepared to contest every inch of the ground with them. Israel must meet them in the power of God. They were to enjoy every place that the sole of their foot touched; a sign of taking possession (Josh. 1:3; Rev. 10:2).

But God was with them, and nothing failed of His good word; wherever they went in dependence upon Him, victory was sure, the enemy was expelled, and they took possession. These things, as others written aforetime, are for our learning. "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might." We are a poor match for Satan and his hosts apart from the power of God. If like Israel at Ai, who forgot God and measured the enemy by themselves, defeat is certain. But the weapons of our warfare are mighty through God; when His Spirit acts in His people, who can withstand? Carnal weapons are in vain, "for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Our enemies are thus of a different character from those of Israel; they are "spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies" (as in ver. 12, better rendered). Scripture does not tell us much about the powers in the heavenlies, but we have many allusions to such, good and bad. Thus in this Epistle Christ is set far above all principality and power (chap. i. 21); through the church is now made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places the manifold wisdom of God (chap. iii. 10). Dan. 10 draws aside the veil, as it were, and tells us something of the conflicts above, showing how earthly events are affected by movements there; while Rev. 12 shows us the final expulsion of evil powers from heaven by Michael and his hosts. This occurs in the midst of the last of Daniel's seventy weeks. But such hosts are not ejected from heaven yet (though they be not in the presence of God): our conflict is with them. It is the unceasing aim of the powers of darkness to prevent our hearts from rising to the height of our heavenly relations; nothing pleases the enemy better than to see saints groveling below.

Armor is provided, the whole armor of God; which we must take to us to be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Many can bear his roar, who are overcome by his wiles. Israel could calmly contemplate the high walls of Jericho, knowing God was with them, but were utterly worsted by the wily Gibeonites. How treacherous are our poor hearts! How unfit to be trusted! We are only exhorted to "stand"; the bruising under our feet is not yet, though shortly (Rom. 16:20). One shudders sometimes at the light and vain talk so prevalent to-day, concerning the power of the enemy, and our power over him and his works. We need to remember the word not to speak evil of dignities, and Michael's reply to Satan, "the Lord rebuke thee." "He durst not bring against him a railing accusation" (2 Peter 2:10, 11; Jude 9, 10). The utmost we can hope to do in "the evil day" (God's way of describing the whole of the present period) is to "stand": happy the saint who is able to do so.

The armor is detailed; and it is all practical. Our loins are to be girt about with truth, every habit is to be controlled by it, the truth is to govern our lives in each particular. Thus alone can we keep our garments unspotted from the world. The breastplate of righteousness follows; for how can we show front to the enemy if our practical ways are not good? Where righteousness before God is spoken of, the figure is rather a robe; but before the foe armor, as here and in 2 Cor. 6:7. The feet are to be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; i.e., peace is to characterize our whole walk below. Is it in vain that the Spirit constantly says, "Grace unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"? If peace with God has been made by the blood of Jesus, and the God of peace has brought Him again from among the dead, the peace of God is to keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. The apostle prayed that the Lord of peace would give the Thessalonians peace always by all means. It is happy to be a "son of peace:" precious portion in a world of turmoil and upheaval!

But the shield of faith is equally necessary, that we may be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. This is that calm confidence in God which it is ours to know in every circumstance; for we walk by faith, not by sight. Faith never dreads foes, however numerous and strong; it measures them by God and goes forward with holy boldness. With the shield in position, the heart is safe.

The headgear is the helmet of salvation. Salvation is ours now as regards the soul; as regards the body we shall know it shortly at the Lord's return; and it is sure. What confidence this gives! All the malice of the enemy can never wrest from us our portion: it is founded upon the sacrifice of Christ, and secured to us by His life on high. Thus are we enabled to hold our heads high, and say, Whom shall we fear?

All these parts of the armor are defensive; but there is one offensive weapon, "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." This was what the Lord used in conflict with Satan. "It is written" was sufficient for victory. Satan is for faith a vanquished foe. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." He meets Christ in the saint, and Christ is enough. One word of scripture, used in the power of the Spirit, is of all value when pressed by the enemy. But this must be coupled with prayer. The word of God and prayer are the two great springs of the Christian's life (Luke 10, 11.); without them we become a prey. Compare 1 John 2:9. It is "the evil day," and our hearts are treacherous and readily beguiled: dependence on God and a right use of His word alone can preserve us.

But our hearts must not be occupied solely with our own needs: "all saints" are to have a place. This is the Epistle which unfolds the truth of the one body: has it entered our hearts? It is fitting, surely, in such a letter that the apostle should enjoin prayer and supplication for all. And there are those who have a special claim upon our prayers, because placed in the front of the battle, exposed therefore to the peculiar rage

of the enemy. Paul was preeminently such an one, and valued the prayers of the saints, that his mouth might be boldly opened to make known the mystery of the gospel. He was an ambassador in bonds: he felt the difficulty of his position, though his heart was sustained. Tychicus carried this Epistle, as also that to the Colossians; he would make known to the saints the affairs of Paul, and comfort their hearts by the recital of the Lord's faithful love and grace to him.

Salutations close all, and they too in perfect keeping with the aim and character of the Epistle.

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Meditations on Ephesians, Ephesians 6:1-9, Meditations on (6:1-9)

IT is noticeable that the Spirit of God gives similar instructions as to the relationships of life in Colossians as here; though not with the same fullness, nor quite upon the same lines. The latter is especially to be seen in the word to children: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right" (just). So reads Ephesians: but in Colossians the apostle merely states, "for this is well-pleasing unto the Lord." Was the variation because of the legal tendencies of the latter? From the forms &c., which had such attraction for their brethren at Colosse, the Ephesians were apparently quite clear, through grace; therefore the apostle was free to say "this is just," without fear of the word being misapplied by them.

