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by John Nelson Darby

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John Nelson Darby, 1800-1882

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EPHESIANS

The epistle to the Ephesians gives us the richest exposition of the blessings of the saints individually, and of the assembly, setting forth at the same time the counsels of God with regard to the glory of Christ. Christ Himself is viewed as the One who is to hold all things united in one under His hand, as Head of the assembly. We see the assembly placed in the most intimate relationship with Him, as those who compose it are with the Father Himself, and in the heavenly position dispensed to her by the sovereign grace of God. Now these ways of grace to her reveal God Himself, and in two distinct characters; as well in connection with Christ as with Christians. He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the God of Christ, when Christ is looked at as man; the Father of Christ when Christ is looked at as the Son of His love. In the first character the nature of God is revealed; in the second, we see the intimate relationship which we enjoy to Him who bears this character of Father, and that according to the excellence of Christ's own relationship to Him. It is this relationship to the Father, as well as that in which we stand to Christ as His body and His bride, that is the source of blessing to the saints and to the assembly of God, of which grace has made us members as a whole.

The form even of the epistle shows how much the apostle's mind was filled with the sense of the blessing that belongs to the assembly. After having wished grace and peace to the saints and the faithful* at Ephesus from God, the Father of true Christians, and from Jesus Christ their Lord, he begins at once to speak of the blessings in which all the members of Christ participate. His heart was full of the immensity of grace; and nothing in the state of the Ephesian Christians required any particular remarks adapted to that state. It is nearness of heart to God that produces simplicity, and that enables us in simplicity to enjoy the blessings of God as God Himself bestows them, as they flow from His heart, in all their own excellence — to enjoy them in connection with Him who imparts them, and not merely in a mode adapted to the state of those to whom they are imparted; or through a communication that only reveals a part of these blessings, because the soul would not be able to receive more. Yes,

when near to God, we are in simplicity, and the whole extent of His grace and of our blessings unfolds itself as it is found in Him.

[* The word translated “faithful” might be rendered “believers.” It is used as a term of superscription both here and in the epistle to the Colossians. We must remember that the apostle was now in prison, and that Christianity had been established for some years, and was exposed to all kinds of attack. To say that one was a believer as at the beginning, was to say that he was faithful. The word then does not merely express that they believed, nor that each individual walked faithfully, but that the apostle addressed himself to those who by grace faithfully maintained the faith they had received.]

It is important to remark two things here in passing: first, that moral nearness to God, and communion with Him, is the only means of any true enlargement in the knowledge of His ways and of the blessings which He imparts to His children, because it is the only position in which we can perceive them, or be morally capable of so doing; and, also, that all conduct which is not suitable to this nearness to God, all levity of thought, which His presence does not admit of, makes us lose these communications from Him and renders us incapable of receiving them. (Compare John 14:21-23). Secondly, it is not that the Lord forsakes us on account of these faults or this carelessness; He intercedes for us, and we experience His grace, but it is no longer communion or intelligent progress in the riches of the revelation of Himself, of the fullness which is in Christ. It is grace adapted to our wants, an answer to our misery. Jesus stretches out His hand to us according to the need that we feel — need produced in our hearts by the operation of the Holy Ghost. This is infinitely precious grace, a sweet experience of His faithfulness and love: we learn by this means to discern good and evil by judging self; but the grace had to be adapted to our wants, and to receive a character according to those wants, as an answer made to them; we have had to think of ourselves.

In a case like this the Holy Ghost occupies us with ourselves (in grace, no doubt), and when we have lost communion with God, we cannot neglect this turning back upon ourselves without deceiving and hardening ourselves. Alas! the dealings of many souls with Christ hardly go beyond this character. It is with all too often the case. In a word, when this happens the thought of sin having been admitted into the heart, our dealings with the Lord to be true must be on the ground of this sad admission of sin (in thought, at least). It is grace alone which allows us

again to have to do with God. The fact that He restores us enhances His grace in our eyes; but this is not communion. When we walk with God, when we walk after the Spirit without grieving Him, He maintains us in communion, in the enjoyment of God, the positive source of joy — of an everlasting joy. This is a position in which He can occupy us — as being ourselves interested in all that interests Him — with all the development of His counsels, His glory, and His goodness, in the Person of Jesus the Christ, Jesus the Son of His love; and the heart is enlarged in the measure of the objects that occupy it. This is our normal condition. This, in the main, was the case with the Ephesians

We have already remarked, that Paul was specially gifted of God to communicate His counsels and His ways in Christ; as John was gifted to reveal His character and life as it was manifested in Jesus. The result of this particular gift in our apostle is naturally found in the epistle we are considering. Nevertheless we, as being ourselves in Christ, find in it a remarkable development of our relationships with God, of the intimacy of those relationships, and of the effect of that intimacy. Christ is the foundation on which our blessings are built. It is as being in Him that we enjoy them. We thus become the actual and present object of the favor of God the Father, even as Christ Himself is its object. The Father has given us to Him; Christ has died for us, has redeemed, washed, and quickened us, and presents us, according to the efficacy of His work, and according to the acceptance of His Person, before God His Father. The secret of all the assembly's blessing is, that it is blessed with Jesus Himself; and thus — like Him, viewed as a man — is accepted before God; for the assembly is His body, and enjoys in Him and by Him all that His Father has bestowed on Him. Individually the Christian is loved as Christ on earth was loved; he will hereafter share in the glory of Christ before the eyes of the world, as a proof that he was so loved, in connection with the name of Father, which God maintains in regard to this (see John 17:23-26). Hence in general we have in this epistle the believer in Christ, not Christ in the believer, though that of course be true. It leads up to the privileges of the believer and of the assembly, more than to the fullness of Christ Himself, and we find more the contrast of this new position with what we were as of the world than development of the life of Christ: this is more largely found in Colossians, which looks more at Christ in us. But this epistle,

setting us in Christ's relationship with God and the Father, and sitting in heavenly places, gives the highest character of our testimony here.

Now Christ stands in two relationships with God, His Father. He is a perfect man before His God; He is a Son with His Father. We are to share both these relationships. This He announced to His disciples ere He went back to heaven: it is unfolded in all its extent by the words He spoke, "I go to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." This precious — this inappreciable truth is the foundation of the apostle's teaching in this place. He considered God in this double aspect, as the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, and as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and our blessings are in connection with these two titles.

But before attempting to set forth in detail the apostle's thought, let us remark that he begins here entirely with God, His thoughts and His counsels, not with what man is. We may lay hold of the truth, so to speak, by one or the other of two ends — by that of the sinner's condition in connection with man's responsibility, or by that of the thoughts and eternal counsels of God in view of His own glory. The latter is that side of the truth on which the Spirit here makes us look. Even redemption, all glorious as it is in itself, is consigned to the second place, as the means by which we enjoy the effect of Gods counsels.

It was necessary that the ways of God should be considered on this side, that is, His own thoughts, not merely the means of bringing man into the enjoyment of the fruit of them. It is the epistle to the Ephesians which thus presents them to us; as that to the Romans, after saying it is God's goodness, begins with man's end, demonstrating the evil and presenting grace as meeting and delivering from it.

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ, having chosen us in Him. Chapter 1 unfolds (v. 4-7) these blessings, and the means of sharing them; verses 8-10, the settled purpose of God for the glory of Christ, in whom we possess them. Next, verses 11-14 set before us the inheritance, and the Holy Ghost given as a seal to our persons, and as the earnest of our inheritance. Then follows a prayer, in which the apostle asks that his dear children in the faith — let us say that we — may know our privileges and the power that has brought us into them, the same as that by which

Christ was raised from the dead and set at the right hand of God to possess them, as the Head of the assembly, which is His body, which, with Him, shall be established over all things that were created by its Head as God and that He inherits as man, filling all things with His divine and redeeming glory. In a word, we have first the calling of God, what the saints are before Him in Christ; then, having stated the full purpose of God as to Christ, God's inheritance in the saints; then the prayer that we may know these two things, and the power by which we are brought into them, and the enjoyment of them.

But we must examine these things more closely. We have seen the establishment of the two relationships between man and God — relationships in which Christ Himself stands. He ascended to His God and our God, to His Father and our Father. We share all the blessings that flow from these two relationships. He has blessed us with all spiritual blessings; not one is lacking. And they are of the highest order; they are not temporal, as was the case with the Jews. It is in the most exalted capacity of the renewed man that we enjoy these blessings: and they are adapted to that capacity, they are spiritual. They are also in the highest sphere: it is not in Canaan or Emmanuel's land. These blessings are granted us in the heavenly places; they are granted us in the most excellent way — one which leaves room for no comparison — it is in Christ. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. But this flows from the heart of God Himself, from a thought outside the circumstances in which He finds us in time. Before the world was, this was our place in His heart. He purposed to give us a place in Christ. He chose us in Him.

What blessing, what a source of joy, what grace, to be thus the objects of God's favor, according to His sovereign love! If we would measure it, it is by Christ we must attempt to do so; or, at least, it is thus that we must feel what this love is. Take especial notice here of the way in which the Holy Ghost keeps it continually before our eyes, that all is in Christ — in the heavenly places in Christ — He had chosen us in Him — unto the adoption by Jesus Christ — made acceptable in the Beloved. This is one of the fundamental principles of the Spirit's instruction in this place. The other is that the blessing has its origin in God Himself. He is its source and author. His own heart, if we may so express it, His own mind, are its

origin and its measure. Therefore it is in Christ alone that we can have any measure of that which cannot be measured. For He is, completely and adequately, the delight of God. The heart of God finds in Him a sufficient object on which to pour itself out entirely, towards which His infinite love can all be exercised.

The blessing then is of God; but moreover it is with Himself and before Him, to gratify Himself, to satisfy His love. It is He who has chosen us, He who has predestined us, He who has blessed us; but it is that we should be before Him, and adopted as sons unto Himself. Such is grace in these great foundations. This consequently is what grace was pleased to do for us.

But there is another thing we have to note here. We are chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. Now this expression is not simply that of the sovereignty of God. If God chose some out of men now, it would be as sovereign as if before the world: but this shows that we belong in the counsels of God to a system set up by Him in Christ before the world existed, which is not of the world when it does exist, and exists after the fashion of this world has passed away. This is a very important aspect of the christian system. Responsibility came in (for man of course) with the creation of Adam in this world. Our place was given us in Christ before the world existed. The development of all the characters of this responsibility went on up to the cross and there closed; innocent, a sinner without law, under law, and, when every way guilty, grace — God Himself comes into the world of sinners in goodness and finds hatred for His love. The world stood judged and men lost, and this the individual now learns as to himself. But then redemption was accomplished, and the full purpose and counsel of God in the new creation in Christ risen, the last Adam, was brought out, “the mystery hidden from ages and generations,” while the first man’s responsibility was being tested. Compare 2 Timothy 1:9-11; Titus 1:2, where this truth is very distinctly brought out.

This responsibility and grace cannot be reconciled really but in Christ. The two principles were in the two trees of the garden; then promise to Abraham unconditionally, that we might understand blessing was free grace; then the law again brought both forward, but put life consequent on responsibility. Christ came, is life, took on Himself for all who believe in

Him the consequence of responsibility, and became, as the divine Son and withal as risen Head, the source of life, our sin being put away; and here, as risen with Him, we not only have received life, but are in a new position quickened out of death with Him, and have a portion according to the counsels which established all in Him before the world existed, and are established according to righteousness and redemption, as a new creation, of which the Second Man is the head. The following chapter will explain our being brought into this place.

We have said that God reveals Himself in two characters, even in His relationship to Christ; He is God, and He is Father. And our blessings are connected with this; that is, with His perfect nature as God, and with the intimacy of positive relationship with Him as Father. The apostle does not yet touch on the inheritance, nor on the counsels of God, with regard to the glory of which Christ is to be the center as a whole; but he speaks of our relationship with God, of that which we are with God and before Him, and not of our inheritance — of that which He has made us to be, and not of that which He has given us. In verses 4-6 our own portion in Christ before God is developed. Verse 4 depends on the name of God; verse 5, on that of Father.

The character of God Himself is depicted in that which is ascribed to the saints (v. 4). God could find His moral delight only in Himself and in that which morally resembles Him. Indeed this is a universal principle. An honest man can find no satisfaction in a man who does not resemble him in this respect. With still greater reason God could not endure that which is in opposition to His holiness, since, in the activity of His nature, He must surround Himself with that which He loves and delights in. But, before all, Christ is this in Himself. He is personally the image of the invisible God. Love, holiness, blameless perfection in all His ways, are united in Him. And God has chosen us in Him. In verse 4 we find our position in this respect. First, we are before Him: He brings us into His presence. The love of God must do this in order to satisfy itself. The love which is in us also must be found in this position to have its perfect object. It is there only that perfect happiness can be found. But this being so, it is needful that we should be like God. He could not bring us into His presence in order to take delight in us, and yet admit us there such as He could not find pleasure in. He has therefore chosen us in Christ, that we should be holy,

without blame before Him in love. He Himself is holy in His character, unblamable in all His ways, love in His nature. It is a position of perfect happiness — in the presence of God, like God; and that, in Christ, the object and the measure of divine affection. So God takes delight in us; and we, possessing a nature like His own as to its moral qualities, are capable of enjoying this nature fully and without hindrance, and of enjoying it in its perfection in Him. It is also His own choice, His own affection, which has placed us there, and which has placed us there in Him, who, being His eternal delight, is worthy of it; so that the heart finds its rest in this position, for there is agreement in our nature with that of God, and we were also chosen to it, which shows the personal affection that God has for us. There is also a perfect and supreme object with which we are occupied.

Remark here that, in the relationship of which we here speak, the blessing is in connection with the nature of God; therefore it is not said that we are predestined to this according to the good pleasure of His will. We are chosen in Christ to be blessed in His presence; it is His infinite grace; but the joy of His nature could not (nor could ours in Him) be other than it is, because such is His nature. Happiness could not be found elsewhere or with another.

But in verse 5 we come to particular privileges, and we are predestined to those privileges. “He has predestined us unto the adoption, according to the good pleasure of his will.” This verse sets before us, not the nature of God, but the intimacy, as we have said, of a positive relationship. Hence it is according to the good pleasure of His will. He may have angels before Him as servants; it was His will to have sons.

