

EPHESIANS

EPHESIANS 1 — THE BELIEVER'S BLESSINGS IN CHURCH

This is the first of what are called the "prison" epistles, because written by Paul while a prisoner at Rome, (Compare 3:1; 4:1; with ~~4201~~ Acts 28). The others are Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon. The apostle wrote these with the chain upon his wrist.

This also (with Colossians) contains the profoundest truth God has been pleased to reveal to His people, even that of the church considered as the body of Christ, "the mystery which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest" (~~5105~~ Romans 16:25-26).

The church is a body distinct from the Jews on the one hand or the Gentiles on the other. Neither is it identical with the kingdom, but separate from it. It is something unique, not heard of in the Old Testament, and especially given to Paul to reveal. It had its earthly beginning after Christ's ascension into glory. It will have its earthly ending when He comes again, and it is caught up to meet Him in the air (~~5043~~ 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Thenceforward the church will reign with Him over the earthly kingdom to be set up. The church is composed of both Jews and Gentiles, and is called The Body of Christ (compare ~~4612~~ 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; ~~5018~~ Colossians 1:18, 24; 2:10, etc.)

The apostolic salutation, 1:1-2, contains the first allusion to this "mystery" in the phrase "to the faithful in Christ Jesus." "In" Him, just as the members of our body are in us, i.e., vitally one with us.

The thanksgiving in the next verse carries the thought further — "hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." Note the past tense, "hath blessed," indicating that it is not something God is doing, or is about to do, but something He has done in the case of every believer, once and forever. Note the comprehensiveness of the work, "all spiritual blessings." There is no blessing God has purposed for the saint that is not already his potentially, in Christ. In the physical realm, the newborn infant

is potentially the man, and all his earthly life is simply the working out, the developing of that which was his in the beginning; so in the spiritual sense of the saint in Christ. The phrase "in heavenly places" does not qualify this at all, since it does not mean that these blessings will not be ours, or not be realized in any sense, till we get to heaven. They are "in heavenly places" in the sense that their source, the One in Whom they are located, and from Whom they flow, Jesus Christ, the Head of the body, is in heaven.

THE FOUR GREAT BLESSINGS

The verses following (vv. 4-14) describe these blessings, of which there are four all-inclusive ones.

First, the believer is "chosen" in Him (vv. 4-6). The period of choice was "before the foundation of the world"; the purpose, that "we should be holy and without blame before Him"; the ground, "the good pleasure of His will"; the object, or motive, "the praise of the glory of His grace." "Holy and without blame" does not mean merely that this will be true of us in the life to come, but that it is true now, not experimentally indeed, but positionally, or legally, as we stand before God uncondemned in Christ.

Secondly, the believer is redeemed in him (vv. 7-10). The redemption was necessary that thus by the removal of sin, the choice of God might become operative in our case. This redemption includes the forgiveness of our sins, and more. It means the revelation to us of the mystery of the divine will (v. 9). Being now sons of God through His grace, we are given the mind of God. The Father reveals His purposes to His children. These are stated in verse 10. "The dispensation of the fulness of the times," is by some understood as the Millennial age which follows the present one; but there are others who think it refers to an age succeeding that and prior to Eternity. That word 'fulness of the times,' seems to imply not only the fulfillment of the broken purposes and plans of past dispensations (broken by man's sin), but also a duration of time in comparison with which all past ages shall be but as fragments, while this will be complete.

Thirdly, the believer is inherited in him (vv. 11-12). Read verse 11 in the Revised Version. It is not only true that "we have obtained an inheritance" in God through Christ, but that God has obtained an inheritance in us. We are His purchased possession, and hence we may be persuaded that He is able to keep that which we have committed against that day (^{scri12}2 Timothy 1:12).

Fourthly, the believer is "sealed" in Him (vv. 13-14), the Holy Spirit Himself, Who dwells in the believer, being that seal.

In the symbolism of Scripture, a seal signifies a finished transaction (^{<431>}Jeremiah 32:9-10); ownership (^{<431>}Jeremiah 32:11-12; ^{<529>}2 Timothy 2:19); and security (^{<108>}Esther 8:8; ^{<167>}Daniel 6:17; ^{<403>}Ephesians 4:30).