Everywhere in scripture is filial obedience pressed; and the Lord Himself in the home at Nazareth has left an example which should be studied (Luke 2:51). Disobedience to parents is one of the unhappy moral signs of the last days (2 Tim. 3:2), as also absence of natural affection; elements painfully and increasingly apparent on every hand. But the obedience must be "in the Lord"; all obedience having this important qualification. A heathen parent might bid his child sacrifice to idols: must he obey? Where the express will of God is crossed, such can only answer as Peter and John to the priests who bade them preach no more in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:19; 5:29). Nothing and no one must be allowed to come in between the conscience and God.

Some have found difficulty in the Spirit's use of the fifth commandment in this place, as apparently sanctioning the placing of Christians under the law. This is not so, for the word of God never contradicts itself. Christians have been delivered from the law by the body of Christ, having died to that wherein they were held; and have a new and higher standard set before them for walk below, even a heavenly Christ. To turn back to law is to build again the things we have destroyed, to place ourselves under the curse, to be removed from Him Who called us in the grace of Christ unto another gospel. But what the apostle shows here is that God has always insisted on due honor and obedience being rendered to parents, under the law as truly as under Christianity; so important, indeed, is it with Him, that Jehovah added a promise to the commandment (the first with such an attachment) "that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest live long on the earth." This is stated to show what the promise was; strictly, of course, in keeping with the calling of Israel. The Christian is called to heavenly blessing; he expects trial and difficulty, and perhaps persecution, in this world; though it is not denied that there is present blessing in the government of God for those who do His will.

Fathers are next addressed. "Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Discipline is necessary, and cannot safely be dispensed with (does our Father train us without it?); but it must be wise to be good. It is unhappy to alienate the affections of the children by unnecessary rigor; parental influence is thus lost, and not easily regained. Faith regards the family as a precious charge from the Lord, and delights to lay hold of the word, "train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6). Is not Timothy a bright example, and encouragement to faith (2 Tim. 3:15)?

Some have found fault with the exhortations of verses 5-8, saying that they sanction or encourage slavery. The objection is groundless. God does not sanction such a principle; but it has come in among men, as many other things, as a result of sin; and while not interfering at all with the framework of society (which awaits its rectification till Christ comes), He legislates for His own saints, who may find themselves in these relationships.

What can be wiser or more comforting to the Christian slave than the word in 1 Cor. 7:20-24? If such yearned for their liberty, that they might serve the Lord more fully, they are told not to make a care of it, and are assured that "he that is called in the Lord being a servant (slave) is the Lord's freed-man;" while on the other hand, "he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant" (or slave). Here (Eph. 6) such are told to be "obedient to their masters according to the flesh with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart as unto Christ." Did they serve unreasonable and tyrannical men? How elevating and sustaining then to look beyond the man to the Lord, "knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free." If the reward fail here, it will assuredly be seen at the judgment-seat of Christ. Christians are not called to reform the world while passing through it; but to acquit themselves becomingly, as heavenly men, in the midst of it all. The principles here laid down though addressed to slaves, apply with equal force to employed servants. Eyeservice, men pleasing, is abominable to the Lord; the rather is it His will that service be rendered heartily, and all done in the name of the Lord Jesus. What a view of our hearts we get, that we should need such a word!

In 1 Tim. 6:2 the apostle adds on this subject another word of particular importance. "And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren, &c." The Spirit of God knows how prone the human heart is to take advantage of such circumstances: it is natural to the heart to be radical. But the believer is to eschew the ways and habits of men, and walk according to God. In the assembly of God, at the Lord's table, the believing master and servant are brethren, and members of one body, outside relationships having no place there; but in the shop or on the farm it is otherwise, and we do well not to forget it.

Masters are then exhorted, and reminded that their Master is in heaven; “neither is there respect of persons with Him.” He notes threatening and oppression: the cry of the poor and needy comes up in His ears, and He will requite it in the coming day. This verse should read, I believe, “their Master and yours is in [the] heavens;” which gives an added point of importance: both master and servant are responsible to the one Lord, and will stand together at the same judgment-seat.

Meditations on Ephesians, Ephesians 5:22-33, Meditations on (5:22-33)

THE Spirit now turns to the various relationships of life and exhorts to a becoming and heavenly walk in them. So complete is the word of God as the believer's directory that nothing is left untouched that is needed for life and godliness. The home and the business find a place as truly as the assembly of God.

The order of the exhortations here should be noted: wives are addressed before husbands, children before fathers, and servants before masters; each word arising out of ver. 21, “submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.” This important principle the apostle now proceeds to develop in its application to the different circumstances in which we find ourselves on earth. A very beautiful style is to be observed in the exhortations to wives and husbands: each are set to study Christ and the church as their patterns respectively of obedience and affection. How different the principle of legal obedience! Here the Spirit fills our hearts with heavenly realities, and then sets us to reproduce them, as it were, in our walk below. This way reminds of God's dealing with Moses with regard to the tabernacle; “see that thou make all things according to the pattern showed thee in the mount.” Thus, as Paul speaks, the tabernacle and its vessels were “patterns of things in the heavens.” On a similar principle should our walk as saints be regulated.

It is blessed to notice how the heart of the apostle, even in giving commonplace exhortations to the saints, turns naturally to that which was his peculiar stewardship—the relationship of grace existing between Christ and the church according to the eternal counsels of God. Wives are therefore told to submit themselves unto their own husbands, as unto the Lord, the husband being the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the church. “Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.” The apostle speaks of the place in which the church has been set, that of subjection to her Head; not of her actual practice. Alas, for that! How much self-will and losing sight of the Headship of Christ has marred her practice! But the truth abides, “the church is subject unto Christ”—He is her glorified Head: the Christian wife is to learn the great principle, and act upon it.