Perhaps it might be said that, if admitted to take delight in the nature of God, one could hardly not be in an intimate relationship; but the form, the character of this relationship depends certainly on the sovereign will of God. Moreover, since we possess these things in Christ, the reflection of this divine nature and the relationship of son go together, for the two are united in us. Still, we must remember that our participation in these things depends on the sovereign will of God our Father; even as the means of sharing them, and the manner in which we share them, is that we are in Christ. God our Father, in His sovereign goodness, according to His

counsels of love, chooses to have us near Himself. This purpose, which links us to Christ in grace, is strongly expressed in this verse, as well as that which precedes it. It is not only our position which it characterises, but the Father introduces Himself in a peculiar way with regard to this relationship. The Holy Ghost is not satisfied with saying “He has predestined us unto the adoption,” but He adds “unto himself.” One might say this is implied in the word “adoption.” But the Spirit would particularise this thought to our hearts, that the Father chooses to have us in an intimate relationship with Himself as sons. We are sons to Himself by Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of His will. If Christ is the image of the invisible God, we bear that image, being chosen in Him. If Christ is a Son, we enter into that relationship.

These then are our relationships, so precious, so marvelous, with God our Father in Christ. These are the counsels of God. We find nothing yet of the previous condition of those who were to be called into this blessing. It is a heavenly people, a heavenly family, according to the purposes and counsels of God, the fruit of His eternal thoughts, and of His nature of love — that which is here called the “glory of his grace.” We cannot glorify God by adding anything to Him. He glorifies Himself when He reveals Himself. All this is therefore to the praise of the glory of His grace, according to which He has acted towards us in grace in Christ; according to which Christ is the measure of this grace, its form towards us, He in whom we share it. All the fullness of this grace reveals itself in His ways towards us — the original thoughts, so to speak, of God, which have no other source than Himself, and in and by which He reveals Himself, and by the accomplishment of which He glorifies Himself. And observe here, that the Spirit does not say “the Christ,” at the end of verse 6. When He speaks of Him, He would put emphasis on the thoughts of God. He has acted towards us in grace in the Beloved — in Him who is peculiarly the object of His affections. He brings this characteristic of Christ out into relief when He speaks of the grace bestowed upon us in Him. Was there an especial object of the love, of the affection of God? He has blessed us in that object.

And where is it that He found us when He would bring us into this glorious position? Who is it that He chooses to bless in this way? Poor

sinner, dead in their trespasses and sins, the slaves of Satan and of the flesh.

If it is in Christ that we see our position according to the counsels of God, it is in Him also that we find the redemption that set us in it. We have redemption through His blood, the remission of our sins. Those whom He would bless were poor and miserable through sin. He has acted towards them according to the riches of His grace. We have already observed, that the Spirit brings out in this passage the eternal counsels of God with regard to the saints in Christ, before He enters on the subject of the state from which He drew them, when He found them in their condition of sinners here below. Now the whole mind of God respecting them is revealed in His counsels, in which He glorifies Himself. Therefore it is said, that that which He saw good to do with the saints was according to the glory of His grace. He makes Himself known in it. That which He has done for poor sinners is according to the riches of His grace. In His counsels He has revealed Himself; He is glorious in grace. In His work He thinks of our misery, of our wants, according to the riches of His grace: we share in them, as being their object in our poverty, in our need. He is rich in grace. Thus our position is ordered and established according to the counsels of God, and by the efficacy of His work in Christ — our position, that is, in reference to Him. If we are to think here, where God's thoughts and counsels are revealed, if remission and redemption come of this, we are to think not according to our need as its measure, but according to the riches of God's grace.

But there is more: God having placed us in this intimacy, reveals to us His thoughts respecting the glory of Christ Himself. This same grace has made us the depositaries of the settled purpose of His counsels, with regard to the universal glory of Christ, for the administration of the fullness of times. This is an immense favor granted us. We are interested in the glory of Christ as well as blessed in Him. Our nearness to God and our perfectness before Him enable us to be interested in the counsels of God as to the purposed glory of His Son. And this leads to the inheritance (compare John 14:28). Thus Abraham, though on lower ground, was the friend of God. God our Father has given us to enjoy all blessings in heavenly places ourselves; but He would unite all things in heaven and on the earth under Christ as Head, and our relationship with all that is put

under Him, as well as our relationship with God His Father, depends on our position in Him; it is in Him that we have our inheritance.

The good pleasure of God was to unite all that is created under the hand of Christ. This is His purpose for the administration of the times in which the result of all His ways shall be manifested.* In Christ we inherit our part, heirs of God, as it is said elsewhere, joint-heirs of Christ. Here however the Spirit sets before us the position, in virtue of which the inheritance has fallen to us, rather than the inheritance itself. He ascribes it also to the sovereign will of God, as He did before with regard to the special relationship of sons unto God. Remark also here, that in the inheritance we shall be to the praise of His glory; as in our relationship to Him we are to the praise of the glory of His grace. Manifested in possession of the inheritance, we shall be the display of His glory made visible and seen in us; but our relationships with Him are the fruit, for our own souls, with Him and before Him, of the infinite grace that has placed us in these relationships and made us capable of them.

[* It will be a grand spectacle, as the result of the ways of God, to see all things united in perfect peace and union under the authority of man, of the second Adam, the Son of God; ourselves associated with Him in the same glory with Himself, His companions in the heavenly glory, as the objects of the eternal counsels of God. I do not enlarge here upon this scene, because the chapter we are considering directs our attention to the communications of the counsels of God respecting it, and not to the scene itself. The eternal state, in which God is all in all, is again another thing. The administration of the fullness of times is the result of the ways of God in government; the eternal state, that of the perfection of His nature. We, even in the government, are brought in as sons according to His nature. Wonderful privilege!

Such then, with regard to the glory bestowed on Him as man, are the counsels of God our Father with respect to Christ. He shall gather together in one all things in Him as their Head. And as it is in Him that we have our true position as to our relationship with God the Father, so also is it with regard to the inheritance bestowed upon us. We are united to Christ in connection with that which is above us; we are so likewise with regard to that which is below. The apostle is speaking here first of Jewish Christians, who have believed in Christ before He is manifested; this is the force of “we who have first trusted in Christ.” If I may venture to use a new word, “who have pre-trusted in Christ” — trusted in Him before He appears. The remnant of the Jews in the last days will believe (like

Thomas) when they shall see Him. Blessed is he who shall have believed without seeing. The apostle speaks of those among the Jews who had already believed in Him.

In verse 13 he extends the same blessing to the Gentiles, which gives occasion for another precious truth with regard to us — a thing that is true of every believer, but that had special force with regard to those from among the Gentiles. God had put His seal on them by the gift of the Holy Ghost. They were not, according to the flesh, heirs of the promises; but, when they believed, God sealed them with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the earnest of the inheritance, both of the one and the other, Jews and Gentiles, until the possession acquired by Christ should be delivered to Him, until He should in fact take possession of it by His power — a power which will allow no adversary to subsist. Remark here, that the subject is not being born again, but a seal put on believers, a demonstration and earnest of their future full participation in the heritage that belongs to Christian inheritance to which He has a right through redemption, whereby He has purchased all things to Himself, but which He will only appropriate by His power when He shall have gathered together all the co-heirs to enjoy it with Him.

The Holy Ghost is not the earnest of love. The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given unto us. God loves us as He will love us in heaven. Of the inheritance the Holy Ghost is but an earnest. We do not yet possess anything of the inheritance. Then we shall be to the praise of His glory. The glory of His grace is already revealed.

Thus we have here the grace which ordered the position of the children of God — the counsels of God respecting the glory of Christ as Head over all — the part which we have in Him as Heir — and the gift of the Holy Ghost to believers, as the earnest and seal (until they are put in possession with Christ) of the inheritance that He has won.

From verse 15 to the end, we have the apostle's prayer for the saints, flowing from this revelation — a prayer founded on the way in which the children of God have been brought into their blessings in Christ, and leading thus to the whole truth respecting the union of Christ and the assembly, and the place which Christ takes in the universe that He created as Son, and which He reassumes as man; and on the power displayed in

placing us, as well as Christ Himself, at the height of this position which God has given us in His counsels. This prayer is founded on the title of “God of our Lord Jesus Christ”; that of chapter 3 on the title of “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” There it is more communion than counsels. God is called the Father of glory here, as being its source and author. But not only is it said, “The God of our Lord Jesus Christ,” but we shall see also that Christ is viewed as man. God has wrought in Christ (v. 20), He has raised Him from among the dead — has made Him sit at His right hand. In a word, all that happened to Christ is considered as the effect of the power of God who has accomplished it. Christ could say, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up again in three days,” for He was God; but here He is viewed as man; it is God who raises Him up again.

There are two parts in this prayer: first, that they may understand what the calling and the inheritance of God are; and secondly, what the power is that puts them in possession of that which this calling confers upon them — the same power which sets Christ at the right hand of God, having raised Him from among the dead.

First, the understanding of the things given us. We find, it appears to me, the two things which, in the previous part of the chapter, we have seen to be the saint’s portion — the hope of the calling of God, and the glory of His inheritance in the saints. The first is connected with verses 3-5, that is, our calling; the second, with verse 11, that is, the inheritance. In the former we have found grace (that is, God acting towards us because He is love); in the latter, the glory — man manifested as enjoying in His Person and inheritance the fruits of the power and the counsels of God. God calls us to be before Him, holy and unblamable in love, and at the same time to be His sons. The glory of His inheritance is ours. Take notice that the apostle does not say “our calling,” although we are the called. He characterises this calling by connecting it with Him who calls in order that we may understand it according to its excellence, according to its true character. The calling is according to God Himself. All the blessedness and character of this calling are according to the fullness of His grace — are worthy of Himself. It is this which we hope for. It is also His inheritance, as the land of Canaan was His, as He had said in the law, and which nevertheless He inherited in Israel. Even so the inheritance of the whole universe, when it shall be filled with glory, belongs to Him, but He inherits it in the saints. It

is the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. He will fill all things with His glory, and it is in the saints that He will inherit them. These are the two parts of the first thing to which the eyes of the saints were to be opened. By the calling of God we are called to enjoy the blessedness of His presence, near to Himself, to enjoy that which is above us. The inheritance of God applies to that which is below us, to created things, which are all made subject to Christ, with whom and in whom we enjoy the light of the presence of God near to Him. The apostle's desire is, that the Ephesians may understand these two things.

The second thing that the apostle asks for them is, that they may know the power already manifested, which had already wrought to give them part in this blessed and glorious position. For, even as they were introduced by the sovereign grace of God into the position of Christ before God His Father; so also the work which has been wrought in Christ, and the display of the power of God, which took place in raising Him from the grave to the right hand of God the Father above every name that is named, are the expression and the model of the action of the same power which works in us who believe, which has raised us from our state of death in sin to have part in the glory of this same Christ. This power is the basis of the assembly's position in her union with Him and of the development of the mystery according to the purposes of God. In person Christ raised up from among the dead is set at the right hand of God, far above all power and authority, and above every name that is named among the hierarchies by which God administers the government of the world that now is, or among those of the world to come. And this superiority exists, not only with regard to His divinity, the glory of which changes not, but with regard to the place given Him as man; for we speak here — as we have seen — of the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is He who has raised Him from the dead, and who has given Him glory and a place above all; a place of which no doubt He was personally worthy, but which He receives, and ought to receive, as man from the hand of God, who has established Him as Head over all things, uniting the assembly to Him as His body, and raising up the members from their death in sins by the same power as that which raised up and exalted the Head — quickening them together with Christ, and seating them in the heavenly places in Him, by the same power that exalted Him. Thus the assembly, His body, is His fullness. It is indeed He

who fills all in all, but the body forms the complement of the Head. It is He, because He is God as well as man, who fills all things — and that, inasmuch as He is man, according to the power of redemption, and of the glory which He has acquired; so that the universe which He fills with His glory enjoys it according to the stability of that redemption from the power and effect of which nothing can withdraw it.* It is He, I repeat, who fills the universe with His glory; but the Head is not isolated, left, so to speak, incomplete as such, without its body. It is the body that completes it in that glory, as a natural body completes the head; but not to be the head or to direct, but to be the body of the head, and that the head should be the head of its body. Christ is the Head of the body over all things. He fills all in all, and the assembly is His fullness. This is the mystery in all its parts. Accordingly we may observe that it is when Christ (having accomplished redemption) was exalted to the right hand of God, that He takes the place in which He can be the Head of the body.

[* Compare chapter 4:9, 10: and this introduction of redemption, and the place Christ has taken as Redeemer, as filling all in all, is full of interest.]

Marvellous portion of the saints, in virtue of their redemption, and of the divine power that wrought in the resurrection of Christ, when He had died under our trespasses and sins, and set Him at the right hand of God: a portion which, save His personal session at the right hand of the Father, is ours also through our union with Him!

In **CHAPTER 2*** the operation of the power of God on earth, for the purpose of bringing souls into the enjoyment of their heavenly privileges, and thus of forming the assembly here below, is presented, rather than the unfolding of the privileges themselves, and consequently that of the counsels of God. It is not even these counsels; it is the grace and the power which work for their fulfillment, by leading souls to the result which this power will produce according to those counsels. Christ is first seen, not as God come down here and presented to sinners, but as dead, that is, where we were by sin, but raised from it by power. He for sin had died; God had raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand. We were dead in our trespasses and sins: He has quickened us together with Him. But as it is the earth that is in question, and the operation of power and grace on the earth, the Spirit naturally speaks of the condition of those in whom this grace works, in fact of the condition of all. At the same time, in

the earthly forms of religion, in the system that existed on earth, there were those who were nigh and those who were far off. Now we have seen that in the full blessing of which the apostle speaks the nature of God Himself is concerned; in view of which, and to glorify which, all His counsels were settled. Therefore outward forms, although some of them had been established provisionally on the earth by God's own authority, could now have no value. They had served for the manifestation of the ways of God as shadows of things to come, and had been connected with the display of God's authority on earth among men, maintaining some knowledge of God — important things in their place; but these figures could do nothing as to bringing souls into relationship with God, in order to enjoy the eternal manifestation of His nature, in hearts made capable of it by grace, through their participation in that nature and reflecting it. For this, these figures were utterly worthless; they were not the manifestation of these eternal principles. But the two classes of man, Jews and Gentles, were there; and the apostle speaks of them both. Grace takes up persons from both to form one body, one new man, by a new creation in Christ.