PRAYER FOR ENLIGHTENMENT

The apostle concludes the revelation of these blessings with a prayer for spiritual enlightenment on the part of his readers, that they may understand and appreciate their meaning (vv. 15-23). It is not enough that the Holy Spirit reveal a great truth like this to Paul, or inspire Him to record it, but the same Spirit must accompany it to the minds and hearts of his readers or hearers if it is to be effective in their faith and experience. They require "the spirit of wisdom and revelation" (v. 17), in order to know "the hope of His calling," "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints," and "the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe" (vv. 18-19). Their calling, these riches and this power have just been revealed in the preceding verses, but who can know them without the aid of the Holy Spirit? Consider the "power" for example. It is that which in Christ raised Him from the dead and set Him at the right hand of God, and put all things under His feet (vv. 20-22). This power will do the same for us who are in Christ. It will do so because He is the "Head over all things to the church" (v. 22). Speaking in the physical sense merely, if one's head is raised from the dead and exalted to a place of power and dignity, every member of the body united to that head, living in it, and in which it lives, must necessarily be raised and exalted also. The head, in a physical sense, finds its completeness, its "fulness" in the body it governs and to which it gives life, and so in the spiritual sense, the church of Christ, which is His body, is His "fulness" in the sense that He fills it all in all things (v. 23). How much we need the aid of the Holy Spirit to apprehend these things, and make them our glorious possession!

QUESTIONS

1. What is the title of this lesson?
2. Name the "prison" epistles, and state why they are so called.
3. What is the great truth revealed in this epistle, and how does it compare with other features of inspiration?

4. What is the church, and its earthly history?
5. Have you re-read ~~<4121>~~1 Corinthians 12:12-27?
6. How would you illustrate the phrase "in Christ"?
7. What is the sum of the believers blessings in Christ?
8. Name these blessings in their order.
9. What may be understood by "the fulness of the times"?
10. What does a seal signify in the symbolism of Scripture?
11. Explain the necessity for Paul's prayer in this case.
12. Have you offered the same prayer for yourself?

EPHESIANS 2 — ADDRESS TO THE GENTILES

This church, like all the others, was composed of both Jews and Gentiles, but chiefly Gentiles. Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles and he never loses sight of this calling in his speaking or writing. It is especially necessary that he now address himself to them, because of the nature of the truth he is revealing: the union of Gentile and Jew in the mystical body of Christ. The chapter shows us three things: our condition by nature (vv. 1-3); our change from nature to grace (vv. 4-10); and our condition by grace (vv. 11-22).

OUR CONDITION BY NATURE (VV. 1-3)

"Dead in (or through) trespasses and sins." Spiritual death is meant, consisting in alienation from the life of God, being destitute of His Spirit (~~<4048>~~Ephesians 4:18-19). It continues after the physical dissolution of the body, and consists in external separation from God in conscious suffering (~~<5009>~~2 Thessalonians 1:9; ~~<2163>~~Luke 16:23). The Scripture speaks of this latter as the second death (~~<4421>~~Revelation 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8). But in this life to be "dead in trespasses and sins" is equivalent to be walking "according to the course of this world" (v. 2); to be doing this is one with holding allegiance to Satan, "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." And there is no exception to the rule, for all mankind before they come to Christ have this manner of life. In other words, they are following after the desires of the flesh, their fallen nature, for which reason they are exposed to the wrath of God against sin (v. 3).

OUR CHANGE FROM NATURE TO GRACE (VV. 4-10)

God, and not ourselves, is the cause of this change. God in the going out of His mercy and love toward us (v. 4). The great instrumental means is Christ, and the method employed is to quicken, raise us up, and make us "sit together in heavenly place" in Him (vv. 5-6). Observe the past tenses here. He "hath quickened us." Believers are already spiritually alive in Christ. He "hath raised us up." In the mind and purpose of God, believers are already physically raised from the dead. "Together" with Christ are they raised, the philosophy of which is seen as we retain in mind the illuminating figure of the human body. If, in the physical sense, one's head is raised from the dead, must not the same be true of all the members of His body? And so, in the spiritual sense, if Christ is the Head of the body His church, and if He is risen from the dead, must not His whole body be risen? It is nothing to say that so far as believers are concerned this is not yet true in an experimental sense. The point is that in God's mind and purpose it is true, and with Him time is not counted. He hath "made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." In other words, we who believe are already exalted with Him. "Heavenly places," literally translated, is "the heavenlies," and means "that which is heavenly in contradistinction to that which is earthly." We are already in the "*heavenlies*" in Christ in the sense that

- (1) we are partakers of His heavenly nature (~~6004~~ 2 Peter 1:4), and life (~~5024~~ Colossians 3:4; ~~6052~~ 1 John 5:12);
- (2) we enjoy the same heavenly fellowship (~~6007~~ John 20:17; ~~5024~~ Colossians 1:24; ~~6050~~ Philippians 3:10; ~~5821~~ Hebrews 2:11; ~~6008~~ 1 John 1:3); and
- (3) we have a heavenly inheritance (~~6058~~ Romans 8:18-21; ~~6009~~ 1 Peter 2:9; ~~6005~~ Revelation 1:5).