Husbands are not exhorted to rule, that not being a point where they are so likely to fail¹, but to love. The wives are not addressed in this way: love with them is not so likely to be weak as submission. And what is set before the husband? “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it.” This, when understood, lifts us above merely natural ground: divine love is our heavenly pattern. It is profitable to notice the different ways in which divine love is spoken of in the scriptures. In John's Gospel (chap. 3.) we get God's love to the world, in John's epistle (chap. 3.) the Father's love to the family. Here it is neither, but Christ's love to the church. It was that on which He set His heart when in the depths as the costly pearl: He would have her for His own, to share His throne and glory, to be the object of His affection forever. To acquire her, He must give Himself (for the question of sin was there): could even divine love do more? He held not back even from the cross, for the joy that was set before Him; a part, at least, of which was to have the church as His own—His body and His bride.

In verse 25 we get the past—what He has done: in verse 26 we get the present, what He is doing, sanctifying and cleansing it with the washing of water by the word. He will have her to be according to His mind, and therefore uses His word upon her that she may be kept apart by it from all that is contrary to Himself, and cleansed whenever she contracts defilement in the world. What individual saint does not know the power and blessedness of this? He died for the saints, for the church: He lives for us and serves us, as the girded One in the glory.

And even that is not all, for there is a future as truly as a past and present; “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.” What a contrast between present conditions and future glory! Spots are too plainly to be seen now, for the church has not kept herself from the world (James 1:27): wrinkles, signs of decay, were to be seen even before the apostle of the church went to his rest. But all such marks of failure and sin will be removed by the holy loving hand of her faithful Lord, and she shall be what His heart would have her; “neither spot nor wrinkle, nor any such thing,” as the Spirit emphatically declares, shall be seen in that day.

Meanwhile He loves the church as Himself, with a love that never wearies nor grows cold; and the husband is to learn the precious lesson: Christ nourishes and cherishes the church, “for we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.” As a typo, Eve's case is then brought forward; the fruit, as it were, of the deep sleep of Adam, his helpmeet, and the sharer of his dominion and blessing. Such is the church's place in relationship with Christ; one with Him now by the Spirit, presently to share all which His grace will bestow. Our hearts do well to cultivate a deeper entrance into His mind concerning the church, seeking His glory in it, and the edification and perfection of all His own. For this, Paul counted it a privilege to labor, pray, and suffer (Col. 1:24-28). In closing the subject, the apostle draws the conclusion. that the husband is to love his wife even as himself, and the wife is to see that she reverence her husband.

Meditations on Ephesians, Ephesians 5:1-21, Meditations on (5:1-21)

THE apostle continues by the Spirit his practical exhortations. The whole Christian pathway is summed up in one pregnant sentence, “Be ye therefore followers (imitators) of God, as dear children.” How much higher is this than law! In giving the latter God set forth His requirement from man, and it consisted in “Do this and live;” but Christianity is a higher and more blessed thing. God has revealed Himself fully too in the Son of His love. This henceforth is the believer's pattern. We do not aim at godliness with a view to gaining the favor of God, or of making out a righteousness: but we walk thus because we are children, partakers of the divine nature, objects of His unbounded affection. It is sweet

thus to be reminded of His love! Paul could address the Roman saints as “beloved of God,” (Rom. 1), the Thessalonians similarly (1 Thess. 1:4); and the Lord in His prayer to the Father lets us know that we are loved by the Father as He Himself was loved (John 17:23, see also John 16:27). The knowledge of this is to shape our steps.

We are to “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.” How such a word searches the heart! Is this how we love? Who will not own to shortcoming? Yet the standard may not be lowered, nothing short of this is the mind of God for His saints. Christ gave Himself—His love led Him even to death for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren (1 John 4). The sacrifice of Christ is here brought before us in its burnt offering aspect—it was a sweet smelling savor; and, blessed be His name, “for us.” In 1 Peter 2:24, where we get the trespass offering side of His cross, “a sweet savor” could not be said: He bore our sins, and drank the cup of divine wrath which was their due.

Warnings follow. “But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be named among you, as becometh saints.” How humbling that such exhortations should be found in close connection with the unfolding of the heavenly calling! But what is the human heart not capable of? No warning is given in vain; and the condition of the Corinthian assembly, when the apostle wrote his first Epistle there, shows the need of the word. The Thessalonians were written to similarly (1 Thess. 4:3-8); the Colossians also (Col. 3:5-6). The tongue is to be guarded no less than the other members of the body: filthiness, foolish talking, and jesting ill become the saints. Scripture is positive as well as negative; if folly is not to flow from our lips, giving of thanks should. Happy occupation! the heart so satisfied with divine grace, and so engrossed with Christ, that out of its abundance thanksgiving wells out to Him. May we know more of it!

Does God think lightly of sin and folly? Nay; to pursue such ways is exceedingly grave. Such persons have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. The Ephesians must not be deceived, “for because of these things the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience.” What can be said when one professing the Lord’s name steadily pursues an evil course? “By their fruits ye shall know them.” It is no question of the believer failing as he passes through the world—for such there is restoring grace through the advocacy of Christ on high, and the gracious operation of the Spirit in heart and conscience below; it is an evil course which is supposed, though under cover of the Lord’s name. The Ephesians were to hold themselves aloof from such, and not to be partakers with them. Such ways had been attractive to them, for they were once darkness; but now, being light in the Lord, they were to walk as children of light. Our former condition is here very solemnly stated— “once darkness.” “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all:” we were thus wholly opposed to God, our very nature antagonistic. But we are no longer darkness, nor in darkness, but are children of light: the fruit of the light¹—i.e. the practical result of knowing God fully revealed—should be manifested in all “goodness and righteousness and truth.” We thus prove experimentally what is acceptable (well-pleasing) to the Lord.