[* It is this power which, raising the saints with Christ from the death of sin, and uniting them to Him the head, forms their relationship to Him as His body. The first part of the chapter gave our individual relationship to the Father, in that Christ is the firstborn among many brethren. Here we come to corporate relationship to Christ, the last and risen man. Up to the second part of the prayer we have the counsels of God. From the latter part we have the operations of power to accomplish them. And it is here our union with Christ first comes in, which, though God's counsels as to it are revealed, yet spiritually is wrought now, as seen in chapter 5.]

In the first two verses of this chapter he speaks of those who were brought out from among the nations that knew not God — Gentiles, as they are usually called. In verse 3 he speaks of the Jews — "We all also," he says. He does not enter here into the dreadful details contained in Romans 3,* because his object is not to convince the individual, in order to show him the means of justification, but to set forth the counsels of God in grace. Here then he speaks of the distance from God in which man is found under the power of darkness. With regard to the nations, he speaks of the universal condition of the world. The whole course of the world, the entire system, was according to the prince of the power of the air; the world itself was under the government of him who worked in the hearts of

the children of disobedience, who in self-will evaded the government of God, although they could not evade His judgment.

[* Take especial notice here, that, in the Ephesians, the Spirit does not describe the life of the old man in sin. God and His own work are everything. Man is viewed as dead in his sins; that which is produced is therefore entirely of God, a new creation on His part. A man who lives in sin must die, must judge himself, must repent, by grace be cleansed; that is, he is dealt with as a living man. Here man is without any movement of spiritual life: God does everything; He quickens and raises up. It is a new creation.]

If the Jews had external privileges; if they were not in a direct way under the government of the prince of this world (as was the case with the nations that were plunged in idolatry, and sunk in all the degradation of that system in which man wallowed, in the licentiousness into which demons delighted to plunge him in derision of his wisdom); if the Jews were not, like the Gentiles, under the government of demons, nevertheless in their nature they were led by the same desires as those by which demons influenced the poor heathen. The Jews led the same life as to the desires of the flesh; they were children of wrath, even as others, for that is the condition of men; they are in their nature the children of wrath. In their outward privileges the Israelites were the people of God; by nature they were men as others. And remark here these words, “by nature.” The Spirit is not speaking here of a judgment pronounced on the part of God, nor of sins committed, nor of Israel having failed in their relationship to God through falling into idolatry and rebellion, nor even of their having rejected the Messiah and so deprived themselves of all resource — all of which Israel had done. Neither does He speak of a positive judgment from God pronounced on the manifestation of sin. They were, even as all men, in their nature the children of wrath. This wrath was the natural consequence of the state in which they were.*

[* Faith, when taught by the word, always goes back to this: judgment refers to deeds done in the body. But we were dead in sins — no living movement of the heart towards God. We do not (John 5) come into judgment, but are passed from death unto life.]

Man as he was, Jew or Gentile, and wrath, naturally went together, even as there is a natural link between good and righteousness. Now God, though in judgment taking cognisance of all that is contrary to His will and glory, in His own nature is above all that. To those who are worthy of wrath He can be rich in mercy, for He is so in Himself. The apostle

therefore presents Him here as acting according to His own nature towards the objects of His grace. We were dead, says the apostle — dead in our trespasses and sins. God comes, in His love, to deliver us by His power — "God, who is rich in mercy, according to his great love wherewith he loved us." There was no good working in us: we were dead in our trespasses and sins. The movement came from Him, praised be His name! He has quickened us; not only that — He has quickened us together with Christ. He had not said in a direct way, that Christ had been quickened, although it may be said, where the power of the Spirit in Himself is spoken of. He was however raised from the dead; and, when we are in question, we are told that all the energy by which He came forth from death is employed also for our quickening; and not only that; even in being quickened we are associated with Him. He comes forth from death — we come forth with Him. God has imparted this life to us. It is His pure grace, and a grace that has saved us, that found us dead in sins, and brought us out of death even as Christ came out of it, and by the same power, and brought us out with Him by the power of life in resurrection — with Christ,* to set us in the light and in the favor of God, as a new creation, even as Christ Himself is there. Jews and Gentiles are found together in the same new position in Christ. Resurrection has put an end to all those distinctions; they have no place in a risen Christ. God has quickened the one and the other with Christ.

[* Here it is a wholly new creation, and the new estate is looked at simply in itself. We were dead towards God in our old one. Man is not looked at here as alive in sins and responsible, but as entirely dead in them, and created again: hence in this part of the epistle we have no forgiveness, no justification. The man is not looked at as a living responsible man. In Colossians we are risen with Christ, but "having forgiven you all trespasses" which Christ had born in coming down into death. Here, too, we have not the old man, and death brought into it, though both walk and the old man are recognised as facts, though not in connection with resurrection. In Colossians we have; even when "dead in your sins" is spoken of, it is added, "and the uncircumcision of your flesh," for it is dead towards God. The epistle to the Romans looks at responsible man in the world; hence you have fully justification, death to sin, and no resurrection with Christ. The man is a living man here, though justified, and alive in Christ.]

Now, Christ having done this, Jews and Gentiles, without the differences which death had abolished, are found together in the risen and ascended Christ, sitting together in Him in a new condition common to both — a condition described by that of Christ Himself.* Poor sinners from among

the Gentiles, and from among the disobedient and gainsaying Jews, are brought into the position where Christ is, by the power which raised Him from the dead and set Him at God's right hand,** to show forth in the ages to come the immense riches of the grace which had accomplished it. A Mary Magdalene, a crucified thief, companions in glory with the Son of God, all we who believe, will bear witness to it. It is by grace we are saved. Now we are not yet in the glory: it is by faith. Would any one say that at least the faith is of man? No + it is not of ourselves in this respect either; all is the gift of God; not of works, in order that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship.

[* It is not merely life communicated (that we had in Romans), but a totally new place and standing which we have taken, life having the character of resurrection out of a state of death in sins. And here we are not viewed as quickened by Christ, but quickened with Him. He is the raised and glorified man.]

[** In Colossians the saints are only seen risen with Christ, with a hope laid up for them in heaven, and are called to set their affections on things above, where Christ and their life with Him are hid. Moreover their resurrection with Christ is only an administrative one for this world in baptism, in connection with faith in the power which raised Christ. We have no union of Jews and Gentiles in Him as risen and in heavenly places. Indeed in Colossians, Gentiles only are before the mind of the apostle.]

[+ I am quite aware of what critics have to say here as to gender; but it is equally true as to grace, and to say, "by grace... and that not of yourselves," is simply nonsense; but by faith might be supposed to be of ourselves, though grace cannot. Therefore the Spirit of God adds, "and that not it] not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." That is, the believing is God's gift, not of ourselves. And this is confirmed by what follows, "not of works." But the object of the apostle is to show that the whole thing was of grace and of God's workmanship — a new creation. So far, grace and faith and all go together.]

In how powerful a way the Spirit puts God Himself forward, as the source and operator of the whole, and the sole one! It is a creation, but, as His work, of a result which is in accordance with His own character. Now it is in us that this is done. He takes up poor sinners to display His glory in them. If it is the operation of God, assuredly it will be for good works: He has created us in Christ for them. And observe here that if God has created us for good works, these must in their nature be characterised by Him who has wrought in us, creating us according to His own thoughts. It is not man who seeks to draw nigh to God, or to satisfy Him by doing works that are

pleasing to Him according to the law — the measure of that which man ought to be; it is God who takes us up in our sins, when there is not one moral movement in our hearts (“none that understandeth, none that seeketh after God”), and creates us anew for works in accordance with this new creation. It is an entirely new position that we are placed in, according to this new creation of God — a new character that we are invested with according to the pre-determination of God. The works are pre-determined also according to the character which we put on by this new creation. All is absolutely according to the mind of God Himself. It is not duty according to the old creation.* All is the fruit of God’s own thoughts in the new creation. The law disappears with regard to us even as to its works; together with the nature to which it applied. Man obedient to the law was man as he ought to be according to the first Adam; the man in Christ must walk according to the heavenly life of the second Adam, and walk worthy of Him as the Head of a new creation, being raised up with Him, and being the fruit of the new creation — worthy of Him who has formed him for this very thing (2 Corinthians 5:5).

[* Not that God does not recognise the relationships He had originally formed — He does fully when we are in them; but the measure of the new creation is another thing.]

The Gentiles therefore enjoying this ineffable privilege — although the apostle does not recognise Judaism as a true circumcision — were to remember from whence they had been taken; without God and without hope as they were in the world, strangers to all the promises. But however far off they had been, now in Christ they were brought nigh by His blood. He had broken down the middle wall, having annulled the law of commandments by which the Jew, who was distinguished by these ordinances, was separated from the Gentiles. These ordinances had their sphere of action in the flesh. But Christ (as living in connection with all that), being dead, has abolished the enmity to form in Himself of the two — Jew and Gentile — one new man; the Gentiles brought nigh by the blood of Christ, and the middle wall of partition broken down, to reconcile both to God in one body; having by the cross not only made peace, but destroyed — by grace that was common to both, and to which one could make no more claim than the other, since it was for sin — the enmity that existed, till then, between the privileged Jew and the idolatrous Gentile far

from God, abolishing in His flesh the enmity, the law of commandments contained in ordinances.

Having made peace, He proclaimed it with this object to the one and the other, whether far off or nigh. For by Christ we all — whether Jews or Gentiles — have access by one Spirit to the Father. It is not the Jehovah of the Jews (whose name was not called upon the Gentiles); it is the Father of Christians, of the redeemed by Jesus Christ, who are adopted to form part of the family of God. Thus, albeit a Gentile, one is no longer a stranger or foreigner; one is of the christian and heavenly citizenship; of the true house of God Himself. Such is grace. As to this world, being thus incorporated in Christ, this is our position. All, Jew or Gentile, thus gathered together in one body, constitute the assembly on earth. The apostles and prophets (of the New Testament) form the foundation of the building, Christ Himself being the chief corner stone. In Him the whole building rises to be a temple, the Gentiles having their place, and forming with the others the dwelling-place on earth of God, who is present by His Spirit. Firstly, he looks at the progressive work which was being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, the whole assembly according to the mind of God; and, secondly, he looks at the union which existed between the Ephesians and other believing Gentiles and the Jews, as forming God's house on the earth at that moment. God dwells in it by the Holy Ghost.*

[* It is exceedingly important in these days to see the difference between this progressive building, never complete till all believers who are to form Christ's body are gathered in, and the present temple of God on earth. In the former Christ is the builder. He carries it on without fail, and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. This is not yet complete nor viewed as a whole till built. Hence in the Epistles we never find a builder in this case: in Peter, "unto whom coming as to a living stone, ye also as living stones are built up"; so here, in Ephesians, it grows to a holy temple in the Lord. But, besides this, the present manifested professing body is looked at as a whole on earth; and man is looked at as building. "Ye are God's building" (1 Corinthians 3). "I, as a wise masterbuilder, have laid the foundation: let every man take heed how he buildeth thereon." Man's responsibility comes in, and the work is the subject of judgment. It is the attributing to this the privileges of the body, and of that which Christ builds, that has produced popery and all that is akin to it. The corrupt thing which is to come under judgment is falsely clothed with the security of Christ's work. Here in Ephesians 2 we find not only the progressive and surely constructed work, but the present building together as a fact in the blessing of it, without reference to human responsibility in building.]

CHAPTER 1 had set before us the counsels and purposes of God; beginning with the relationship of the sons and the Father, and, when the operation of God is spoken of, the assembly as the body of Christ united to Him who is Head over all things. Chapter 2, treating of the work which calls out the assembly, which creates it here below by grace, sets before us this assembly on the one hand, growing up to a holy temple, and then as the present habitation of God here below by the Spirit.*

[* Chapter 2 speaks indeed of the body (v. 16); but the introduction of the house is a new element and requires some development. Although the work which is accomplished in the creation of the members who are to compose the body is all of God, it is accomplished on earth. The counsels of God have in view, first individuals, to place them near Himself, such as He would have them; then, having exalted Christ above every name now or hereafter, gives Him to be head of the body, formed of individuals united to Christ in heaven over all things. They will be perfect according to their Head. But the work on earth, if it gathers together the new-born, gathers them together on the earth. Now that which answers here below to the presence of Christ in heaven is the presence of the Holy Ghost on earth. The individual believer is indeed the temple of God, but in this chapter it is the whole body of Christians formed on earth that is spoken of; they become the house, the dwelling-place, of God on the earth. Wonderful and solemn truth. Immense privilege and source of blessing; but equally great responsibility. It will be observed that, in speaking of the body of Christ, we speak of the fruit of God's eternal purpose and own operation; and, although the Spirit may apply this name to the assembly of God on earth, as accounted to be composed of real members of Christ, nevertheless the body of Christ, as formed by the quickening power of God according to His eternal purpose, is composed of persons united to the Head as real members. The house of God, as now set up on earth, is the fruit of a work of God, here entrusted to men, not the proper object of His counsels (though the city in Revelation in a measure answers to it). In so far as it is the work of God, it is evident that this house is composed of those who are truly called of God, and so God set it up, and as it is spoken of here (compare Acts 2:47). But we must not confound the practical result of this work, accomplished in the hands of men, and under their responsibility (1 Corinthians 3), with the object of the counsels of God. A true member of Christ can no one be without being really united to the Head, neither a true stone in the house; but the house can be the dwelling-place of God, although that which is not a true stone may enter into its construction. But it is impossible that one not born of God should be a member of the body of Christ. See the preceding note.]

The whole of chapter 3 is a parenthesis unfolding the mystery; and presenting at the same time, in the prayer that concludes it, the second character of God set before us at the beginning of the epistle, namely, that of Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and this is the way in which it is here introduced. Chapter 1 gives the counsels of God as they are in themselves,

adding His raising Christ and setting Him above all on high at the end. Chapter 2, His work in quickening others with Him and forming the whole assembly of those who are risen in Christ, taken by grace from among Jews and Gentiles; these are God's thoughts and work. Chapter 3 is Paul's administration of it; it speaks especially of the bringing in of the Gentiles on the same footing as the Jews. This was the entirely new part of the ways of God.