The object of God in thus changing us from nature to grace is expressed in verse 7, and corresponds to ~~6006~~ Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14, "the praise of His glory," especially the glory of His grace. From the human side, all this comes to pass through faith — "not of works" (vv. 8-9). And indeed, on our part there can be no good works acceptable to God, until this change occurs. It is then we are created anew in order to bring forth such works (v. 10). This last is the present and earthly effect of our changed condition.

OUR CONDITION BY GRACE (VV. 11-22)

Verse 11 shows that Gentiles rather than Israelites are particularly in mind. Before becoming Christians they were "separate from Christ" (v. 12 RV), in that they did not belong to the commonwealth, or nation, of Israel. Not belonging to Israel they were "strangers from the covenants of the promise" (RV). The "promise" was of the coming of the Messiah, the Christ, in connection with which, and for the carrying out of which, God entered into many covenants, or agreements with Israel, as the Old Testament has shown us. To none of these covenants did the Gentiles bear any relation. Hence the latter were without hope in the world such as Israel had, and being without such hope, they were practically "without God." They were thus "afar off" from Israel in point of privilege and blessing, but now, being in Christ Jesus, they had been "made nigh" (v. 13). Christ had become their "peace," He had brought the Gentile and Jew together, by breaking down that which had separated them (v. 14), "even the law of commandments in ordinances" (v. 15). This He did by His death on the cross, having fulfilled the law in the ceremonial sense and kept it in the moral sense, on their behalf. He had thus made in Himself of the two men, Jew and Gentile, One New Man, by which is meant not an individual believer, but that mystical conception, Christ, spoken of in ~~45212~~¹ Corinthians 12:12. The Christ there, as we saw, meant not the Personal Christ, but the Personal Christ plus the church considered as His body, the members of which are baptized into Him by the Holy Spirit. This is the Great Mystery of which Paul speaks here, and which he had been especially commissioned to reveal. How wonderful it is! Both these two classes, Jews and Gentiles, have been reconciled to God "in one body by the cross" (v. 16), in the sense that Christ's work on the cross took away the enmity between them both and God. He thus preached peace with God to both, to the Gentiles "afar off" from God, and to the Jews "that were nigh" in comparison with them as indicated in verse 12. These both, Jew and Gentile, now alike through Christ, had access by the Holy Spirit "unto the Father" (v. 18). The Gentile, in comparison with the Jews, had been "strangers and foreigners," but were now "fellow-citizens with the saints." In verse 30 the figure is changed to a building to which Christ is the Chief Corner Stone. In Him "each several building" (RV), "groweth into a holy temple in the Lord" (v. 21). This holy temple is "a habitation of God through the Spirit." Because the Holy Spirit dwells in every believer, he

dwells in the whole company of believers, and this means that He dwells in the church, which is His habitation (compare ~~Rev~~ Revelation 21:2-3).

QUESTIONS

1. Why is it specially necessary for the apostle to now address himself to the Gentiles?
2. What three things are shown in this chapter?
3. How do verses 2-3 explain being "dead in trespasses and sins"?
4. What is God's method in changing men from nature to grace?
5. What is the significance of the past tense in the working out of this method?
6. What is meant by "heavenly places"?
7. What object has God before Him in all this?
8. Analyze verse 12.
9. What is meant by "one new man"?
10. Explain verse 18.

EPHESIANS 3 — AN EXPLANATORY PARENTHESIS

At the beginning of this chapter, Paul is about to exhort the church in a practical application of the doctrine he had expounded. Indeed, he has gotten as far as, "For this cause I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles," when the divine impulse leads him to digress. This digression, covering the remainder of the chapter, is an explanation of the special ministry given him for the Gentiles (vv. 2-4). This ministry was a "mystery" unrevealed in the Old Testament, for the reference to the "prophets" in verse 5 means the New Testament prophets particularly Paul himself. That the apostle is not referring merely to the gospel of salvation is clear because that was no "mystery" (~~Rev~~ Romans 9:24-33; 10:19-21). What he is referring to is (v. 6), "that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and fellow-members of the body," i.e., the body of Christ, the church, of which he has been speaking. This unique "body" was a mystery "hid in God" from the beginning of the world (v. 9), whose revelation at this time was for the purpose stated in verse 10. That verse shows the church to be

"the lesson-book for the angels." They had seen God's ways in creation, and at the deluge, and in Israel, but here is something that not even the Scriptures had hinted at, that was never promised in the Old Testament, something kept entirely secret between the Father and the Son.