The Christian should thus, (not only abstain from ungodly ways, but) abjure all fellowship with those who practice them. Rather should he expose them; not necessarily directly attacking the world’s practices, but by consistent godliness reproving iniquity. Men’s secret sins, which have as large a place now as in Paul’s days, are too shameful even to name; but they are exposed, and their true character declared by the light, for light manifests all things. Such exposing will not bring love, but rather hatred, to the witness, as our Lord Jesus said, “Me it (the world) hateth, because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil” (John 7:7). In His case the darkness hated the light: it was too much for them.

Therefore is the believer to awake if sleeping, and arise from among the dead. Sorrowful condition for a saint to slip into! Of what value as a witness to God and the truth is a sleeper? Thanks be to God, such are not dead: the spark of divine life is there, and can never be extinguished; but they have sunk into a state of spiritual torpor, having thus lost their enjoyment of heavenly grace, and their usefulness in testimony. The Spirit also arouses in Rom. 13, but there reminds us of the nearness of our salvation, the night being far spent, and the day at hand. Here such sleepers among the dead are exhorted to arise; and, as the apostle adds, “Christ shall shine upon thee.” Only thus can the believer reflect anything of God to a hostile world.

Such exhortations remind us of where we are—in an enemy’s land. We shall not need in heaven to be told to walk carefully, to redeem the time, and to lay aside folly, and understand what the will of the Lord is. The days are evil: hence the need of the Spirit’s admonitions.

The use of wine is to be guarded—in it is excess, profligacy: the rather are we to be filled with the Spirit. This is a different thought from being sealed with the Spirit. The latter is God’s work entirely, the Spirit being His gift to the believer, founded on redemption; but to be “filled” rests with ourselves in self-judgment and looking to Christ. How far do we hinder His operation within?

Being thus filled, the heart expresses itself in melody and thanksgiving to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. The psalms, &c., spoken of in this chapter are Christian compositions; not those of David, which relate to the Jew rather than to the Christian. Of course, there are many precious sentiments contained in that wonderful and inspired collection that are true for believers at all times. Still the book is not characterized by those blessings which we are called particularly to enjoy; as accomplished redemption, union with an exalted Christ, the knowledge of the Father, and the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. The spiritual tone is distinctly lowered when souls persist in using the Psalms of David as the proper and habitual vehicle of their worship.

Meditations on Ephesians, Ephesians 4:12-32, Meditations on (4:12-32)

THE first and principal object of all ministry is “the perfecting of the saints.” It is not the will of God that His saints shall remain in an infantine condition, not knowing their privileges and blessings and His thoughts concerning them, but that they should make progress and grow in the knowledge of Himself and of His grace. It is not enough that all is ours in Christ Jesus, and that what grace has given can never be forfeited because the fruit of divine counsel and founded upon Christ’s work; but God would have His saints know and enjoy all that has been granted. This thought is immensely higher than the general notion of even good men in Christendom to-day. With many the principal object is the salvation of souls, at best the blessing of the creature rather than the glory of Christ. This is to serve on low ground, however little intended, the aim being distinctly beneath the declared aim of our God. The unhappy result is that numbers of souls stop short at the knowledge of

forgiveness, or of security from judgment, with feeble thoughts of divine righteousness, and little or no knowledge of union by the Spirit with a risen and exalted Christ on high. It is, of course, freely admitted that souls must be won for Christ by the gospel before they can be perfected; but forgiveness of sins is but an initial blessing. The soul is by Him introduced into a large place, where unbounded grace may be learned and enjoyed. And let it not be supposed that the evangelist's work has nothing to do with this. His work is included in the statement, "for the perfecting of the saints." He declares the gospel, and thus performs the first great office; the pastor and teacher follow up the work, the labors of each and all tending in the one great direction. An understanding of this will preserve the evangelist from labor of an independent character. His work, of course, lies not within the assembly, but in the world of the ungodly; yet he goes forth from the bosom of the assembly, and into that circle he gathers souls, that Christ the center may be glorified in them. Thus are the further objects of the giving of the gifts secured; the work of the ministry is accomplished in all its branches; and the body of Christ, which the Spirit of God came here to form, is edified.

Before passing from this important subject, it is of moment to press the direct responsibility of every servant to Christ. Let us note well the principles of this chapter. Evangelists, pastors, and teachers, are gifts from Christ ascended, as truly as apostles and prophets: the church has no place but as a receiver. The notion of officials or the church appointing ministry is not found here, nor elsewhere in scripture. I am aware that elders (or bishops) and deacons were appointed by an apostle or apostolic man so commissioned like Titus; but such were ordained for rule not for the ministry of the word. The first class (always in the plural) were set to watch over the spiritual affairs of the saints in the towns where they dwelt, their authority not extending beyond those limits; deacons were appointed to serve tables or analogous work. In some instances, persons of both classes possessed ministerial gifts also, Stephen and Philip among deacons being cases in point; but this was altogether distinct from their local responsibilities. They were appointed to local office: as evangelists, &c., they were the gifts of Christ. Therefore, evangelists, pastors, and teachers being Christ's gifts, to Him they are responsible in the exercise of their service, and to no one else. When the Corinthians were disposed to judge Paul, they only drew forth from him a sound rebuke; and were told that to him it was a small thing to be judged by them, or by man's day—his judge was the Lord (1 Cor. 4:3-5). Had the apostle been speaking of discipline in the assembly, he would have spoken differently; a minister, if convicted of immoral ways, or unsound doctrine, being as much amenable to discipline as any other professors of Christ's name. But in the ordinary exercise of their gifts all such are responsible to the Lord alone, at Whose judgment-seat they and all will shortly stand.