Paul was a prisoner for having preached the gospel to the Gentiles — a circumstance that brought out his particular ministry very clearly. Thus ministry in the main is presented as in Colossians 1. Only in the latter epistle the whole subject is treated more briefly, and the essential principle and character of the mystery according to its place in the counsels of God is less explained, is viewed only on a special side of it, suited to the purpose of the epistle, that is, Christ and the Gentiles. Here the apostle assures us that he had received it by a special revelation, as he had already taught them in words which, though few, were suited to give a clear understanding of his knowledge of the mystery of Christ — a mystery never made known in the past ages, but now revealed by the Spirit to the apostles and prophets. Here it will be observed that the prophets are most evidently those of the New Testament, since the communications made to them are put in contrast with the degree of light granted in the previous ages. Now the mystery had been hidden in all former times; and in fact it needed so to be; for to have put the Gentiles on the same footing as the Jews would have been to demolish Judaism, such as God had Himself established it. In it He had carefully raised a middle wall of partition. The duty of the Jew was to respect this separation; he sinned, if he did not strictly observe it. The mystery set it aside. The Old Testament prophets, and Moses himself, had indeed shown that the Gentiles should one day rejoice with the people: but the people remained a separate people. That they should be co-heirs, and of the same body, all distinction being lost, had indeed been entirely hid in God (part of His eternal purpose before the world was), but formed no part of the history of the world, nor of the ways of God respecting it, nor of the revealed promises of God.

It is a marvelous purpose of God which, uniting redeemed ones to Christ in heaven as a body to its head, gave them a place in heaven. For, although

we are journeying on the earth, and although we are the habitation of God by the Spirit on the earth, yet in the mind of God our place is in heaven.

In the age to come the Gentiles will be blessed; but Israel will be a special and separate people.

In the assembly all earthly distinction is lost; we are all one in Christ, as risen with Him.

Thus the gospel of the apostle was addressed to the Gentiles, to announce thus good news to them according to the gift of God, which had been granted to Paul by the operation of His power, to proclaim to them not merely a Messiah according to the promises made to the fathers, a Jewish Christ, but a Christ whose riches were unsearchable. No one could trace to the end, and in all its development in Him, the accomplishment of the counsels, and the revelation of the nature of God. They are the incomprehensible riches of a Christ in whom God reveals Himself, and in whom all God's thoughts are accomplished and displayed. These purposes of God with regard to a Christ, the Head of His body the assembly, Head over all things in heaven and earth, Christ, God manifest in the flesh, were now made known and being accomplished, so far as gathering the joint-heirs in one body went. Saul, the inveterate enemy of Jesus proclaimed as Messiah, even if by the Holy Ghost from heaven — the worst therefore of all men — becomes by grace Paul, the instrument and witness of that grace to announce these incomprehensible riches to the Gentiles This was his apostolic function with regard to the Gentiles There was another — to enlighten all with regard to this mystery, which, from the beginning of the world, had been hidden in God. This answers to the two parts of the apostle's ministry pointed out in Colossians 1:23-25: as verse 27 in that chapter corresponds with verse 17 here. God, who created all things, had this thought, this purpose before creation, in order that, when He should subject all creation to His Son become a man and glorified, that Son should have companions in His glory, who should be like Himself, members of His body spiritual, living of His life.

He made known to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, which gave them a portion in the counsels of God in grace. He enlightened all with regard, not precisely, to the mystery, but to the administration* of the mystery; that is to say, not only the counsel of God, but the

accomplishment in time of that counsel by bringing the assembly together under Christ its head. He who had created all things, as the sphere of the development of His glory, had kept this secret in His own possession, in order that the administration of the mystery, now revealed by the establishment of the assembly on earth, should be in its time the means of making known to the most exalted of created beings the manifold and various wisdom of God. They had seen creation arise and expand before their eyes; they had seen the government of God, His providence, His judgment; His intervention in lovingkindness on the earth in Christ. Here was a kind of wisdom altogether new; a thing outside the world, hitherto shut up in the mind of God, hid in Himself so that there was no promise or prophecy of it, but the special object of His eternal purpose; connected in a peculiar way with the One who is the center and the fullness of the mystery of godliness; which had its own place in union with Him; which, although it was manifested on earth and set with Christ at the head of creation, formed properly no part of it. It was a new part of it. It was a new creation, a distinct manifestation of the wisdom of God; a part of His thoughts which until then had been reserved in the secret of His counsels; the actual administration of which, on the earth in time by the apostle's work, made known the wisdom of God according to His settled purpose, according to His eternal purpose in Christ Jesus. "In whom," the apostle adds, "we draw nigh with all boldness by faith in him": and it is according to this relationship that we do so.

[* This appears to me to be the true word, and not "the fellowship."

Therefore these Gentile believers were not to be discouraged on account of the imprisonment of him who had proclaimed to them this mystery; for it was the proof and the fruit of the glorious position which God had granted them, and of which the Jews were jealous.

This revelation of the ways of God does not, as the first chapter, present Christ to us as man raised up by God from the dead, in order that we should be raised up also to have part with Him, and that the administration of the counsels of God should thus be accomplished. It presents Him as the center of all the ways of God, the Son of the Father, the Heir of all things as the Creator Son, and the center of the counsels of God. It is to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that the apostle now addresses himself; as in chapter 1 it was to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. Every

family (not “the whole family”) ranges itself under this name of Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Under the name of Jehovah there were only the Jews. “You only have I known of all the families of the earth,” had Jehovah said to the Jews in Amos, “therefore will I punish you for your iniquities”; but under the name of Father of Jesus Christ all families — the assembly, angels, Jews, Gentiles, all — range themselves. All the ways of God in that which He had arranged for His glory were co-ordained under this name, and were in relation with it; and that which the apostle asked for the saints to whom he addressed himself was, that they should be enabled to apprehend the whole import of those counsels, and the love of Christ which formed the assured center for their hearts.

For this purpose he desires that they should be strengthened with all might by the Spirit of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that the Christ, who is the center of all these things in the counsels of God the Father, should dwell also in their hearts, and thus be the intelligent center of affection to all their knowledge — a center which found no circle to limit the view that lost itself in infinitude which God alone filled — length, breadth, height, depth.* But this center gave them at the same time a sure place, a support immovable and well known, in a love which was as infinite as the unknown extent of the glory of God in its display around Himself. “That Christ,” says the apostle, “may dwell in your hearts.” Thus He, who fills all things with His glory, fills the heart Himself, with a love more powerful than all the glory of which He is the center. He is to us the strength which enables us in peace and love to contemplate all that He has done, the wisdom of His ways, and the universal glory of which He is the center.

[* Christ is the center of all the display of divine glory, but He thus dwells in our hearts so as to set them, so to speak, in this center, and make them look out thence on all the glory displayed. Here we might lose ourselves; but he brings them back to the well-known love of Christ, yet not as anything narrower, for He is God, and it passes knowledge, so that we are filled up to all the fullness of God.]

I repeat it — He who fills all things fills above all our hearts. God strengthens us according to the riches of that glory which He displays before our wondering eyes as rightly belonging to Christ. He does it, in that Christ dwells in us, with tenderest affection, and He is the strength of our heart. It is as rooted and grounded in love; and thus embracing as the

first circle of our affections and thoughts, those who are so to Christ — all the saints the objects of His love: it is as being filled with Him, and ourselves as the center of all His affections, and thinking His thoughts, that we throw ourselves into the whole extent of God's glory; for it is the glory of Him whom we love. And what is its limit? It has none; it is the fullness of God. We find it in this revelation of Himself. In Christ He reveals Himself in all His glory. He is God over all things, blessed for ever.

But dwelling in love we dwell in God and God in us: and that in connection with the display of His glory, as He develops it in all that He has formed around Himself, to exhibit Himself in it, in order that Christ, and Christ in the assembly, His body, should be the center of it, and the whole the manifestation of Himself in His entire glory. We are filled unto all the fullness of God; and it is in the assembly that He dwells for this purpose. He works in us by His Spirit with this object. Therefore Paul's desire and prayer is that glory may be unto God in the assembly throughout all ages by Jesus Christ: Amen. And note, it is here realisation of what is spoken of that is desired. It is not, as chapter 1, objective, that they may know what is certainly true, but that it may be true for them, they being strengthened with might by His Spirit. It is very beautiful to see how, after launching us into the infinitude of God's glory, he brings us back to a known center in Christ — to know the love of Christ, but not to narrow us. It is more properly divine, though familiar to us, than the glory. It passes knowledge.

Observe too here, that the apostle does not now ask that God should act by a power, as it is often expressed, which works for us, but by a power that works in us.* He is able to do above all that we can ask or think according to His power that works in us. What a portion for us! What a place is this which is given us in Christ! But he returns thus to the thesis proposed at the end of chapter 2, God dwelling in the assembly by the Spirit, and Christians, whether Jews or Gentiles, united in one. He desires that the Ephesian Christians (and all of us) should walk worthy of this vocation. Their vocation was to be one, the body of Christ; but this body in fact manifested on earth in its true unity by the presence of the Holy Ghost. We have seen (chap. 1) the Christian brought into the presence of God Himself; but the fact that these Christians formed the body of Christ, and that they were the dwelling-place of God here below, the house of

God on the earth — in a word, their whole position — is comprised in the expression, “their vocation.” Chapter 1, note, gives the saints before God; the prayer of chapter 3, Christ in them.

[* This fully distinguishes the prayer of chapter I and this. There the calling and inheritance were in the sure purpose of God, and his prayer is that they may know them, and the power that brought them there. Here it is what is in us, and he prays that it may exist, and that as present power in the church.]

CHAPTER 4. Now the apostle was in prison for the testimony which he had born to this truth, for having maintained and preached the privileges that God had granted to the Gentiles, and in particular that of forming by faith, together with the believing Jews, one body united to Christ. In his exhortation he makes use of this fact as a touching motive. Now the first thing that he looked for on the part of his beloved children in the faith, as befitting this unity and as a means of maintaining it in practice, was the spirit of humility and meekness, forbearance with one another in love. This is the individual state which he desired to be realised among the Ephesians. It is the true fruit of nearness to God, and of the possession of privileges; if they are enjoyed in His presence.

At the end of chapter 2 the apostle had unfolded the result of the work of Christ in uniting the Jew and the Gentile, in making peace, and in thus forming the dwelling-place of God on the earth; Jew and Gentile having access to God by one Spirit through the mediation of Christ, both being reconciled to God in one body. To have access to God; to be the dwelling-place of God through His presence by the Holy Ghost; to be one body reconciled to God — such is the vocation of Christians. Chapter 3 had developed this in its whole extent. The apostle applies it in chapter 4.

The faithful were to seek — in the dispositions mentioned above — to maintain this unity of the Spirit by the bond of peace. There are three things in this exhortation: first, to walk worthy of their calling; second, the spirit in which they were to do so; third, diligence in maintaining the unity of the Spirit by the bond of peace. It is important to observe, that this unity of the Spirit is not similarity of sentiment, but the oneness of the members of the body of Christ established by the Holy Ghost, maintained practically by a walk according to the Spirit of grace. It is evident that the

diligence required for the maintenance of the unity of the Spirit relates to the earth and to the manifestation of this unity on the earth.

The apostle now finds his exhortation on the different points of view under which this unity may be considered — in connection with the Holy Ghost, with the Lord, and with God.

There is one body and one Spirit; not merely an effect produced in the heart of individuals, in order that they might mutually understand each other, but one body. The hope was one, of which this Spirit was the source and the power. This is the essential, real, and abiding unity.

There is also one Lord. With Him was connected “one faith” and “one baptism.” This is the public profession and recognition of Christ as Lord. Compare the address in 1 Corinthians.

Finally there is one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all.

What mighty bonds of unity! The Spirit of God, the lordship of Christ, the universal ubiquity of God, even the Father, all tend to bring into unity those connected with each as a divine center. All the religious relationships of the soul, all the points by which we are in contact with God, agree to form all believers into one in this world, in such a manner that no man can be a Christian without being one with all those who are so. We cannot exercise faith, nor enjoy hope, nor express christian life in any form whatever, without having the same faith and the same hope as the rest, without giving expression to that which exists in the rest. Only we are called on to maintain it practically.

We may remark, that the three spheres of unity presented in these three verses have not the same extent. The circle of unity enlarges each time. With the Spirit we find linked the unity of the body, the essential and real unity produced by the power of the Spirit uniting to Christ all His members: with the Lord, that of faith and of baptism. Here each individual has the same faith, the same baptism: it is the outward profession, true and real perhaps, but a profession, in reference to Him who has rights over those that call themselves by His name. With regard to the third character of unity, it relates to claims that extend to all things, although to the

believer it is a closer bond, because He who has a right over all things dwells in believers.*

[* To recapitulate, there is, first, one body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling; second, one Lord, with whom are connected one faith and one baptism; third, one God and Father of all, who is above all things, everywhere, and in all Christians. Moreover, while insisting upon these three great relationships in which all Christians are placed, as being in their nature the foundations of unity, and the motives of its maintenance, these relationships extend successively in breadth. The direct relationship applies properly to the same persons; but the character of Him who is the basis of the relationship enlarges the idea connected with it. With regard to the Spirit, His presence unites the body — is the bond between all the members of the body: none but the members of the body — and they, as such — are seen here. The Lord has wider claims. In this relationship it is not the members of the body that are spoken of; there is one faith and one baptism, one profession in the world: there could not be two. But although the persons who are in this outward relationship may stand also in the other relationships and be members of the body, yet the relationship here is one of individual profession; it is not a thing which cannot exist at all except in reality (one is a member of Christ's body, or one is not). God is the Father of these same members, as being His children, but He who maintains this relationship is necessarily and always above all things — personally above all things, but divinely everywhere.]

Observe here, that it is not only a unity of sentiment, of desire, and of heart. That unity is pressed upon them; but it is in order to maintain the realisation, and the manifestation here below, of a unity that belongs to the existence and to the eternal position of the assembly in Christ. There is one Spirit, but there is one body. The union of hearts in the bond of peace, which the apostle desires, is for the public maintenance of this unity; not that there might be patience with one another when that has disappeared, Christians contenting themselves with its absence. One does not accept that which is contrary to the word, although in certain cases those who are in it ought to be born with. The consideration of the community of position and of privilege, enjoyed by all the children of God in the relationships of which we have now been speaking, served to unite them with each other in the sweet enjoyment of this most precious position, leading them also, each one, to rejoice in love at the part which every other member of the body had in this happiness.