PRAYER FOR STRENGTH

Some conception of the nature and greatness of this truth thus revealed, may be gathered from the prayer that follows. As that in chapter 1 was for spiritual enlightenment, this is for spiritual strength. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels," the apostle says in another place, and earthen vessels break easily, and are unable to stand too great a strain. To contain such a truth, we need the aid of the Holy Spirit, hence the language of verses 16-19. The prayer in chapter 1 was for a deep and real apprehension of their standing before God; here, it is rather for practical, inward power, by the Holy Ghost. In a word, it is here a question of actual state, of the affections having Christ within, of being rooted and grounded in love, that they might be thoroughly able (for so it means), to lay hold of that which is indeed measureless. The apostle does not say what it is of which they are to lay hold, for verse 18 has no ending. It brings you into infinity. It can be nothing else, indeed, than the grandeur of that "mystery" of the believer's oneness with Jesus Christ. All things are for the glory of the Son, and the saints in Him are to have the very highest place with him over all.

Hence the ascription (vv. 20-21). In this, He does not say above all that we can ask or think, but all that we do ask or think. We can ask more than we do ask, because of "the power that worketh in us," i.e., power of God. In chapter 1, we saw the power of God working for us; here, we see it working in us. In chapter 1, it raised us from the dead; here, it gives us entrance into his love and fulness. No wonder the grateful apostle exclaims, "Unto Him be glory!"

QUESTIONS

1. What is the literary character of chapter 3?
2. What is the nature of this digression?
3. What is meant by the "mystery"?
4. What is the subject of this prayer in comparison with that in chapter 1?
5. What added thought have we here concerning the Divine power in

relation to the believer?

EPHESIANS 4:1-5:21 — THE CHRISTIAN'S WALK

At 4:1 the apostle returns to the exhortation and practical application on which he had started at 3:1. The Ephesian Christians had been called with a holy calling (vocation) and now they were to "walk worthy" of it. "Walk" occurs five times in our lesson, giving completeness to it.

WALK IN UNITY (4:1-16)

The unity referred to is that which has been made among Christians by the baptism of the Holy Spirit into Christ (vv. 3-6). It is not anything they are to make for themselves, or which they can make, but something they are to endeavor to "keep." The way to keep it is expressed in verse 2. The occasion for the exhortation is suggested in verses 7 and following, which recall the strife in the Corinthian church about spiritual gifts, only there the stress was laid on the gifts, while here it bears on the persons who receive the gifts, or rather who themselves are gifts to the church (vv. 8-11). These apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are given for "the perfecting of the saints," their increase in the knowledge of Christ, and the latter in turn are to engage in ministering for the building up of the whole body (see the Revised Version). This is to continue till the body of Christ is complete, i.e., "till we all come..., a perfect [full grown] man" (v. 13). This "man" does not mean any individual man, but the "Man" referred to in chapter 2:15, the "Man" composed of the Personal Christ as the Head, and the members of the church as His body. We Christians are all to "grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ" (v. 15). Each member of the body has a part to perform in its development (v. 16).

WALK IN PURITY (4:17-5:2)

"Not as other Gentiles walk," in vanity, ignorance of God, lasciviousness (4:17-19), falsehood, anger, theft, idleness, corrupt speech, etc. (4:25-31). These things are to be "put off," or in other words, "the old man," i.e., our old fallen and corrupt nature is to be put off at the same time that "the new man," i.e., the new nature in Christ Jesus is to be "put on." This means as we have seen in ^{<856>}Galatians 5:16-25, that there should be an actual, experimental living of Christ in us, and by us, every day. But this is only to

be obtained through the renewing of the spirit of our mind (v. 23). That is, the Holy Spirit must renew us day by day with strength to accomplish it (3:16-19).

WALK IN LOVE (5:2)

This section really begins at 4:31. Walking in love is being kind and tender hearted to one another in Christ, which graces show themselves in the absence of bitterness and wrath, anger, clamor and evil speaking. Christ Himself is an example, and His work for us the motive of this love.

WALK IN LIGHT (5:8)

This section probably begins at verse 3, and runs to 14. The darkness which is the absence of light is shown in the sins of fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talking, and the like, with which we are to have no fellowship, but rather to reprove (v. 11). This very reproof is light (v. 13).