We now come to the duration of the gifts; "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 perfection spoken of here seems to be not in glory, where all will doubtless be according to Christ, but a state of full growth on earth in contrast with infancy and weakness as in verse 14.

Even in Paul's early day, corrupt men bearing the Lord's name were active in seeking to ensnare the unwary and the simple, and lead them astray from the faith. God would have His saints firmly established in His grace and truth, and in the knowledge of His Son, that they may be proof against the ever changing wiles of the enemy. It is deplorable to observe saints tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, apparently at the mercy of the foe. Is this God's will? Nay, but their establishment and blessing. And inasmuch as the church of God will never be without souls needing to be helped on to full growth, the ever faithful Head will continue the gifts of His grace until the end: "till we all come." Note, gifts are not given to make the saints helplessly dependent on them, but the reverse; by means of the gifts the saints become firmly rooted and grow up into Him Who is the Head—Christ.

Verse 15 is rather "being truthful in love"; the truth not only influencing our speech, as the Authorized Version would indicate, but all our ways, having its true place in our inward parts.

Verse 16 completes the circle of the provision of the Head for the edification of His body. Here we get not only that which is general, the body compacted and fitly joined together by that which every joint supplieth. It is an important principle surely: no member of the body is irresponsible" unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ"—and all must be in exercise that all may be blessed and edified, and the Lord glorified.

In verse 17 the practical exhortations take a different shape. In verses 1—16 the instruction affects more particularly our collective walk as one body; here we have that which is individual. A becoming and separate walk is pressed. The apostle puts it solemnly: "This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord." He knows the dangers to which the saints were everywhere exposed, and that the Lord's honor was bound up with them; therefore the peculiarly impressive tone.

He exhorts them not to walk "as other Gentiles walk." They used so to do, as chap. ii. 1-3 shows; and at that time they were children of wrath even as others. But grace makes a difference, and would have the difference to be seen by men among whom we walk; not indeed that we may be praised, but that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ. The exhortation is similar to 1 Peter 4:3— "The time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles"—only there the apostle of the circumcision was writing to believing Jews, who had in their former days sunk to the level of the Gentiles around.

Paul depicts in dark colors the condition of the Gentiles who know not God; minds vain, understandings darkened, hearts hardened, alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them. This is true of all, whether philosophical or unlearned. Man's mind cannot find a true center or object, if it knows not God; nor can his understanding find the enlightenment. See the solemn confirmation of this in Rom. 1:21, 22, and recall the apostle amongst the "wise" at Athens. In the latter place he could only speak of the most elementary things; the creatorship of God, the unity of man, the folly of idolatry, &c.; for what does man's mind become when he shuts God out? True, all may not sink to the level of verse 19, "being past feeling" &c.; but the unregenerate heart, wherever found, is capable even of that. But we have not so learned: How sweetly the apostle expresses our present path here Not set as those in Judaism to obey a code of laws, but to learn and hearken to a Person—Christ. Would the law, if kept, make a man heavenly? No, it suits men in the flesh, acting as a curb and as a plummet; but it could never make a man what a Christian ought to be. The Christian's standard is immeasurably higher. "But we know that the law is good if a man use it lawfully, knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man" (1 Tim. 1:9); and this the believer is, in virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, for we have been made the righteousness of God in Him.

The truth is, that a new nature, a new life (from which the Gentiles, as such, are alienated) has been imparted, and the new life has an object presented to it—Christ; and it is the believer's delight to study Him. "I have heard Him and learned Him." In measure as our hearts are

occupied with Him, we become changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit. And when we look at His blessed ways here, when manifested, we see how we should shape our steps, for in Him the life of God was displayed in perfection among men below. This, I conceive to be the force of “as the truth is in Jesus” —all was to be seen perfectly exemplified there. Moreover, we have put off (past tense, not as A. V. or R. V.) concerning the former conversation (behavior) the old man; and have put on the new. Both are described: the old man is “corrupt according to the lusts of deceit.” (The meaning of the word “corrupt” here is “ruined” (we get a different word in verse 29, “putrid,” “rotten”): the old man is past all repair. God has disowned him, we have put him off— “our old man is crucified with Him.” But the new man is according to God created in righteousness and holiness of truth. Note the word “created”; God has caused to exist in me what was not there once. See Col. 3:10, the new man is “renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him.” The word eminently suits Ephesians; for here man is viewed as dead. But we have been quickened—quickened together with Christ: there is therefore a new creation, “we are created in Christ Jesus unto good works” &c. I have said the new man is described: he is created “according to God.” The new man loves righteousness and holiness of truth, never loving to wallow in the mire; and the practical display of these characteristics is the proof of life.

The apostle proceeds to details: falsehood (meaning more than lying actions as well as words) is to be put off; truth is to be spoken, for we are members one of another. The motive stated is an exalted one: I am not merely to scorn falsehood from a sense of honor, which an upright man of the world may do, but I am a member of the same body with my brother; if I act or speak falsely to him, I do so to myself, and more solemn still, to Christ. Anger is to be watched, that sin may not result, and that the devil may have no place. Anger in the sense of indignation against unrighteousness and iniquity, is all well and of God—we find God often angry in the Old Testament and Christ moved with anger in the New—but our hearts are treacherous, and we have to watch it.