But, on the other hand, the fact that Christ was exalted to be in heaven the Head over all things, brought in a difference which appertained to this supremacy of Christ — a supremacy exercised with divine sovereignty and

wisdom. “Unto every one of us is given grace gift] according to the measure of the gift of Christ” (that is to say, as Christ sees fit to bestow). With regard to our position of joy and blessing in Christ, we are one. With regard to our service, we have each an individual place according to His divine wisdom, and according to His sovereign rights in the work. The foundation of this title, whatever may be the divine power that is exercised in it, is this: man was under the power of Satan — miserable condition, the fruit of his sin, a condition to which his self-will had reduced him, but in which (according to the judgment of God who had pronounced on him the sentence of death) he was a slave in body and mind to the enemy who had the power of death — with reservation of the sovereign rights and sovereign grace of God (see chap. 2:2). Now Christ has made Himself man, and began by going as man, led by the Spirit, to meet Satan. He overcame him. As to His personal power, He was able to drive him out everywhere, and to deliver man. But man would not have God with him; nor was it possible for men, in their sinful condition, to be united to Christ without redemption. The Lord however, carrying on His perfect work of love, suffered death, and overcame Satan in that his last stronghold, which God’s righteous judgment maintained in force against sinful man — a judgment which Christ therefore underwent, accomplishing a redemption that was complete, final, and eternal in its value; so that neither Satan, the prince of death and accuser of the children of God on earth, nor even the judgment of God, had anything more to say to the redeemed. The kingdom of Satan was taken from him; the just judgment of God was undergone and completely satisfied. All judgment is committed to the Son, and power over all men, because He is the Son of man. These two results are not yet manifested, although the Lord possesses all power in heaven and in earth. The thing here spoken of is another result which is accomplished meanwhile. The victory is complete. He has led the adversary captive. In ascending to heaven He has placed victorious man above all things, and has led captive all the power that previously had dominion over man.

Now before manifesting in person the power He had gained as man by binding Satan, before displaying it in the blessing of man on earth, He exhibits it in the assembly, His body, by imparting, as He had promised, to men delivered from the enemy’s dominion gifts which are the proof of that power.

CHAPTER 1 had laid open to us the thoughts of God; chapter 2 the fulfillment, in power, of His thoughts with regard to the redeemed — Jews or Gentiles, all dead in their sins — to form them into the assembly. Chapter 3 is the especial development of the mystery in that which concerned the Gentiles in Paul's administration of it on earth. Here (chap. 4) the assembly is presented in its unity as a body, and in the varied functions of its members; that is to say, the positive effect of those counsels in the assembly here below. But this is founded on the exaltation of Christ, who, the conqueror of the enemy, has ascended to heaven as man.

Thus exalted, He has received gifts in man, that is, in His human character (compare Acts 2:33). It is thus "in man," that it is expressed in Psalm 68, from whence the quotation is taken. Here, having received these gifts as the Head of the body, Christ is the channel of their communication to others. They are gifts for men.

Three things here characterise Him — a man ascended on high — a man who has led captive him who held man in captivity — a man who has received for men, delivered from that enemy, the gifts of God, which bear witness to this exaltation of man in Christ, and serve as a means for the deliverance of others. For this chapter does not speak of the more direct signs of the Spirit's power, such as tongues, miracles — such as are usually termed miraculous gifts. But what the Lord as Head confers on individuals, they are the gifts, as His servants for forming the saints to be with Him, and for the edification of the body — the fruit of His care over them. Hence, as already remarked, their continuance (till we all, one after another, grow up to the head) is stated as to power, by the Spirit; in 1 Corinthians 12 it is not.

But let us pause here for a moment, to contemplate the import of that which we have been considering.

What a complete and glorious work is that which the Lord has accomplished for us, and of which the communication of these gifts is the precious testimony! When we were the slaves of Satan and consequently of death, as well as the slaves of sin, we have seen that He was pleased to undergo for the glory of God that which hung over us. He went down into death of which Satan had the power. And so complete was the victory of

man in Him, so entire our deliverance, that (exalted Himself as man to the right hand of God's throne — He who had been under death) He has rescued us from the enemy's yoke, and uses the privilege which His position and His glory give Him to make those who were captives before, the vessels of His power for the deliverance of others also. He gives us the right, as under His jurisdiction, of acting in His holy war, moved by the same principles of love as Himself. Such is our deliverance that we are the instruments of His power against the enemy — His fellow-laborers in love through His power. Hence the connection between practical godliness, the complete subjugation of the flesh, and the capacity to serve Christ as instruments in the hand of the Holy Ghost, and the vessels of His power.

Now the Lord's ascension has immense significancy in connection with His Person and work. He ascended indeed as man, but He first descended as man even into the darkness of the grave and of death; and from thence victorious over the power of the enemy who had the power of death, and having blotted out the sins of His redeemed ones, and accomplished the glory of God in obedience — He takes His place as man above the heavens in order that He may fill all things; not only as being God, but according to the glory and the power of a position in which He was placed by the accomplishment of the work of redemption — a work which led Him into the depths of the power of the enemy, and placed Him on the throne of God — a position that He holds, not only by the title of Creator, which was already His, but by that of Redeemer, which shelters from evil all that is found within the sphere of the mighty efficacy of His work — a sphere filled with blessing, with grace, and with Himself. Glorious truth, which belongs at the same time to the union of the divine and human natures in the Person of Christ, and to the work of redemption accomplished by suffering on the cross!

Love brought Him down from the throne of God, and, being found as a man,* through the same grace, into the darkness of death. Having died, bearing our sins, He has gone up again to that throne as man, filling all things. He went below the creature into death, and is gone above it.

[* The descent into the lower parts of the earth is viewed as from His place as man on earth; not His coming down from heaven to be a man. It is Christ who descended.]

But while filling all things by virtue of His glorious Person, and in connection with the work which He accomplished, He is also in immediate relation with that which in the counsels of God is closely united to Him who thus fills all things, with that which has been especially the object of His work of redemption. It is His body, His assembly, united to Him by the bond of the Holy Ghost to complete this mystical man, to be the bride of this second Man, who fills all in all — a body which, as manifested here below, is set in the midst of a creation that is not yet delivered, and in the presence of enemies that are in the heavenly places, until Christ shall exercise, on the part of God His Father, the power that has been committed to Him as man. When Christ shall thus exercise His power, He will take vengeance on those who have defiled His creation by seducing man, who had been its head down here and the image of Him who was to be its Head everywhere. He will also deliver creation from its subjection to evil. Meanwhile, personally exalted as the glorious man, and seated at God's right hand until God shall make His enemies His footstool, He communicates the gifts necessary for the gathering together of those who are to be the companions of His glory, who are the members of His body, and who shall be manifested with Him when His glory shines forth in the midst of this world of darkness.

The apostle shows us here an assembly already delivered, and exercising the power of the Spirit; which on the one side delivers souls, and on the other builds them up in Christ, that they may grow up to the measure of their Head in spite of all the power of Satan which still subsists.

But an important truth is connected with this fact. This spiritual power is not exercised in a manner simply divine. It is Christ ascended (He however who had previously descended into the lower parts of the earth) who, as man, has received these gifts of power. It is thus that Psalm 68 speaks as well as Acts 2:33. The latter passage speaks also of the gifts bestowed on His members. In our chapter it is only in the latter way that they are mentioned. He has given gifts unto men.

I would also remark, that these gifts are not here presented as gifts bestowed by the Holy Ghost come down to earth, and distributing to every one according to His will: nor are those gifts spoken of which are tokens of spiritual power suited to act as signs upon those that are

outside: but they are ministrations for gathering together and for edification established by Christ as Head of the body by means of gifts with which He endows persons as His choice. Ascended on high, and having taken His place as man at the right hand of God, and filling all things, whatever may be the extent of His glory, Christ has first for His object to fulfill the ways of God in love in gathering souls, and in particular towards the saints and the assembly; to establish the manifestation of the divine nature, and to communicate to the assembly the riches of that grace which the ways of God display, and of which the divine nature is the source. It is in the assembly that the nature of God, the counsels of grace, and the efficacious work of Christ are concentrated in their object; and these gifts are the means of ministering, in the communication of these, in blessing to man.

Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers: apostles and prophets laying, or rather being laid, as the foundations of the heavenly building, and acting as coming directly from the Lord in an extraordinary manner; the two other classes (the last being sub-divided into two gifts, connected in their nature) belonging to ordinary ministry in all ages. It is important to remark also, that the apostle sees nothing existing before the exaltation of Christ save man the child of wrath, the power of Satan, the power which raised us up (dead in sins as we were) with Christ, and the efficacy of the cross, which had reconciled us to God, and abolished the distinction between Jew and Gentile in the assembly, to unite them in one body before God — the cross in which Christ drank the cup and bore the curse, so that wrath has passed away for the believer, and in which a God of love, a Savior God, is fully manifested.

So the existence of the apostles dates here only from the gifts that followed the exaltation of Jesus. The twelve as sent out by Jesus on earth have no place in the instruction of this epistle, which treats of the body of Christ, of the unity and the members of this body; and the body could not exist before the Head existed and had taken His place as such. Thus also we have seen that, when the apostle speaks of the apostles and prophets, the latter are to him those exclusively of the New Testament, and those who have been made such by Christ after His ascension. It is the new heavenly man who, being the exalted Head in heaven, forms His body on the earth. He does it for heaven, putting the individuals who compose it spiritually and intelligently in connection with the Head by the power of

the Holy Ghost acting in this body on the earth; the gifts, of which the apostle here speaks, being the channels by which His graces are communicated according to the bonds which the Holy Ghost forms with the Head.

The proper and immediate effect is the perfecting of individuals according to the grace that dwells in the Head. The shape which this divine action takes, further, is the work of the ministry, and the formation of the body of Christ, until all the members are grown up into the measure of the stature of Christ their Head. Christ has been revealed in all His fullness: it is according to this revelation that the members of the body are to be formed in the likeness of Christ, known as filling all things, and as the Head of His body, the revelation of the perfect love of God, of the excellency of man before Him according to His counsels, of man the vessel of all His grace, all His power, and all His gifts. Thus the assembly, and each one of the members of Christ, should be filled with the thoughts and the riches of a well-known Christ, instead of being tossed to and fro by all sort of doctrines brought forward by the enemy to deceive souls.

The Christian was to grow up according to all that was revealed in Christ, and to be ever increasing in likeness to his Head; using love and truth for his own soul — the two things of which Christ is the perfect expression. Truth displays the real relation of all things with each other in connection with the center of all things, which is God revealed now in Christ. Love is that which God is in the midst of all this. Now Christ, as the light, put everything precisely in its placeman, Satan, sin, righteousness, holiness, all things, and that in every detail, and in connection with God. And Christ was love, the expression of the love of God in the midst of all this. And this is our pattern; and our pattern as having overcome, and, as having ascended into heaven, our Head, to which we are united as the members of His body.

There flows from this Head, by means of its members, the grace needed to accomplish the work of assimilation to Himself. His body, compacted together, increases by the working of His grace in each member, and edifies itself in love.* This is the position of the assembly according to God, until all the members of the body attain to the stature of Christ. The manifestation alas! of this unity is marred; but the grace, and the operation

of the grace of its Head to nourish and cause its members to grow, is never impaired, any more than the love in the Lord's heart from which this grace springs. We do not glorify Him, we have not the joy of being ministers of joy to each other as we might be; but the Head does not cease to work for the good of His body. The wolf indeed comes and scatters the sheep, but he cannot pluck them out of the Shepherd's hands. His faithfulness is glorified in our unfaithfulness without excusing it.

[* Verse 11 gives special and permanent gifts; verse 16, what every joint supplies in its place. Both have their place in the forming and growth of the body.]

With this precious object of the ministration of grace (namely, for the growth of each member individually unto the measure of the stature of the Head Himself), with the ministration of each member in its place to the edifying itself in love, ends this development of the counsels of God in the union of Christ and the assembly, in its double character of the body of Christ in heaven, and the habitation of the Holy Ghost on earth — truths which cannot be separated, but each of which has its distinctive importance, and which reconcile the certain immutable operations of grace in the Head with the failures of the assembly responsible on the earth.

Exhortations to a walk befitting such a position follow, in order that the glory of God in us and by us, and His grace towards us, may be identified in our full blessing. We will notice the great principles of these exhortations.

The first is the contrast* between the ignorance of a heart that is blind, and a stranger to the life of God, and consequently walking in the vanity of its own understanding, that is, according to the desires of a heart given up to the impulses of the flesh without God — the contrast, I say, between this state, and that of having learnt Christ, as the truth is in Jesus (which is the expression of the life of God in man, God Himself manifested in the flesh), the having put off this old man, which is corrupt itself according to its deceitful lusts, and put on this new man, Christ. It is not an amelioration of the old man; it is a putting it off, and a putting on of Christ.

[* I have already noticed, that contrast of the new state and the old characterises the Ephesians more than Colossians, where we find more development of life.]

Even here the apostle does not lose sight of the oneness of the body; we are to speak the truth, because we are members one of another. "Truth," the expression of simplicity and integrity of heart, is in connection with "the truth as it is in Jesus," whose life is transparent as the light, as falsehood is in connection with deceitful lusts.

Moreover, the old man is without God, alienated from the life of God. The new man is created, it is a new creation, and a creation* after the model of that which is the character of God righteousness and holiness of truth. The first Adam was not in that manner created after the image of God. By the fall the knowledge of good and evil entered into man. He can no longer be innocent. When innocent, he was ignorant of evil in itself. Now, fallen, he is a stranger to the life of God in his ignorance: but the knowledge of good and evil which he has acquired, the moral distinction between good and evil in itself, is a divine principle. "The man," said God, "is become as one of us, to know good and evil." But in order to possess this knowledge, and subsist in what is good before God, there must be divine energy, divine life.

[* In Colossians we have "renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created us."