WALK IN WISDOM (5:15-21)

"Not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time," or "buying up the opportunities" as it might be rendered. The wisdom spoken of is "understanding what the will of the Lord is" (v. 17), which can only be ours as we are "filled with the Spirit" (v. 18). When we are thus filled with the Spirit, our fellowship with one another in Christ, is one of joy, gratitude, loving submission (vv. 19-21).

QUESTIONS

1. What is the title of this lesson?
2. What suggests it in the text?
3. In what five ways is the Christian's walk outlined?
4. What is the nature of the unity in which they are to walk?
5. How may this unity be kept?
6. What gifts are here referred to?
7. For what purpose are they bestowed?
8. How long is this work to proceed?
9. What is meant by "man" in verse 13?

10. What is meant by the "old man," and the "new man" in verses 22 and 24?
12. What is the result of being "filled with the Spirit"?

EPHESIANS 5:22-6:24 — APPLICATION TO THE HOUSEHOLD

In the last lesson Paul spoke of the Christian's "walk" in general terms, but now applies the thought particularly to: wives and husbands (5:22-33); children and parents (6:1-4); and servants and masters (vv. 5-9), summing up the whole in verses 10-18. The epistle concludes with a brief reference to his personal affairs (vv. 19-22), and a benediction (vv. 23-24).

Speaking of the application to the three classes of the social order, it is noticeable that the apostle begins with the duties of the inferior or subjected party in each case, an arrangement not accidental, as may be judged by comparing ^{<5018>}Colossians 3:18-4:1, as well as ^{<4128>}1 Peter 2:18, and the subsequent verses. As another suggests, "one reason for this may be that the duties of submission and obedience are so incomparably important to all the interests of human life." Furthermore all these duties are here seen in special connection with the believer's standing in Christ.

In the instance of wives and husbands, we are not to suppose that there is anything derogatory to the former in their submission, since subordination and order are the great characteristics of God's workmanship. Christ is equal to God and yet as the Son He is submissive to the Father. Is that derogatory to him? Of course, the reference here is to the saved woman, and one who so appreciates her standing in Christ as to feel the fitness of things resulting there from. Moreover, as the same spiritual teacher says, husbands are not directed to command but to love their wives. The right to command is implied but not enforced. The husband's love, on the other hand, includes every attention to his wife, the reposing of his confidence in her, and the enjoyment with her of their oneness in Christ. Under these reciprocal conditions submission is likely to be a delight. Verses 30-31 of this section are quoted from ^{<4023>}Genesis 2:23-24, which suggests a beautiful type of the church as the bride as well as the body of Christ (2 Con 11:2-3).

In the instance of children and parents, observe that the former are addressed as though they were present in the church assemblies where this letter was read, and expected to give their personal attention to it, to understand it, and obey its teachings the same as their adult associates. Observe too, that they were saved children, and able to appreciate their obligation to obey their parents because with them they were "in the Lord." One such inspired declaration as this is an all-sufficient answer to much of that newer pedagogy in our Sunday schools which leaves the supernatural almost out of account.

Children need the Word of God as much as their parents do, and if it be given to them clear and simple, the Holy Ghost is able to illuminate it to their understandings and apply it to their hearts. They who are substituting something else in its place in our Sunday schools are assuming a responsibility from which the wise may well shrink. Observe finally, in this connection, that fathers are not to be unduly severe with their children, but to temper and qualify their government as becometh them that are in the Lord.

In the instance of servants and masters, the former are to be understood as slaves, but not necessarily of an inferior race. They may have been captives taken in war, and in many respects the equal of their masters, and yet they were to be obedient, "as unto Christ." They were in him just as their masters were, but this would not alter the relation they bore to them, for ~~REB~~ Galatians 3:28 has reference to salvation in Christ, and does not contravene the established relations of life. But there are obligations for the Christian masters also (v. 9).

In the previous lesson we dwelt on the Christian's walk, but now we come, in the summing up of the article, to the Christian's warfare (5:10-18). The *Scofield Bible* divides these verses thus: the warrior's power (v. 10); the warrior's armor (v. 11); the warrior's foes (vv. 12-17); and the warrior's resource (v. 18).

QUESTIONS

1. What three classes of the social order are named?
2. Why presumably, does the apostle begin with the duty of the subjected party first?
3. Show that there is nothing derogatory in the subjection of a wife to

her husband.

4. Under what conditions is such submission likely to be a delight?
5. What inferences are to be drawn from the address to children in 6:1?
6. What caution does this suggest to Sunday School teachers?
7. Have you looked up the reference to ~~4:28~~ Galatians 3:28?
8. To what does that reference refer?
9. What new idea about the Christian is suggested in the summing up of the epistle?
10. Analyze 6:10-18.