The thief is to become a laborer and even a giver, for grace transforms. The law required the thief to make restitution but grace makes him positively benevolent.

And if the hands are regulated in verse 28, the tongue finds a place in verse 29. What do we emit from our lips? The Spirit in James devotes a whole chapter to the unruly member; instruction always needed and wholesome. Is our conversation “corrupt,” or is it “good to the use of edifying, ministering grace unto the hearers. Of Christ we read; “Grace is poured into Thy lips” (Psa. 45).

The Holy Spirit of God dwells within; the temple should be kept pure, that He may be ungrieved. There are two great principles in these verses, a new nature, a positive life imparted, and the indwelling of the Spirit. By Him we are sealed unto the day of redemption. “Grieve not” is here said to the individual, “quench not” in 1 Thess. 5 to the assembly.

God's ways are to be seen in us, and all bitterness, wrath, put far away. The kindness and tender-heartedness of God to us are to form our ways. He in Christ has forgiven us, the spirit of forgiveness is to reign amongst the saints. “Until seven times?” Nay, but “until seventy times seven” (Matt. 18).

Meditations on Ephesians, Ephesians 4:1-16, Meditations on (4:1-16)

We here enter upon the practical part of the epistle. Ver. 1 refers back to the end of chap. 2. In chap 3:1 the apostle commenced with, “For this cause I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,” and then went off into a lengthy parenthesis (not an unusual thing in his epistles) which reaches to the end of the chapter. Here he takes up the thread: “I, therefore the prisoner of the Lord, beseech.” How touching the manner of the exhortation! In all his epistles there is marked rareness of commanding (though of course he had authority as an apostle). He loved to say “Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy” (2 Cor. 1:24).

Three times in Paul's epistles we are exhorted to “walk worthy.” In 1 Thess. 2:12 we are to “walk worthy of God,” the living and true God Whom, in contrast with idols, the Thessalonians had been called to serve. In Col. 1:10 it is “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing,” Christ's authority and headship being much dwelt upon in that epistle. Here it is “worthy of the vocation (calling) wherewith ye are called” (chap 4:1). The calling has been unfolded in chaps. i, and ii.; it involves new nature and relationship, access to the Father, and God's habitation in the Spirit union with the exalted Christ in one body.

Lowliness and meekness are to characterize us: how else can we walk together? We have the same thing in Phil. 2, “lowliness of mind, each esteeming other better than themselves.” Fellowship with each other is an impossibility, if self is allowed: heart-burnings and strife must surely follow. But suppose, in displaying lowliness and meekness, we find our brethren otherwise? Then comes the opportunity of exercising longsuffering and forbearance in love; and our earnest endeavor must be to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

In view of the many unions of than this is His formation; and in this we are called to walk, saints in Christendom, it becomes an important question, what is the unity of the Spirit? The Spirit gathers to Christ as center, and His unity embraces all the saints, every evil being excluded. Nothing narrower or broader watching our hearts sedulously, lest Satan get an advantage to Christ's dishonor and our sorrow. We need zeal to observe it practically.

The apostle proceeds to mention some of the bonds of unity. There are seven: one body, one Spirit, one hope; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all. We must not confound the unity of the Spirit with the unity of the body, though the two things are intimately connected. A recent writer, one worthy of esteem in love for his work's sake, has said, “Is it not clear that, during this age, the Church of Christ was never meant to be a visible corporate body, but to be a great spiritual reality, consisting of all faithful and loyal spirits, in all communions, who, holding the Head, are necessarily one with each other?” It is clear, undoubtedly, that the church was meant to be “a great spiritual reality,” and this it is. But it is also clear from scripture, that it should have been “a visible corporate body,” i.e. all the saints on earth walking together in one communion, keeping the unity of the Spirit. It were better far to own our deep failure and sin, and seek fresh grace from the ever faithful Lord, than to excuse our failure by denying the truth and our responsibility.

Though all that is here stated be true of every saint, it is plain that there are different circles in vers. 4-6, and that they widen. None can have part in the one body and one Spirit and one hope, but those that are really Christ's; but the one Lord, one faith, and one baptism, are connected with the sphere of profession; while the one God and Father of all Who is above all, and through all, and in us (or you) all, speaks of a wider circle still (save in the last clause, "in us all"); for all the families in heaven and earth range themselves under Him, as in chap. 3:15. For God's aim in perfecting the saints, Christ's work of ministry, and our building up here below as members of His body, the Head has given gifts. There are two truths in vers. 7-16; first, "unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." This is the general statement. Every saint has received something from Christ for the edification of the body, which is "compacted by that which every joint supplieth." No member is irresponsible; each has his place and functions. Secondly, there are special gifts, which we may call ministerial. All flow from a victorious and ascended Christ. He came once in grace where we were. We were dead, and under the power of Satan: He went down into death, meeting the strong man, but proved Himself to be the stronger, and, having taken from him all his armor wherein he trusted, He divides the spoils. The lowest place was once His— "He descended into the lower parts of the earth; "He now is seen far above all heavens, filling all things. Captivity has been led captive, the Victor has received gifts for men¹ (strictly, "in man;" i.e. in His human character).

How precious to view ministry thus! It is not regarded in scripture as a mere office, imparting external importance to the holder, but as fruit of the victory of Jesus, of which all His members share the blessedness. There are various gifts named; apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Note, it is not said that He gave apostolic or evangelistic gifts to certain men, though this is true (1 Peter 4:10), but He gave apostles, etc. That is, the men themselves are gifts to the body for its edification and blessing. Apostles and prophets did foundation work; and these, having laid the foundation, have ceased. Their writings abide for the permanent profit of the saints; and in this sense, they may abide; but, as a fact, they are gone. Successors they have none; nor was any promise given of a restored apostleship at the end, whatever some may vainly think.