Everything has its true nature, its true character, in the eyes of God. That is the truth. It is not that He is the truth. The truth is the right and perfect expression of that which a thing is (and, in an absolute way, of that which all things are), and of the relations in which it stands to other things, or in which all things stand towards each other. Thus God could not be the truth. He is not the expression of some other thing. Everything relates to Him. He is the center of all true relationship, and of all moral obligation. Neither is God the measure of all things, for He is above all things; and nothing else can be so above them, or He would not be so.* It is God become man; it is Christ, who is the truth, and the measure of all things. But all things have their true character in the eyes of God: and He judges righteously of all, whether morally or in power. He acts according to that judgment. He is just. He also knows evil perfectly, being Himself goodness, that it may be perfectly an abomination to Him, that He may repel it by His own nature. He is holy. Now the new man, created after the divine nature, is so in righteousness and holiness of truth. What a privilege!

What a blessing! It is, as another apostle has said, to be “partakers of the divine nature.” Adam had nothing of this.

[* There is a sense in which God is, morally, the measure of other beings — a consideration that brings out the immense privilege of the child of God. It is the effect of grace, in that, being born of Him and partaking of His nature, the child of God is called to be the imitator of God, to be perfect as His Father is perfect. He who loves is born of God, and knows God, for God is love. He makes us partakers of His holiness, consequently we are called to be imitators of God, as His dear children. This shows the immense privileges of grace. It is the love of God in the midst of evil, and which, superior to all evil, walks in holiness, and rejoices also together, in a divine way, in the unity of the same joys and the same sentiments. Therefore Christ says (John 17), “as we are,” and “in us.”

Adam was perfect as an innocent man. The breath of life in his nostrils was breathed into him by God, and he was responsible for obedience to God in a thing wherein neither good nor evil was to be known, but simply a commandment. The trial was that of obedience only, not the knowledge of good or evil in itself. At present, in Christ, the portion of the believer is a participation in the divine nature itself, in a being who knows good and evil, and who vitally participates in the sovereign good, morally in the nature of God Himself, although always thereby dependent on Him. It is our evil nature which is not so, or at least which refuses to be dependent on Him.

Now there is a prince of this world, a stranger to God; and, besides participation in the divine nature, there is the Spirit Himself who has been given to us. These solemn truths enter also as principles into these exhortations. “Give no place to the devil,” on the one hand — give him no room to come in and act on the flesh; and, on the other hand, “grieve not the Holy Spirit” who dwells in you. The redemption of the creature has not yet taken place, but ye have been sealed unto that day: respect and cherish this mighty and holy guest who graciously dwells in you. Let all bitterness and malice therefore cease even in word, and let meekness and kindness reign in you according to the pattern you have in the ways of God in Christ towards you. Be imitators of God: beautiful and magnificent privilege! but which flows naturally from the truth that we are made partakers of His nature, and that His Spirit dwells in us.

These are the two great subjective principles of the Christian — the having put off the old man and put on the new, and the Holy Ghost’s dwelling in

him. Nor can anything be more blessed than the pattern of life here given to the Christian, founded on our being a new creation. It is perfect subjectively and objectively. First, subjectively, the truth in Jesus is the having put off the old man and put on the new, which has God for its pattern. It is created after God in the perfection of His moral character. But this is not all. The Holy Spirit of God by which we are sealed to the day of redemption dwells in us: we are not to grieve Him. These are the two elements of our state, the new man created after God, and the presence of the Holy Spirit of God; and He is emphatically here called the Spirit of God, as in connection with God's character.

And next objectively: created after God, and God dwelling in us, God is the pattern of our walk, and thus in respect of the two words which alone give God's essence — love and light. We are to walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself for us a sacrifice to God. "For us" was divine love; "to God" is perfection of object and motive. Law takes up the love of self as the measure of love to others. Christ gives up self wholly and for us, but to God. Our worthlessness enhances the love but, on the other hand, an affection and a motive have their worth from the object (and with Christ that was God Himself), self wholly given up. For, so to speak, we may love up and love down. When we look upward in our affections, the nobler the object the nobler the affection; when it is downwards, the more unworthy the object, the more pure and absolute the love. Christ was perfect in both, and absolutely so. He gave Himself for us, and to God. Afterwards we are light in the Lord. We cannot say we are love, for love is sovereign goodness in God; we walk in it, like Christ. But we are light in the Lord. This is the second essential name of God and as partakers of the divine nature we are light in the Lord. Here again Christ is the pattern. "Christ shall give thee light." We are called on, then, as His dear children to imitate God.

This life, in which we participate and of which we live as partakers of the divine nature, has been objectively presented to us in Christ in all its perfection and in all its fullness; in man, and in man now brought to perfection on high, according to the counsels of God respecting Him. It is Christ, this eternal life, who was with the Father and has been manifested unto us — He who, having then first descended, has ascended now into heaven to carry humanity thither, and display it in the glory — the glory

of God — according to His eternal counsels. We have seen this life here in its earthly development: God manifest in flesh; man, perfectly heavenly, and obedient in all things to His Father, moved, in His conduct to others, by the motives that characterise God Himself in grace. Hereafter He will be manifested in judgment; and already, here below, He has gone through all the experiences of a man, understanding thus how grace adapts itself to our wants, and displaying it now, according to that knowledge, even as hereafter He will exercise judgment with a knowledge of man, not only divine, but which, having gone through this world in holiness, will leave the hearts of men without excuse and without escape.

But it is the image of God in Him, of which we are now speaking. It is in Him that the nature which we have to imitate is presented to us, and presented in man as it ought to be developed in us here below, in the circumstances through which we are passing. We see in Him the manifestation of God, and that in contrast with the old man. There we see “the truth as it is in Jesus,” save that in us it involves the putting off of the old man and putting on the new, answering to Christ’s death and resurrection (compare particularly as to His death, 1 Peter 3:18; 4:1). Thus, in order to attract and to lead on our hearts, to give us the model on which they are to be formed, the aim to which they should tend, God has given us an object in which He manifests Himself, and which is the object of all His own delight.

The reproduction of God in man is the object that God proposed to Himself in the new man; and that the new man proposes to himself, as he is himself the reproduction of the nature and the character of God. There are two principles for the Christian’s path, according to the light in which he views himself. Running his race as man towards the object of his heavenly calling, in which he follows after Christ ascended on high: he is running the heavenward race; the excellency of Christ to be won there, his motive — that is not the Ephesian aspect. In the Ephesians he is sitting in heavenly places in Christ, and he has to come out as from heaven, as Christ really did, and manifest God’s character upon earth, of which, as we have seen, Christ is the pattern. We are called, as in the position of dear children, to show our Father’s ways.

We are not created anew according to that which the first Adam was, but according to that which God is: Christ is its manifestation. And He is the second Man, the last Adam.*

[* It is useful to note here the difference of Romans 12:1, 2, and this epistle. The Romans, we have seen, contemplates a living man on earth; hence he is to give his body up as a living sacrifice — alive in Christ, he is to yield his members up wholly to God. Here the saints are seen as sitting in heavenly places already, and they are to come out in testimony of God's character before men, walking as Christ did in love, and light.]

In detail we shall find these characteristic features: truthfulness, the absence of all anger that has the nature of hatred (lying and hatred are the two characteristics of the enemy); practical righteousness connected with labor according to the will of God (man's true position); and the absence of corruption. It is man under the rule of God since the fall, delivered from the effect of the deceitful lusts. But it is more than this. A divine principle brings in the desire of doing good to others, to their body and their soul. I need not say how truly we find here the picture of the life of Christ, as in the preceding remarks it was the putting off of the spirit of the enemy and of the old man. The spirit of peace and love (and that, in spite of evil in others and the wrongs they may do us) completes the picture, adding that which will be easily understood after what has been said, that, in "forgiving one another," we are to be imitators of God, and to walk in love as Christ has loved us, and has given Himself for us. Beautiful picture, precious privilege! May God grant us so to look at Jesus as to have His image stamped upon us, and in some sort to walk like Him.

Moreover, let us remark here, and it is an important feature in this picture of the fruits of grace and of the new man, that when the grace and love, which come down from God, act in man, they always go up again to God in devotedness. Walk, he says, in love, even as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor. We see it in Christ. He is this love which comes down in grace, but this grace, acting in man, makes Him devote Himself to God, although it is on behalf of others. So it is in us; it is the touchstone of the christian heart's activity.

The apostle then speaks plainly as to sin, in order that no one may deceive himself; nor be occupied with deep truths, using them intellectually, to the

neglect of ordinary morality — one of the signs of heresy, properly so called. He has connected the profoundest doctrines in his teaching with daily practice. If Christ be glorified, the Head of the assembly, He is the model of the new man, the last Adam; the assembly being one with Him on high, and the habitation of God on earth by the Spirit, with whom every Christian is sealed. Every Christian, if indeed he has learned the truth as it is in Jesus, has learned that it consists in having put off the old man, and having put on the new man, created after God in righteousness and holiness (of which Christ is the model, according to the counsels of God in glory); and he is to grow up unto the measure of the stature of Christ, who is the Head, and not grieve the Holy Spirit wherewith he is sealed. The fullest revelation of grace does not weaken the immutable truth that God had a character proper to Himself; it unfolds that character to us by means of the most precious revelations of the gospel, and of the closest relationships with God, which were formed by these revelations: but this character could not alter, nor could the kingdom of God allow of, any characters contrary to it. The wrath of God therefore against evil, and against those who commit it, is plainly set forth.

Now we were that which is contrary to His character, we were darkness; not only in the dark, but darkness in our nature, the opposite of God who is light. Not one ray of that which He is was found in our will, our desires, our understanding. We were morally destitute of it. There was the corruptness of the first Adam, but no share in any feature of the divine character. We are now partakers of the divine nature, we have the same desires, we know what it is that He loves, and we love what He loves, we enjoy that which He enjoys, we are light (poor and weak indeed, yet such by nature) in the Lord-looked at as in Christ. They are the fruits of light* that are developed in the Christian; he is to avoid all association with the unfruitful works of darkness.

[* We should read “fruit of the light,” not “fruit of the Spirit.”]

But, in speaking of motives, the apostle returns to the great subjects that pre-occupied him, and he returns to them, not only that we should put on the character set forth by that of which he speaks, but that we should realise all its extent, that we should experience all its force. He had told us that the truth in Christ was the having put on the new man, in contrast with the old man, and that we are not to grieve the Holy Spirit. Now he

exhorts those that sleep to awake, and Christ should be their light. Light makes all things manifest; but he who sleeps, although not dead, does not profit by it. For hearing, seeing, and all mental reception and communication, he is in the state of a dead man. Alas, how apt this sleep is to overtake us! But in awaking, it was not that they should see the light dimly, but Christ Himself should be the light of the soul; they should have all the full revelation of that which is well-pleasing to God, that which He loves; they should have divine wisdom in Christ; they should be able to profit by opportunities, should find them, being thus enlightened, in the difficulties of a world governed by the enemy, and should act according to spiritual understanding in every case that presented itself. Further, if they were not to lose their senses through means of excitement used in the world, they were to be filled with the Spirit, that is, that He should take such possession of our affections, our thoughts, our understanding, that He should be their only source according to His proper and mighty energy to the exclusion of all else. Thus, full of joy, we should praise, we should sing for joy; and we should give thanks for all that might happen, because a God of love is the true source of all. We should be full of joy in the spiritual realisation of the objects of faith, and the heart continuing to be filled with the Spirit and sustained by this grace, the experience of the hand of God in everything here below will give rise only to thanksgiving. It comes from His hand whom we trust and whose love we know. But giving thanks in all things is a test of the state of the soul; because the consciousness that all things are from God's hand, full trust in His love, and deadness as to any will of our own, must exist in order to give thanks in everything — a single eye which delights in His will.

In entering into the details of relationships and particular duties, the apostle cannot give up the subject that is so dear to him. The command which he addresses to wives, that they are to submit themselves to their husbands, immediately suggests the relationship between Christ and the assembly, not now as a subject for knowledge, but to unfold His affection and tender care. We have seen that the apostle, having established the great principles displayed in the revelation of our relationship with God — our vocation — then deduces their practical consequences with regard to the life and conduct of Christians: they were to walk as having put on the new man, to have Christ for their light, not to grieve the Spirit, to be filled with

the Spirit. Now all this, while the fruit of grace, was either knowledge or practical responsibility.

But here the subject is viewed in another aspect. It is the grace that acts in Christ Himself, His affections, His guardian care, His devotedness to the assembly. Nothing can be more precious, more tender, more intimate. He loved the assembly — that is the source of all. And there are three steps in the work of this love. He gave Himself for it, He washes it, He presents it all glorious to Himself. This is not precisely the sovereign election of the individual by God; but the affection that displays itself in the relationship which Christ maintains with the assembly.* See also the extent of the gift, and how marvelous the ground of confidence that it contains. He gives Himself; it is not only His life, true as that is, but Himself.** All that Christ was has been given, and given by Himself; it is the entire devotedness and giving of Himself. And now all that is in Him — His grace, His righteousness, His acceptance with the Father, the excellent glory of His Person, His wisdom, the energy of divine love that can give itself — all is consecrated to the welfare of the assembly. There are no qualities, no excellencies in Christ, which are not ours in their exercise consequent on the gift of Himself. He has already given them, and consecrated them to the blessing of the assembly which He has given Himself to have. Not only are they given, but He has given them; His love has accomplished it.

[* It is well to notice here this character of love — love in an established relationship. The word of God is more exact than is generally thought in its expressions; because the expression has its origin in the thing itself. It is not said that Christ loved the world — He has no relationship with the world as it is. It is said that God so loved the world; this is what He is towards it in His own goodness. It is not said that God loved the assembly. The proper relationship of the assembly as such is with Christ, her heavenly Bridegroom. The Father loves us, we are His dear children. God, in this character, loves us. Thus Jehovah loves Israel. On the other hand, all the tenderness and faithfulness that belong to the relationship in which Christ stands are our portion in Him, as well as all that the name of Father means on its side also.]

[** It is specially the devotedness of His love; He gives and gives Himself.]

We know well that it is on the cross that this giving of Himself was accomplished, it is there that the consecration of Himself to the good of the assembly was complete. But here that glorious work is not exactly

viewed on the side of its atoning and redeeming efficacy, but on that of the devotedness and love to the assembly which Christ manifested in it. Now we can always reckon upon this love which was perfectly displayed in it. It is not altered. Jesus — blessed and praised be His name for it! — is for me according to the energy of His love in all that He is, in all circumstances and for ever, and in the activity of that love according to which He gave Himself. He loved the assembly and gave Himself for it. This is the source of all our blessings, as members of the assembly.

But this love of Christ is inexhaustible and unchangeable. It effects the blessing of its cherished object, by preparing it for a happiness of which His heart is alike the measure and the source,* to happiness of perfect purity, the excellence of which He knows in heaven — purity suited to the presence of God, and to her who should be in that presence for ever, the bride of the Lamb — purity which renders it capable of enjoying perfect love and glory; even as that love tends to purify the soul by making itself known to it, and attracting it, divesting it of self, and filling it with God as the center of blessing and joy.

[* When I say (here and above) that the love of Christ is its source, it is not as if the love of the Father and the counsels of God had not their place in it. I speak of the blessing applied and carried out in the relationship presented in this passage; and this relationship exists with Christ. Nevertheless it is the same divine love.]

It is important to remark that Christ does not here sanctify the assembly to make it His own, but makes it His own to sanctify it. It is first His, then He suits it to Himself. Christ, who loves the church as being His own, and who has already made it His own by giving Himself for it, and who chooses to have it such as His heart desires, occupies Himself with it, when He has won it, to render it such. He gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify it by the washing of water by the word. Here we find that moral effect produced by the care of Christ, the object which He proposes to Himself in His work accomplished in time, and the means He uses to attain it. He appropriates the assembly morally, sets it morally apart for Himself, when He has made it His; for He can only desire holy things — holy according to the knowledge He has of purity — by virtue of His eternal and natural abode in heaven. He then puts the assembly in connection with heaven, from whence He is, and into which He will introduce it. He gave Himself in order to sanctify it. For this purpose He

uses the word, which is the divine expression of the mind of God, of heavenly order and holiness, of truth itself (that is to say, of the true relation of all things with God; and that according to His love in Christ), and which consequently judges all that deviates from it as to purity or love.

He forms the assembly for His bride, a help-meet for Him, in which all is according to the glory and the love of God, by the revelation (through the word, which comes from thence) of these things as they exist in heaven. Now Christ Himself is the full expression of these things, the image of the invisible God. Thus, in communicating them to the assembly, He prepares it for Himself. When speaking therefore in this sense of His own testimony, He says, “We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen.”

But it is this which the word is, as we have received it from Jesus; and more especially as speaking from heaven, with the character of the new commandment, the darkness passing away, and the true light now shining; and consequently, the thing being true, not only in Him, but in us. The ministry of chapter 1 is occupied with this, forming the hearts of the saints on earth in fellowship with the Head from which the grace and the light descended. In this manner then Christ sanctifies the assembly for which He gave Himself. He has formed it for heavenly things by the communication of heavenly things, of which He is Himself the fullness and the glory. But this word finds the assembly mixed up with things that are contrary to this heavenly purity and love. Alas! its affections — as to the old man at least — mixed up with these earthly things, which are contrary to the will of God and to His nature. Thus in sanctifying the assembly He must needs cleanse it. This is therefore the work of the love of Christ during the present time, but for the eternal and essential happiness of the assembly.

He sanctifies the assembly, but He does it by the word, communicating heavenly things — all that belongs to the nature, to the majesty, and to the glory of God — in love, but at the same time applying them to judge everything in her present affections, which is at variance with that which He communicates. Precious work of love, which not only loves us but

labors to make us fit to enjoy that love; fit to be with Christ Himself in the Father's house!

How deeply is He interested in us! He not only accomplished the glorious work of our redemption by giving Himself for us, but He acts continually with perfect love and patience to make us such as He would have us to be in His own presence — fit for the heavenly places and heavenly things.

What a character this shows to belong also to the word, and what grace in His use of it! It is the communication of divine things according to their own perfection, and now as God Himself is in the light. It is the revelation of God Himself, as we know Him in a glorified Christ, in a perfect love to form us also according to that perfection for the enjoyment of Him; and yet it is addressed to us, yea is suited in its very nature to us down here (compare John 1:4) to impart these things to us by bringing in light amid the darkness, thus necessarily judging all that is in the darkness, but in order to purify us in love.

Observe, also, the order in which this work of Christ is presented to us, beginning with love. He loved the assembly; this, as we have already said, is the source of all. All that follows is the result of that love and cannot gainsay it. The perfect proof of it is then stated: He gave Himself for the assembly. He could not give more. It was to the glory of the Father, no doubt, but it was for the assembly. Had he reserved anything, the love in giving Himself would not have been perfect, not absolute; it would not have been a devotedness that left nothing for the awakened heart to desire. It would not have been Christ, for He could not but be perfect. We know love and perfection in knowing Him. But He has won the heart of the assembly by giving Himself for it. He has won her thus. She is His according to that love. Yea; it is there that we have learnt what love is. Hereby know we love in that He gave Himself for us. All was for the glory of the Father: without that it would not have been perfection; and the revelation of the heavenly things would not have taken place, for that depended on the Father's being perfectly glorified. In this the things to be revealed were manifested and verified, so to speak, in spite of evil; but all is entirely for us.

If we have learnt to know love, we have learnt to know Jesus, such as He is for us; and He is wholly for us.

Thus the entire work of cleansing and of sanctification is the result of perfect love. It is not the means of obtaining the love, or of being its object. It is indeed the means of enabling us to enjoy it; but it is the love itself which, in its exercise, works this sanctification. Christ wins the assembly first. He then in His perfect love makes it such as He would have it to be — a truth that is precious to us in every way, and first, in order to free the soul from all servile fear, to give sanctification its true character of grace and its true extent here. It is joy of heart to know that Christ Himself will make us all He desires us to be.

We have considered two effects of the love of Christ for the assembly. The first was the gift of Himself, which in a certain sense comprises the whole; it is love perfect in itself. He gave Himself. The second is the moral formation of the object of His love, that it may be with Him; according, we may add, to the perfections of God Himself, for that indeed is what the word is — the expression of the nature, the ways, and the thoughts of God.

There is yet a third effect of this love of Christ's which completes it. He presents it to Himself a glorious assembly without spot or wrinkle. If He gave Himself for the assembly, it was in order to have it with Him; but if He would have it with Him, He must render it fit to be in His glorious presence; and He has sanctified it by cleansing it according to the revelation of God Himself, and the heavenly things of which He is in Himself the center in glory. The Holy Ghost has taken the things of Christ, and has revealed them to the assembly; and all that the Father has is Christ's. Thus perfected according to the perfection of heaven, He presents it to Himself a glorious assembly. Morally, the work was done; the elements of heavenly glory had been communicated to her who was to stand in that glory, had entered into her moral being, and thus formed her to participate in it. The power of the Lord is needed to make her participate in it in fact, to make her glorious, to destroy every trace of her earthly abode, save the excellent fruit that results from it. He presents her glorious to Himself — this is the result of all. He took her for Himself, He presents her to Himself, the fruit and the proof of His perfect love; and for her it is the perfect enjoyment of that same love. But there is yet more. That sentence discloses to us all the import of this admirable display of grace. The Spirit carries us back to the case of Adam and Eve, in which

God, having formed Eve, presents her to Adam all complete according to His own divine thoughts and at the same time suited to be the delight of Adam, as a help-meet adapted to his nature and condition. Now Christ is God. He has formed the assembly, but with this additional right over her heart that He has given Himself for her; but He is also the last Adam in glory; and He presents her glorified to Himself, such as He had formed her for himself. What a sphere for the development of spiritual affections is this revelation! What infinite grace is that which has given place for such an exercise of these affections!

We cannot fail to notice the connection between the cleansing and the glory, that is, that the cleansing is according to the glory and by it; and that the glory is the completeness of, and completely answers to, the cleansing. For the cleansing is by the word, which reveals the whole glory and mind of God. Presented in glory she has neither spot nor wrinkle; she is holy and unblamable. This is a most important truth, and recurs elsewhere. Compare 2 Corinthians 3:18, and Philippians 3:11 to the end. So in 1 Thessalonians 3:13. What is complete in glory there, is wrought into the soul now by the Spirit operating with the word.

This then is the purpose, the mind of the Lord, with regard to the assembly, and this the sanctifying work which prepares her for Himself and for heaven. But these are not all the effects of His love. He watches tenderly over her during all the time of her sojourn here below.

The apostle, who did not lose sight of the thesis which gave rise to this digression that is so instructive to us, says that the husband ought to love his wife as his own body — that it was loving himself. He was naturally led to this by the allusion to Genesis; but he immediately returns to the subject that occupies him. No one, he says, ever hated his own flesh; he nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord the assembly. This is the precious aspect, during time, of Christ's love, which the apostle here presents. Not only has Christ a heavenly aim, but His love performs the work which, so to speak, is natural to it. He tenderly cares for the assembly here below; He nourishes it, He cherishes it. The wants, the weaknesses, the difficulties, the anxieties of the assembly are only opportunities to Christ for the exercise of His love. The assembly needs to be nourished, as do our bodies; and He nourishes her. She is the object of

His tender affections; He cherishes her. If the end is heaven, the assembly is not left desolate here. She learns His love where her heart needs it. She will enjoy it fully when need has passed away for ever. Moreover it is precious to know that Christ cares for the assembly, as a man cares for his own flesh. For we are members of His own body. We are of His flesh, and of His bones. Eve is here alluded to. We are, as it were, a part of Himself, having our existence and our being from Him, as Eve from Adam. He can say, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." Our position is, on the one hand, to be members of His body; on the other hand, we have our existence as Christians from Him. Therefore it is that a man is to leave his natural relations, in order to be united to his wife. It is a great mystery. Now it was just this that Christ did as man, in a certain sense, divinely.

Nevertheless every one ought thus to love his own wife, and the wife to reverence her husband.

There remain yet certain relationships in life, with which the doctrine of the Spirit of God is connected: those of children and parents, of fathers and children, and of servants and master. It is interesting to see the children of believers introduced as objects of the Holy Spirit's care, and even slaves (for servants were such), raised by Christianity to a position which the circumstances of their social degradation could not affect.

All the children of Christians are viewed as subjects of the exhortations in the Lord, which belong to those who are within, who are no longer in this world, of which Satan is the prince. Sweet and precious comfort to the parent, that he may look upon them as having a right to this position, and a part in those tender cares which the Holy Ghost lavishes on all who are in the house of God! The apostle marks the importance which God attached, under the law, to this duty. It is the first command with which He linked a promise. Verse 3 is only the quotation of that which he alludes to in verse 2.

The exhortation to fathers is also remarkable — that they should not provoke their children; that their hearts should be turned towards them; that they should not repel them, nor destroy that influence which is the strongest guard against the evil of the world. God forms the heart of children around this happy center: the father should watch over this. But there is more. The christian father (for it is always those within to whom

he speaks) ought to recognise the position in which, as we have seen, the children are placed, and to bring them up under the yoke of Christ in the discipline and admonition of the Lord. Christian position is to be the measure and the form of the influences which the father exercises, and of the education which he gives his children. He treats them as brought up for the Lord, and as the Lord would bring them up.

It will be remarked, that in the two relationships we are considering, as well as in that of wives with their husbands, it is on the side from which submission is due that the exhortations begin. This is the genius of Christianity in our evil world, in which man's will is the source of all the evil, expressing his departure from God to whom all submission is due. The principle of submission and of obedience is the healing principle of humanity: only God must be brought into it, in order that the will of man be not the guide after all. But the principle that governs the heart of man in good, is always and everywhere obedience. I may have to say that God must be obeyed rather than man; but to depart from obedience is to enter into sin. A man may have, as a father, to command and direct; but he does it ill if he do it not in obedience to God and to His word. This was the essence of the life of Christ: "I come to do thy will, O my God." Accordingly the apostle begins his exhortations with regard to relationships by giving the general precept: "Submit yourselves one to another." This renders order easy, even when the order of institutions and of authority may fail. Submission, moral obedience, can never in principle be wanting to the true Christian. It is the starting-point of his whole life. He is sanctified unto the obedience of Christ (1 Peter 1:2).

In the case which has led to these remarks, it is striking to see how this principle elevates the slave in his condition: he obeys by an inward divine principle, as though it were Christ Himself whom he obeyed. However wicked his master may be, he obeys as if he obeyed Christ Himself. Three times the apostle repeats this principle of obedience to Christ or the service of Christ, adding, "doing the will of God from the heart." What a difference this made in the poor slave's condition! Moreover, whether bond or free, each should receive his reward from the Lord. The master himself had the same Master in heaven, with whom there is no respect of persons. Still it is to masters that he says this, not to the slave; for Christianity is delicate in its propriety, and never falsifies its principles.

The master was also to treat the slave with perfect equity — even as he expected it from the slave — and was not to threaten.

It is beautiful to see the way in which divine doctrine enters into the details of life, and throws the fragrance of its perfection into every duty and every relationship; how it acknowledges existing things, as far as they can be owned and directed by its principles, but exalts and enhances the value of everything according to the perfection of those principles; by touching not the relationships but the man's heart who walks in them; taking the moral side, and that of submission, in love and in the exercise of authority which the divine doctrine can regulate, bringing in the grace which governs the use of the authority of God.

But it is not only that there is a line of conduct to follow, a model to imitate, a Spirit with whom one may be filled, it is not only relationships between oneself and God, and those in which we stand here below; this is not all that must occupy the Christian. He has enemies to fight. The people of Israel under Joshua in the land of Canaan were indeed in the promised land, but they were in conflict there with enemies who were in it before them, although not according to the rights by which Israel possessed the land through the gift of God. God had set it apart for Israel (see Deuteronomy 32:8); Ham had taken possession of it.

Now, with regard to us, it is not with flesh and blood that we have to fight, as was the case With Israel. Our blessings are spiritual in the heavenly places. We are sitting in Christ in the heavenlies. We are a testimony to principalities and powers in the heavenlies; we have to wrestle with spiritual wickednesses in the heavenlies. Israel had passed through the wilderness — had crossed the Jordan; the manna had ceased; they ate the corn of the land. They were settled in the land of Canaan as though it were all their own without striking a blow. They ate the produce of this good land in the plains of Jericho. So it is with regard to the Christian. Although we are in the wilderness, we are also in the heavenly places in Christ. We have crossed the Jordan, we have died and are risen again with Him. We are sitting in the heavenly places in Him, that we may enjoy the things of heaven as the fruit of our own country. But conflict is before us, if we desire to enjoy them practically. The promise is of every blessing, of all the promised land, but wheresoever we shall set our foot on it (Joshua 1).