The remaining gifts for the blessed objects are continued, and are vouchsafed to the end by the faithful Head in heaven. Of these, the evangelist is mentioned first, for so his work is in the order of the soul's experience. He is the special gift to bring the soul to God, the Holy Spirit acting through him. The work of the pastor and teacher then begins. The pastor acts the father's part, watching over the divine life which has been imparted, seeking to train in God's ways, and guide and guard from ill; while the teacher (here a connected class) opens the treasury of truth, and expounds what he knows of the precious things of God that the soul may be instructed. How are these men known? Not by garments or titles, but by spiritual power. The man who yearns over the perishing, and who is able to bring home to them the gospel of Christ, is beyond doubt an evangelist. Where this is the fact (and it is easily known), he is recognized as such, and accepted as a gift from Christ. So, also those who act a fatherly part of unfold the vast field of revealed truth, showing by their ways that the saints are a burden on their hearts, are to be honored by their brethren in that still more delicate and difficult work.

It is due to Christ to thankfully accept all that He gives; not setting off one gift against another, but giving all the place assigned by the Lord. "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them that labor among and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in the Lord for their work's sake; and be at peace among yourselves" (1 Thess. 5:12,13).

It is to be observed that on the one hand miraculous gifts are not mentioned here, nor on the other hand, elders and deacons. They have each their own place in scripture; the first being signs to the unbelieving; the second, local responsibilities. Here we have the direct and gracious and unfailing position of the Lord for the edification of the body here below.

Meditations on Ephesians, Ephesians 1:15-22; 2, Meditations on (1:15-22)

This closes the introduction of the epistle, and the apostle pauses to pray for the saints. The prayer here is addressed to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ ("Father of glory," because Author of it), and that in chap. iii., to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, corresponding with the twofold title in ver. 3. Paul had heard of their "faith" and their love— "love to all the saints" being the outcome of faith in our Lord. Narrowness of heart misses His mind, whatever the day may be, though love does not display itself in the same way toward all. In the companion epistle (Colossians) the Spirit commends the saints for the same precious fruit. There are three parts in this prayer. The apostle desired them to know the hope of His calling; the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints; and the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe. The "calling" we have seen in ver. 3-5; we are to be holy and blameless before Him in love, having sonship according to the good pleasure of His will. The "inheritance" we get in vers. 9-11; we are to share all things with Christ the Heir. Note, it is God's inheritance (as also His calling); but He inherits it in the saints. It is not at all meant that the saints form the inheritance, as some have thought, such a notion having no ground but refutation in the N. T. We see it often written of Israel. Yet also God reserved to Himself the land of Canaan; it was His land, but He inherited it in His people, while they were His inheritance.

The apostle wished the saints to grasp the vastness of all three—the calling, the inheritance, and the power that wrought in Christ in raising Him from among the dead, and placing Him at God's right hand in heavenly places, with all things under His feet. It is God's display of power, not in creation, however wonderful, but in raising from the dead His Son, Who went down into death (where we were) bearing our sins, and Who now is in righteousness at His own right hand above, as the accepted Man, the second Adam, Head of the new creation. The same power will presently place us in the same glory; and meanwhile it gives us to enter into the precious meaning of union with Him there, whereby we walk upon our high places. "He hath put all things under His feet" is a quotation from Psa. 8. It will be seen in its day; He is Head of the body of the church meanwhile. Wondrous thought! the church is His fullness. His mighty grace has so ordered all, that He (the Head) is not complete without His members—all those who have been joined to Him on high by the Holy Spirit.

Meditations on Ephesians, Ephesians 1:1-14, Meditations on (1:1-14)

THERE is an immense difference between the Epistle to the Ephesians and that which precedes (to the Galatians). There the apostle has to descend to the lowest scale of grace, and repeat foundation truths, because of the condition of souls. Here he writes freely of the most exalted themes—the counsels of God concerning Christ and the church. The Galatians were being drawn from the ground of faith after circumcision, worldly elements, and works of law; consequently the apostle had to recall them to the true ground of justification before God, faith in Christ's work. In Ephesians he was able to speak "wisdom among the perfect" (1 Cor. 2:6).

It is interesting, yet solemn, to note the difference between this Epistle and that to the Colossians, which most nearly approximates to it in doctrine. In Colossians he brings forward association with Christ dead and risen, but does not carry us into heavenly places. Our hearts, our mind, should be there; but we are viewed as here. He dwells upon the personal glories of the Head and the fullness that resides in Him, rather than the privileges and blessings that are ours in virtue of our union with Him. Why? Again, because of the need of souls. Meat in due season is requisite, and the condition of souls must be consulted. The Colossians were being attracted by philosophy and the tradition of men, &c., and needed to be reminded of the headship of Christ, in Whom they were complete. In the case of the Ephesians, however, there was apparently nothing in particular to rebuke or to warn against; they were exhorted to walk worthy of their calling. Consequently the apostle's heart was free, and he could write freely and fully of the wondrous blessings and privileges which pertain to us in Christ.¹

Note how he introduces his apostleship: "Paul apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God." Quite different is this from the opening of Galatians: "Paul apostle, not of men, neither by law, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, Who raised Him from the dead." Both forms of speech are in keeping with the character of the Epistles in which they are found. Paul was careful to establish for the Galatians that his ministry did not flow from Jerusalem as a center; nor had he derived his authority through a human channel; but all was of God, having Christ risen as center. Now in Ephesians, he purposes to show that all blessings for the saints in heavenly places flow from God's will (see in chap. 1:5, 9, 11); he therefore tells us that his apostleship had the same spring.