For this we need the Lord's strength, and of this the apostle now speaks. "Be strong," he says, "in the Lord." The enemy is subtle. We have to withstand his stratagems even more than his power. Neither the strength nor even the wisdom of man can do anything here. We must be armed with the panoply, that is, the whole armor, of God.

But observe first, that the Spirit turns our thoughts upon God Himself before speaking of that which has to be overcome. "Be strong in the Lord." It is not, first of all, a refuge from the face of the enemy; we are in it for ourselves before we use it against the wiles of the enemy. It is in the intimacy of the counsels and the grace of God that man fortifies himself for the warfare from which he cannot escape, if he would enjoy his christian privileges. And he must have the whole armor. To be wanting in one piece exposes us to Satan on that side. The armor must be that of God — divine in its nature. Human armor will not ward off the attacks of Satan; confidence in that armor will engage us in the battle only to make us fall in combat with a spirit who is more mighty and more crafty than we are.

These enemies are thus characterised; they are principalities and powers — beings possessing an energy of evil which has its source in a will that has mastery over those who do not know how to resist it; they have also strength to carry it out. Their energy they have from God, the will that uses it comes from themselves; they have forsaken God; the spring of their actions is in their own will. In this respect it is a source of action independent of God, and the energy and the qualities which they have from God are the instruments of that will — a will which has no bridle except from outside itself. They are principalities and powers. There are good ones; but in them the will is only to do that which God wills, and to employ in His service the strength they have received from Him.

These rebellious principalities and powers rule over the darkness of this world. Light is the atmosphere in which God dwells, which He diffuses all around Himself. Wicked spirits deceive and reign in darkness. Now this world, not having the light of God, is entirely in darkness, and demons reign in it; for God is not there — except in supreme power after all, turning everything to His glory, and, in the end, to the good of His children.

But if these principalities rule in the darkness of this world they do not possess merely an outward force; they are in the heavenlies, and are occupied with spiritual wickedness there. They exercise a spiritual influence, as having the place of gods. There is then, first, their intrinsic character, their mode of being, and the state in which they are found; second, their power in the world as governing it; and third, their religious and delusive ascendancy, as lodging in the heavens. They have also, as a sphere for the exercise of their power, the lusts of man, and even the terrors of his conscience.

To resist enemies like these we need the armor of God. The manifestations of this power, when God permits it, constitute the evil days. All this present period of Christ's absence is, in a certain sense, the evil day. Christ has been rejected by the world, of which, while in it, He was the light, and is hidden in God. This power, which the enemy displayed when he led the world to reject Christ, he still exercises over it: we oppose it by the action and the power of the Holy Ghost, who is here during the Lord's absence. But there are moments when this power is allowed to show itself in a more especial manner, when the enemy uses the world against the saints, darkening the light which shines in it from God, troubling and leading astray the minds of professors and even of believers — days, in a word, in which his power makes itself felt. We have to wrestle with this power, to resist it all, to stand against everything in the confession of Christ, of the light; we have to do all that the confession of His name requires in spite of all and at whatever cost, and to be found standing when the storm and the evil day are past.

Thus we have not only to enjoy God and the counsels of God and their effect in peace; but, since these very counsels introduce us into heavenly places and make us the light of God on earth, we have also to encounter the spiritual wickednesses which are in the heavenly places, and which seek to make us falsify our high position, to mislead us, and to darken the light of Christ in us on the earth. We have to escape the snares of heavenly spiritual wickedness for ourselves, and to maintain the testimony here below incorrupt and pure.*

[* Still what we have to overcome are the wiles of the devil. His power over us is broken. He may rouse the world in persecution and be a roaring lion; but as regards personal temptations, if we resist the devil he flees from us; he

knows he has met Christ, and Christ has overcome. But his wiles are ever there.]

Now by the power of the Holy Ghost, who has been given to us for this purpose, we shall find that the armor of God relates first to that which, by setting the flesh aside, and by maintaining the existence of a good conscience, takes all hold from the enemy; then, to the preservation of complete objective trust in God; and next, to the active energy which stands with confidence in the presence of the enemy, and using the weapons of the Holy Ghost against him. The defensive armor our own state, comes first. The whole ends with the expression of the entire and continual dependence on God in which the christian warrior stands.

We will examine this armor of God, that we may know it. It is all practical — founded on that which has been accomplished, but in itself practical. For it is not a question here of appearing before the bar of God, but of resisting the enemy, and of maintaining our ground against him.

Before God our righteousness is perfect, it is Christ Himself, and we are the righteousness of God in Him: but we do not need armor there, we are sitting in the heavenly places: all is peace, all is perfect. But here we need armor, real practical armor, and first of all to have the loins girt about with truth. The loins are the place of strength when duly girt, but represent the intimate affections and movements of the heart. If we allow our hearts to wander where they will, instead of abiding in communion with God, Satan has easy hold upon us. This piece of armor is then the application of the truth to the most intimate movements, the first movements of the heart. We gird up the loins. This is done, not when Satan is present; it is a work with God, which is done by applying the truth to our souls in His presence, judging everything in us by this means, and putting a bridle on the heart that it may only move under His eye. This is true liberty and true joy, because the new man enjoys God in uninterrupted communion; but here the Spirit speaks of it with respect to the safeguard which it will be to us against the attacks of the enemy. At the same time it is not merely the repression of evil thoughts — that is its consequence: it is the action of the truth, of the power of God, acting by the revelation of everything as it is — of all that He Himself teaches, bringing the conscience into His presence, keeping it thus in His thoughts; all that God has said in His word, and the unseen realities having their true force and their application

to the heart that stirs in us, so that its movements should have their character from God's own word and not from its own desires, everything going on in the presence of God.*

[* Girding the loins is a common figure of scripture for a mind and heart kept in godly order as in God's presence by the word of God.]

Satan has no hold on a heart thus kept in the truth, as revealed by God; there is nothing in its desires that answers to the suggestions of Satan. Take Jesus as an example. His safeguard was not in judging all that Satan said. In the wilderness at the beginning of His public service, except in the last temptation, it was in the perfect application of the word for Himself, for that which concerned His own conduct, to the circumstances around Him. The truth governed His heart, so that it only moved according to that truth in the circumstance that presented itself "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." No word has come forth — He does nothing. There was no motive for acting. It would have been to act of His own accord, of His own will. That truth kept His heart in connection with God in the circumstance that met Him. When the circumstance arose, His heart was already in intercourse with God, so that it had no other impulse than that which the word of truth suggested. His conduct was purely negative, but it flowed from the light which truth threw upon the circumstance, because His heart was under the absolute government of the truth. The suggestion of Satan would have brought Him out of this position. That was enough. He will have nothing to do with it. He does not yet drive away Satan: it was only a matter of conduct, not of flagrant opposition to the glory of God. In the latter case He drives him away; in the former He acts according to God without concerning Himself with anything farther. Satan's device totally failed of its effect. It simply produced nothing. It is absolutely powerless against the truth, because it is not the truth; and the hearth has truth for its rule. Wiles are not the truth: this is quite enough to prevent our being caught by them, that is, if the heart be thus governed.

In the second place there is the breastplate of righteousness — a conscience that has nothing to reproach itself with. The natural man knows how a bad conscience robs him of strength before men. There is only to be added here the way in which Satan uses it to entrap man in his snares. By maintaining the truth we have Satan for our enemy. If we yield ourselves

up to error, he will leave us in that respect at peace, except in using our faults and crimes to enslave us more, to bind us hand and foot in that which is false. How would a man who has the truth, who has perhaps even escaped error, if his conduct were bad, bear to have it exposed to the eyes of all? He is silent before the enemy. His own conscience even will make him silent, if he is upright, without thinking of consequences, unless a confession be necessary. Besides this the strength of God and spiritual understanding will fail him: where could he have gained them in a wrong walk? We go forward boldly when we have a good conscience. But it is when we are walking with God, for the love of God, for the love of righteousness itself, that we have this breastplate on, and thus we are fearless when called to go forward and face the enemy. We gain a good conscience before God by the blood of the Lamb. By walking with God we maintain it before men and for communion with God, in order to have strength and spiritual understanding, and to have them increasingly. This is the practical strength of good conduct, of a conscience without rebuke. "I exercise myself" always to this, said the apostle. What integrity in such a walk, what truthfulness of heart when no eye sees us! We are peremptory with ourselves, with our own hearts, and with regard to our conduct; we can therefore be peaceful in our ways. God also is there. So walk, says the apostle, and the God of peace shall be with you. If the fruits of righteousness are sown in peace, the path of peace is found in righteousness. If I have a bad conscience, I am vexed with myself, I grow angry with others. When the heart is at peace with God and has nothing to reproach itself with, when the will is held in check, peace reigns in the soul. We walk on the earth, but the heart is above it in intercourse with better things; we walk in a peaceful spirit with others, and nothing troubles our relations with God. He is the God of peace. Peace, the peace of Jesus, fills the heart. The feet are shod with it; we walk in the spirit of peace.

But, together with all this, a piece of defensive armor is needed over all the rest, that we may be able to stand in spite of all the wiles of the enemy — an armor, however, which is practically maintained in its soundness by the use of the preceding ones, so that, if the latter is essential, the others have the first place in practice. This is the shield, faith; that is to say, full and entire trust in God, the consciousness of grace and of His favor maintained in the heart. Here faith is not simply the reception of God's testimony

(although it is founded on that testimony), but the present assurance of the heart with regard to that which God is for us, founded, as we have just said, on the testimony which He has given of Himself — trust in His love and in His faithfulness, as well as in His power. “If our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.” The work of the Spirit in us is to inspire this confidence. When it exists, all the attacks of the enemy, who seeks to make us believe that the goodness of God is not so sure — all his efforts to destroy or to weaken in our hearts this confidence in God and to hide Him from us, prove fruitless. His arrows fall to the ground without reaching us. We stand fast in the consciousness that God is for us: our communion is not interrupted. The fiery darts of the enemy are not the desires of the flesh, but spiritual attacks.

Thus we can hold up our heads: moral courage, the energy which goes forward, is maintained. Not that we have anything to boast of in ourselves, but the salvation and the deliverance of God are fresh in our minds. God has been for us; He is for us: who shall be against us? He was for us when we had no strength; it was salvation, when we could do nothing. This is our confidence — God Himself — not looking at ourselves. We have the helmet of salvation on our heads. The former parts of the armor give us freedom to enjoy the two latter.

Thus furnished with that which protects us in our walk, and in the practical confidence in God, and the knowledge of God that flows from it, we are in a state to use offensive weapons. We have but one against the enemy, but it is one that he cannot resist if we know how to handle it: witness the Lord’s conflict in the wilderness with Satan. It is the word of God. There Jesus always answered with the word by the power of the Spirit. It sets man in his true position according to God as obedient man in the circumstances around him. Satan can do nothing there: we have but to maintain that position. If Satan openly tempts us to disobedience, there is no wile in that. Not being able to do anything else, Satan acted thus with the Lord, and manifested himself as he is. The Lord drove him away by the word. Satan has no power when he is manifested as Satan. We have to resist the wiles of the devil. Our business is to act according to the word, come what may; the result will show that the wisdom of God was in it. But observe here, this sword is the sword of the Spirit. It is not the intelligence or the capacity of man, although it is man who uses the word.

His sword is highly tempered, but he can neither draw it nor strike with it if the Holy Ghost is not acting in him. The weapons are spiritual; they are used by the power of the Spirit. God must speak, however weak the instrument may be.

The sword is also used actively in the spiritual warfare, in which it judges all that is opposed to us. In this sense it is both defensive and offensive. But, behind all this armor, there is a state, a disposition, a means of strength, which quickens and gives all the rest its power: this is a complete dependence on God, united to trust in Him, which expresses itself in prayer. "Praying always"; this dependence must be constant. When it is real, and I feel that I can do nothing without God, and that He wills my good in all things, it expresses itself. It seeks the strength which it has not: it seeks it from Him in whom it trusts. It is the motion of the Spirit in our hearts in their intercourse with God, so that our battles are fought in the communion of His strength and His favor, and in the consciousness that we can do nothing, and that He is all. "At all times"; "with supplication." This prayer is the expression of the man's need, of the heart's desire, in the strength that the Spirit gives him, as well as in confidence in God. Also since it is the Spirit's act, it embraces all saints, not one of whom can be forgotten by Jesus; and the Spirit in us answers the affections of Christ, and reproduces them. We must be watchful and diligent in order to use this weapon; avoiding all that would turn us away from God, availing ourselves of every opportunity, and finding, by the grace of the Spirit, in everything that arises, an occasion (by means of this diligence) for prayer and not for distraction.*

[* Prayer is founded on the immense privilege of having common interests with God both as to ourselves and as to all that are His, yea, even as to Christ's glory. Wondrous thought! unspeakable grace!

The apostle asks from his heart for this intercession on their part, in the sense of his own need and of that which he desires to be for Christ.

The mission of Tychicus expressed Paul's assurance of the interest which the love of the Ephesians made them take in having tidings of him, and that which he himself felt in ascertaining their welfare and spiritual state in Christ. It is a touching expression of his confidence in their affection — an affection which his own devoted heart led him to expect in others.

He presents the Ephesians as enjoying the highest privileges in Christ, and as being able to appreciate them. He blames them in nothing. The armor of God — by which to repel the assaults of the enemy, and to grow up in peace unto the Head in all things, the preservative armor of God — was naturally the last thing that he had to set before them. It is to be noticed that he does not speak to them in this epistle of the Lord's coming. He supposes believers in the heavenly places in Christ; and not as on earth, going through the world, waiting till He should come to take them to Himself, and restore happiness to the world. That which is waited for in this epistle is the gathering together of all things under Christ, their true Head, according to the counsels of God. The blessings are in the heavens, the testimony is in the heavens, the church is sitting in the heavens, the warfare is in the heavens.

The apostle repeats his desire for them of peace, love, and faith; and concludes his epistle with the usual salutation by his own hand.

This epistle sets forth the position and the privileges of the children, and of the assembly in its union with Christ.