Paul begins with praise, as also Peter (1 Peter 1:3). How could he write such divine realities without thus bursting forth? The inspired writers were channels—the Holy Ghost being responsible for every word written by them (1 Cor. 2:13); but they were not mere pens. Their affections were engaged, drawn forth doubtless by the Holy Ghost; and the truth therefore was inscribed by Paul with a worshipping heart. He speaks of God as "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Farther on, in chap. 1:17, he speaks of "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ"; and, in chap. 3:14, of "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." These are the two titles under which God has been made known to us. Recall the Lord's words on the resurrection day, "I ascend unto my Father and your Father; and to my God and your God" (John 20:17). The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ.

This is in direct contrast with the Jewish portion of old. Jehovah called the Jew to enjoy temporal blessings in earthly places, with Canaan as their seat, basket and store, good crops and vintage, their promised enjoyment, if obedient. But we are not called thus. The Spirit here expounds a deeper purpose formed in God's heart before the foundation of the world, that we should be before Him in heavenly glory with His Son. If there, we must have a suited nature. Could the natural man be at home with God, and find pleasure where all is holy? impossible; it is opposed to his very being. Moreover, supposing it were possible to be before Him with a conscience not at rest, where would be the joy? How blessed, therefore, that we are to be "holy and without blame before Him in love" "Holy," because having His nature, a nature that finds its only portion in God— "Without blame," in virtue of Christ's work for who shall lay anything to our charge? "In love," His love flowing ever into our hearts, and back again to Him its source.

But if the God of our Lord Jesus Christ has done this, in the character of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, He has "predestinated us unto the adoption of children (sons) by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will," he. This is a further step: not only nature but relationship. What grace! What part had we to perform? Man is not found here; all is "according to the good pleasure of His will." He willed, and that is all. He has sought His own glory in doing all this for us: hence we read "to the praise of the glory of His grace." Our blessing is never the prime thought with God, but His own glory and the glory of Christ. How precious the change of expression in ver. 6, not "in Christ" but "in the Beloved!" "Accepted" is hardly the idea here, but rather "taken into favor"; and this "in the Beloved!" Recall the Lord's words in John 17:23: "that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them as Thou hast loved Me." How wonderful! Objects of the same Divine affection standing in the same relationship with the Father.

This leads to a passing notice of our former condition (Eph. 1:7); but it is not developed here, for the Spirit would engage us with God, His counsels and His will. And in chap. 2. it is gone into fully, where we are reminded solemnly of what we were. Here it is briefly said that we have redemption, the forgiveness of offenses through His blood. We were formerly Satan's slaves, needing redemption; we were offenders, needing forgiveness.

Further, God has "made known to us the mystery of His will." He has revealed to us His great purpose to unite all earthly and heavenly things under Christ in headship, and has shown us our place of union with Him in the great scheme. What a position of confidence! (See John 15:15.)

We must not confound "the fullness of times" here with "the fullness of time" in Gal. 4. The latter expression is in connection with the coming of Christ. God has tested man in a variety of ways during different dispensations; and when the creature was proved to be helplessly bad and corrupt, He sent forth His Son. This was "the fullness of time." But the phrase in Eph. 1:10 refers to the scheme when all the threads of God's purposes will have spun themselves out, and Christ shall take His place as Head over all above and below, the church sharing all with Him.

But not only do we see Christ's portion as Head of all things in heaven and earth, but our own portion is brought forward: "In Whom also we have obtained an inheritance." Marvelous thought! we are to share with Him all that the Father has given Him. We have been predestinated to it "according to the purpose of Him Who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." This leads the apostle to say that we should be to the praise of His glory who first trusted in Christ. The apostle speaks of himself and his Jewish fellow-saints, who believed in Christ while hidden at the right hand of God before His public manifestation to the world. The nation will not believe in Him until the day of display and will not be blessed till then, and then in an inferior way. This the Lord hinted to Thomas, who is a striking type of His people: "Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen and (yet) have believed" (John 20:29). This is the church's peculiar place, called to believe in Him unseen, and to have the more exalted place of blessing before Him and with Him. But in Christianity the Jew is not blessed apart from the Gentile. Thus we read, "in Whom ye also (trusted) after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation." Jew and Gentile are united; both are reconciled to God in one body by the cross, and both blessed together.

The gospel is here called "the gospel of your salvation." The gospel is spoken of in a variety of ways in the New Testament. It is called "the gospel of God" (Rom. 1:1), because it comes out from God and finds its spring in His own heart. It is the "gospel of His Son" (Rom. 1:9), because Christ is the object; it is God's testimony to men concerning His Son. It is "the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:4); for it bears witness to the present exaltation of Christ as Man at the right hand of God in glory. It is also called "the gospel of peace," and "the gospel of the grace of God." But in Eph. 1 the Spirit says "the gospel of your salvation;" for it is the glad tidings, not only that all trespasses are forgiven in virtue of Christ's blood, and that sin is condemned in His death, but that the believer in Him is brought into complete salvation, a totally new place of heavenly blessing before God.

Following faith in the gospel is the Spirit's seal: "ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise." It is important to see the difference between the Spirit's early work in the soul in convincing it of sin and producing faith in Christ, and sealing. The Spirit of promise is God's gift to all who have accepted Christ's work: the blood first, then the oil (Lev. 8). But He is not only the "seal," He is also the "earnest of the inheritance." The inheritance is not yet possessed by us (indeed the Heir has not yet received His rights); but all is blessedly sure, and the Divine Spirit is the pledge. "The redemption of the purchased possession" looks forward to the time when Christ will take possession of everything He purchased. Then creation shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, the changing of our bodies into His image at His coming being the first stage.

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